

Lessons from Philippians: The Narrow Way

by Bayless Conley

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Hello friend, welcome to the broadcast today. Wherever you happen to be, whatever language you happen to be listening to me in right now, the Holy Spirit is there with you. We're going to study the Word of God together. I trust that you're going to learn some things that will be important and beneficial for you. We're looking at the church in Philippi. We're going to start in Philippians 1 for this session, and we're going to go through it verse by verse. We spent the last few messages looking at how this church was born. It's recorded in Acts 16. Paul and Silas went to Philippi, and we talked about it at length. The church was born, but it was born through much persecution. The first convert was a woman named Lydia. She was the very first European convert. Some refer to her as the turning point of Western civilization. Lydia got saved, and her household got saved. They got water baptized.

The Apostle Paul cast a demon out of a fortune-teller girl. We're not told, but it's very likely that she became a believer and hopefully became a part of this new, fledgling church. Then, the Philippian jailer and his family got saved and water baptized. Some people say that he became the pastor of the church there at Philippi. Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into jail for preaching the gospel. But even though they were in jail, the jail never got into them. Speaking of jail, this is some 10 years later, Paul is writing this letter to that church in the city of Philippi, and he is in a Roman prison. The man knew something about being jailed for his faith. He sends the letter back with a man named Epaphroditus. He brings the letter to this church, Lydia, her household, the jailer, his household, and perhaps that demon-possessed girl. We find that the church has grown. In fact, there were a number of different locations by the time Paul sent this letter back.

The Word of God runs very swiftly, and many times there is a domino effect that takes place. One member of the family gets saved, and then other members get saved. Then, they lead their friends to Christ, and they share the gospel with their families. You just never know the results of one person coming to Christ. Co-workers get saved. Relatives get saved. Friends get saved. Then, their co-workers, their friends, and their relatives hear the gospel. There is this organic way that the gospel travels, and it can travel quite quickly. So, we open up Philippians 1:1 NKJV. It says,

¹ Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.

It says, "Paul and Timothy." Timothy was one of Paul's sons in the faith. He was sort of a troubleshooter, a very gifted minister of the gospel. It says that they are bond servants of Jesus Christ. Now, the Greek word translated as bond servants here is *Doulos*. It literally means "a slave." It is a person who has been purchased by another. It is a person who no longer owns himself, no longer has the right to do what he wants, when he wants it, or where he wants to do it. It is called making Jesus Lord. *Lord* means "boss". It means that I die to my rights of independent living and my life is no longer my responsibility. It becomes my response to His ability. So, Paul writes to the saints, bishops, and deacons. Now, all believers are saints. You don't have to wait until you die and have a committee vote on you to see if you become a saint.

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The Greek word here translated *saint* literally means “holy and set apart, different.” All believers in Christ Jesus are saints. They are holy. They are set apart. They are different from everyone else in the world.

Why? It says, “The saints in Christ Jesus.” That is what makes us different—that we are in Christ. And of course, that translates out into our speech. It translates out into our lifestyle, and if it doesn't do that, well then, friend, you are not in Christ. If there is no fruit, chances are there is no root. The root is trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, the good works, the changed speech, and the different attitudes are all the result of embracing Christ and putting your faith in Him. We come to Him as we are, but here is the truth of the matter: Everyone in the world is either in Christ or they are in Adam. There is no other place to be. From God's vantage point, you are either in Christ or you are in Adam. First Corinthians 15:22 says, “In Christ all are made alive, in Adam all die.” Every human being is in Adam to begin with, just by virtue of being born into this world, born as a human being. Adam is our most distant ancestor. We are all his offspring.

And because of Adam's transgression in the garden, he died spiritually. He was cut off, separated from God. God told Adam, “Listen, everything in the garden you have a right to it. It is yours to have dominion. However, there is one thing I claim exclusive right to, and that is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, there in the midst of the garden. The day you partake of that, you will die.” God is saying, “Listen, there are rights, there are wrongs. There are absolute truths. There is sin, and then there is that which is right. I alone am qualified to say what is sin and what is not, what is good and what is evil. I set the boundaries. If you ever try to violate that, where you want to become God yourself, the day you do it, you'll die.” Interestingly enough, in the original Hebrew language, the word die is there twice. “In dying, you shall die. You will die die. Adam, you'll die a double death.”

