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Of Doctrine and Righteousness

Philippians 1:3-6

Intro: In **II Tim 3:16**, Paul writes both the proof text of Scripture as well as the divine intension of Scripture. Paul states unequivocally that all Scripture...is inspired by God, which means every part of it; and that it is profitable for those who read it, who study it, who take the truths and principles that are found in it and apply them to their lives. Paul specifies 4 things the Scriptures are profitable for: doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness.

Today, as we continue our study in Philippians, we will consider some doctrine and instruction in righteousness. Now, if anyone is harboring any misconceptions about the doctrine we're going to discuss or is generally opposed to righteousness in general, then there may also be some correction and reproof going on; so we'll just wait and see.

3-5 – So, Paul has just introduced himself to the saints at Philippi and has greeted them in the name of Jesus. Now, he not only mentions that he prays for them regularly, he also mentions how he prays for them; his primary concern for them is for their spiritual needs. In Paul's mind, spiritual realities always came before physical ones. He was not insensitive to material needs. He did mention them from time to time, but he knew that physical needs were always less important than spiritual things—for himself first, and also for all believers. So, when he writes to the Philippians, he's thankful above all for their fellowship in the gospel. Paul's prayer is a great example on which we can pattern our own prayer life.

It's interesting that the first words of Paul's prayer in his various epistles typically involve thanksgiving. We see it here in regards to this church where there was much to be thankful for). We see it in his letter to the Romans (**1:8**) to folks he hadn't even met yet. We see it in his letter to the church in Colosse (**1:3**) and even in his letter to the believers at Corinth (**1:4**) who needed a good bit of instruction righteousness and were causing Paul much distress.

In his prayers Paul always thanked God for the evidence of spiritual

blessing among Christians. Although Paul was sensitive to the problems in these churches, he was even more sensitive to the mercies of God. He knew people's hearts. He knew that there is no good in man that can satisfy God. He knew that Christians live a good part of their lives in the flesh instead of in the Spirit. He knew that we all fall short of what God would like us to be. But Paul was also very familiar with God's grace and he gloried in it. He knew God had provided wonderfully for His children—for their salvation, their constant and continuing growth in the Christian life. Paul was always thankful for these things.

Do our prayers follow this pattern? No Christian would be so crass as to only pray for themselves. We're uneasy with a prayer that's just a long string of requests but sometimes we find ourselves guilty of praying that way. Our prayers should be spiritual prayers. They should be filled with thanksgiving... for spiritual things: for Christ, His love, the Holy Spirit, the support of other Christians, the freedom of worship (& to worship), etc. We usually fail to mention these things in prayer, not because we're not thankful for them but because we take them for granted. A good standard for measuring spiritual maturity in our prayers is: how much time do we spend rejoicing in Him and thanking Him for the spiritual blessings He has given us in Christ.

The one thing Paul is most thankful for regarding the Christians at Philippi was their fellowship with him in the gospel. What does this mean? The word fellowship has been so watered down in the modern Christian vernacular that it conveys only a faint suggestion of what it meant in earlier times. When we speak of fellowship today, we generally mean no more than friendship, or sharing a good time. But it originally meant much more than sharing of something; it meant a sharing in something, participating in something greater than the people involved and more lasting than the activity of any given moment. The biblical definition means being caught up into a communion created by God.

There are plenty of organizations and clubs that people join because they have a shared interest in certain activities, intellectual pursuits or business opportunities but that's not what Paul's referring to here. There may have even been various groups in the church who had things in common. But Paul's not speaking of that. He's thankful for their share in the gospel of God. They had been taken up into a divine fellowship. They were now

united, not on a social level or an intellectual level, but by their commitment to the truths of the gospel.

We don't know much about the church at Philippi. We know that it was largely a gentile church because the names mentioned in it are gentile. We know that it consisted of a jailer, a violent man who would've killed himself in a crisis except he was stopped by Paul, a slave girl who had been delivered of an evil spirit, a businesswoman who traded in purple cloth from Asia and who had been a Jewish proselyte, and others. Apparently there was little to bind them together by worldly standards. But they had one great thing in common: they had fellowship in the gospel of God. This is what brought them together. And they were faithful to continue in that fellowship.