We all know the story. Adam partook of the fruit of that tree, along with his wife Eve. He wanted to be like God himself, deciding what is good and what is evil. Like, “Hey, God doesn't have to be my final authority. I can decide for myself what is right and what is wrong.” We still see that same attitude and spirit at work in the world today. People talk about “my truth.” No, friend, there is just truth. There is no “your truth.” There is no “his truth” and “her truth.” There is absolute truth, and God alone defines that. But here is the kicker, the Bible tells us in Romans 5 that through Adam, sin and death came into the world. And that death, that state of spiritual death, separation from God, was passed on to all men because of Adam's transgression. So, the whole human race is in Adam, and the only way to get out of Adam and into Christ is by making a choice. In Adam all die. They are dead spiritually. Eventually, they will die the second death, which is eternal separation from God in a place of torment called hell. The Bible calls it the second death, and that is the end destination for everybody who rejects and refuses Christ.

In fact, let me just tell you something. As long as you're breathing, as long as you are alive, you have the power of choice. You can say yes to God. You can say yes to His one and only way of salvation. I know some people say, “Well, it's so narrow, and I find that offensive.” Well, friend, it is what it is. If you are trapped upstairs in a burning building and I lean a ladder against the side of that building, break out the window, and say, “Come on. Come down the ladder. Here is a way of rescue,” you can fold your arms and say, “Well, I just don't believe that is the only way. That is narrow, and I'm offended by that ladder.” You can be offended all you want, but you are going to burn up if you don't come down the ladder. Friend, God is so gracious. He gave us a way out of our sin. He gave us a way out of death. He gave us a way into His family, into bliss, and into an eternity with Him. It is through Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes unto the Father except through Me.” You can get offended all you want, and some people can say, “Well, it's Christianity. I'm just offended by the narrowness of it.”

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Well, the truth is, it is narrow, and Jesus was narrow in that respect. Jesus said, “Narrow is the way that leads to life and few there be who find it. Broad is the pathway that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in that way.” Friend, you can go on the broad way and you can take all your beliefs with you. You can take a little bit of white magic. You can believe in Eastern philosophy. You can believe it. You can take it all with you. It's a broad way. It will all fit, but eventually that way narrows and sends you into a restricted, tormented eternity where there is no way out. Now, the narrow way through Christ—the Bible makes it clear—is difficult. There are trials. There are persecutions. There are misunderstandings. When you stand fast for your faith, the way is narrow. But eventually it broadens out into an amazing horizon, an expansive horizon that the mind and heart can't even contain.

Here is what I was going to say while you are listening to me right now: every human being has the power of choice. But once you die, your power of choice is taken away forever. You lose the power of choice once you step out of this life. You need to choose while there is the opportunity, and we need to give folks a choice. As nice as some of your neighbors and friends might be, if they don't embrace Christ, they will go into an eternity without Him. We are obligated both by conscience and command, at least to tell people that they have a choice. I realize it can be uncomfortable to broach the subject of spiritual things and maybe talk about heaven, hell, and salvation with a coworker, or even with family members. But think of it in the same terms as the people who are trapped on an upstairs floor, and the building is burning. You say, “Well, it might offend them if I lean the ladder up against their house, or if I went and knocked on the door to see if they are okay. I don't want to offend them.” When we weigh that out in the light of eternity, it is worth offending some people to tell them the truth. And here, God has chosen through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. Once we share the gospel, the Holy Spirit works with that and brings people to faith. But you can't have a harvest where no seed has been planted. People are born again through the incorruptible seed of God's Word. So, I'm willing to offend some people. I'm willing to be awkward in my presentation. I may fall over every third word and feel like I did a terrible job at sharing, but the power is in the seed. It is not in my slick presentation of the gospel. Even the smallest child can carry a seed. You can carry a seed. Tell somebody about Jesus.

Paul says, “I'm writing to all the saints in Christ Jesus, the set apart ones, those who are different,” and being in Christ is what makes us different. He also wrote to the bishops and the deacons. Notice they are mentioned separately from saints. Now, they are saints because they are believers, but the bishop is the office of a pastor. We see that clearly from 1 Peter 5:2. He said, “Shepherd the flock of God, which is among you as overseers.” The word *overseer* is the same word translated as a bishop here. It is the ministry of a pastor. Then, he talked about deacons. *Diákonos* is the Greek word, and it literally means “a servant.” Deacons are chosen.

We read in Acts 6, where the Hellenistic Jewish women were being overlooked in the daily administration of food. So there erupted a conflict in the early church—nothing new under the sun. Somebody seems to always be upset about something. So the Apostle said, “Look, it's not right that we should leave the Word of God to serve tables. We need to give ourselves to the Word and prayer. So find seven men among you who are full of the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom, that can be appointed to serve and take care of this business.” They chose seven men full of the Holy Spirit and full of faith. They appointed them over the business to serve, and that is waiting on tables and serving food. It's the same word *serve* there in Acts 6, as we find here for a deacon. A deacon is one who serves. They are people who will wait on tables and take care of hospitality. They will clean. They might work in the nursery. It basically is the ministry of “the helps.” It is so important that they literally laid their hands on them, prayed for them, and

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released them to take care of it. Some of them, like we read about Stephen, also began to be used by God to work miracles among the people. So there was something added to his life. But here's the thing: Their job, a deacon's job, is not to lord over the people. God never intended to have the church run by a deacon board. Deacons are servants, and scripturally speaking, they were elected and chosen to wait on tables and to serve people. It is not a position of oversight where they vote on the pastor's decision to do this or that. I know some church governments are set up that way, but I don't see that as being biblical. But a deacon, however, is a high calling. It's a great privilege to serve, and to do anything for God's people in God's house. Paul goes on in Philippians 1:2 NKJV and says,

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I like that: "Grace and peace." God is writing them a letter, dictating it to them through the Apostle Paul. And right off the bat, He is letting them know that He is not mad, "Grace and peace to you." Some who are listening right now, if God wrote you a personal letter, you'd be afraid to open it. Listen, God loves you. He wants to say, "Grace to you." That is God's unmerited favor. Now, in English, we have an acrostic that certainly wouldn't work in every language. Grace, G-R-A-C-E, **G**od's **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist's **E**xpense. He gives us His blessing undeservedly. We didn't earn it. We didn't merit it. It is grace. It is given to us based on His character and His finished works. It's not based on our character. It's not based on our finished works. So Paul has been in the presence of God, and he begins by saying, "Grace and peace to you from God." Not, "Condemnation and judgment. God is about ready to smash you to powder." No, "Grace and peace." Then, he says this in verses 3–4 NKJV,

³ I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy.

Every time he thought of them, he thanked God. He didn't take them for granted. I think we should do the same. Has God blessed you with a good wife? You should be thankful upon every remembrance. Has God blessed you with a good husband? You should be thankful. Do you have good friends? You should be thankful. Do you have a good church to go to? Do you have a good job? You need to be thankful. He says, "I thank God upon every remembrance of you." Every time you think of them, you should say, "Thank you, God." Every time you think of your wife, your friends, your church, the fact that you have a job, that you have a roof over your head, every time you think of it, you should thank God. Now, I know some people, when they think about their spouse, they are not saying, "Thank God." They are saying, "Why God?" But it ought to be, "Thank God" and not, "Why God?" Then again, in verses 4 and 5, he said,

⁴ . . . always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, ⁵ for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now . . .

Now, with some people, it is a duty to pray for them. With other people, it is a delight to pray for them. Why was it such a joy for the apostle Paul to pray for them? I was praying for a guy today. I will confess, and I will be honest: It was not a delight to pray for him. It was a duty to pray for him, but it was something that I knew I needed to do for that person's benefit because they need help. They need to have their eyes opened because of a certain stance they've taken and a pathway that they're walking on. But it was necessary for me, too. The Scriptures say to bless those who curse you and pray for those who spitefully use you. So, with some people it is a duty to pray for them, but we need to do it. But for other people, it's an absolute delight to pray.

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Paul said, “You were partakers with me from the first day until now.” They supported Paul with prayer and finances from the very first day that he brought the gospel to them. Lydia opened her house and shared her resources with them. Then, we find out that Paul went from there to Berea, to Corinth, and to other places. We find that they, not just once, but again and again, sent aid to him. They sent offerings to him to help him bring the gospel to other regions and to other people. Paul said, “You have been a partner with me. You have had fellowship with me, a partnership with me from the first day until now.” They prayed for him and supported him financially. There is a joy when you think of those who have made what you do possible. I know there are people watching me right now who support our *Answers* broadcast and all the things we do around the world in different languages on different platforms. There are people who send us encouraging letters. I know some of you pray for us, and you pray for me regularly. Thank you for doing that. It brings a joy to my heart that is difficult to put into words. There are people who faithfully and generously support what we're doing. They have been blessed through the Word that we have been privileged to share. They are helping us to bring that Word to other people. I'll tell you this: God will reward you for doing that, but it is such a blessing to us and to the team here to have people who support us, who believe in what we are doing, who believe in this calling, who believe that the work we are doing is important and significant. And that is being expressed through partnership. He went on in verse 6 and said,

⁶ . . . being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

“The one who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Until the day that Jesus comes back means He will fulfill it. He will bring it to a finish. We can be confident that what God begins, He finishes. He is completing a good work in you. He is completing a good work in me. Listen, I'm a project under construction. I'm a work in progress. God is not finished with me. Thank God. I remember when our children were small and living at home. We would give them the job, “Clean up your room. Make up your room. It looks like a tornado went through there. It looks like a hurricane passed through.” They would start, but very rarely did those children finish what they started. God always finishes what He started. When you got saved, that wasn't the finish line. In many respects, that was just the beginning. God is not through with you. How long will this work go on? Again, until the day of Jesus Christ, until He returns and we stand before Him.

What is the good work that He is doing in us? Well, He is conforming us into His image. God is conforming me to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. He is doing it from the inside out. He is working Christ's likeness in my character and in your character. He is working honesty, humility, love, generosity, boldness, gentleness, patience, holiness, and faithfulness. He is working these things in us so that they can be manifested through us. What God does in you, He wants to ultimately bring through you, so you can be a blessing in someone else's life. Hebrews 13:21 shares the same truth. It says that God is working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight. That term *working in you* is translated in other places in the New Testament as “a tree bringing forth fruit” and as “a person forming or molding clay.” So, God is working in you. He is working in me. Again, that same phrase—think of it being used to describe a tree bringing forth fruit or used to describe a sculptor who is working and molding clay with his hands. Both denote a process. God is continually pruning and shaping us inwardly so that we can bring forth fruit that will glorify His name. My friend, God has not abandoned you, and you are not hopeless. He is working, and you need to remember you are not a failure. You are just a learner.

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I know I'm speaking to somebody right now. You have messed up, and you feel like quitting. You think God is done with you, He is through with you, and He is angry with you. God loves you, and it is time for you to get up, my sister. It is time for you to get up, brother. Dust yourself off and have another go at it. God will work in you. Now, maybe you don't have a tree full of fruit yet, but you ought to be thankful if there are just some little blossoms popping out. The fruit will come if we cooperate with God. In fact, I believe that we can accelerate God's work through our cooperation, through prayer, through feeding on God's Word, through times of stillness, through worship, and through associating with other people who love Jesus Christ and are on fire for Jesus. We can also impede the process of fruit bearing through spiritual laziness and perhaps stop it altogether, if we choose not to cooperate. But the truth of the matter is, God doesn't give up on people. And we do our best not to give up on people either. God hasn't given up on you, friend. I just want to tell you that He loves you. You are valuable to God, and the good work He began in you—just like He began in these Philippian Christians—He will carry out until the day of Jesus Christ. Don't be discouraged. Don't give up. You are loved by God. And if you're watching me right now and you've never embraced Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior—you're in Adam, but you've never found your way into Christ—the Bible says, "If you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and if you confess Him with your mouth as Lord, you will be saved." Why not right now? Just say,

Jesus, come into my life. I bow my heart before You, and I confess You as my Lord.
All that I am and all that I have, I put in Your hands, Lord Jesus.

He loves you. We love you too. We'll see you again.

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