This must always be the bond between Christians. If you unite with other Christians on the basis of wealth, you'll exclude the poor. If you unite along social lines, you will exclude those outside your level of society (high or low). If you unite intellectually, you'll exclude those under or above you. However you do it, the witness of the church will suffer. Thankfully, God didn't establish the fellowship of Christians along these lines. Our fellowship is in the gospel!

There are 2 other places in this book where Paul mentions fellowship. In [2:1](#), he speaks of fellowship of the Spirit. What is that? Well, if fellowship in the gospel means a mutual participation in the gospel, fellowship of the Spirit must mean a mutual participation in the Holy Spirit. It doesn't mean a fellowship between spirits, as between your spirit and mine. It doesn't mean that we all receive a little bit of the Holy Spirit, like water being poured into a glass. It means that we participate in Him. As birds spend the majority of their lives in the air and as fish live in the water, so Christians are to live in the Spirit. Because of this, we should strive to be of one love, one accord and one mind.

In [3:10](#), Paul mentions a different kind of fellowship—fellowship in the sufferings of Christ. None of us can suffer for sin. Only the Lord Jesus could do that. But there is a sense in which we can have fellowship in His sufferings. As we come to know something of His sufferings we also come to know more about Him and become more like Him.

So, 3 opportunities for fellowship in Paul's letter: fellowship in the gospel of

God; fellowship of the Spirit and fellowship in the sufferings of Christ. Paul's showing us that we have the privilege of sharing in the full nature of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit! What a privilege for believers! If you're a Christian, you already share in the gospel. That fellowship is yours by virtue of your conversion. The fellowship of the Spirit is something you will grow into. It's also possible that in your Christian walk, you may also come to know the fellowship of the sufferings of our Lord. If that happens, just know that it will be through the great tenderness and gentle compassion of the Lord.

6 – This is probably 1 of the 3 greatest verses in the Bible that teach the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, the doctrine that no one whom God has brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ will ever be lost.

By and large, humans lack perseverance. We start things and drop them all the time. We're always beginning things that we never actually find time to finish. But God's not like that. He never starts anything that He can't finish. God perseveres. Has He started something in your life? Have you been born again by the Spirit of God? Then you need not fear ever being lost. Your confidence shouldn't be in yourself, your faith or your spiritual successes, but in God. It's He who calls us as Christians, who leads us on in this Christian life, and who most certainly will lead us home.

There are 2 other passages in the Bible that also clearly express this doctrine: [Jn 10:27-28](#) and [Rom 8:38-39](#). This doctrine is also found less formally in dozens of other passages. David writes in [Ps 138:8](#), "The LORD will perfect that which concerns me. [Heb 10:14](#), For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. This doctrine is also suggested by the images that are applied to believers throughout the Bible. The saints are compared to trees that do not wither ([Ps 1:3](#)), to the great cedars of Lebanon that flourish from year to year ([Ps 92:12](#)), to a house built upon a rock ([Matt 7:24](#)), to Mount Zion that cannot be moved ([Ps 125:1](#)). These passages teach that the one who has been born again by God will never be lost. God never abandons His plans or His projects. God never begins a work that He doesn't finish.

There are many who don't like this teaching because they believe we're responsible for our own salvation. They'd rather believe that we can be accepted by God on the basis of our good works or participation in

sacraments, and that our final salvation depends more or less on how faithful or persevering we can be. This is not biblical, and it is contradicted by every moment of the believer's experience with God, even from the first moments of our salvation.

People don't seek God; they reject Him. If we're saved, it's only because God comes to us first in grace. Paul wrote in Romans that no human being will ever be justified in God's sight by his own good works, for all works (no matter how good they may seem) fall short of God's standard of righteousness. Besides, lost souls don't seek Him. Paul writes, "There is none righteous, no not one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks God" (3:10-11). This is true of all of us. We can't even begin to meet God's standard of righteousness, and we wouldn't even know it unless God reveals our failure to us. We don't even understand His standard. We don't seek the One who can help us. Yet, God still comes to us and opens our eyes, gives us the faith to believe and draws us to Himself.

Did you seek God? No, you resisted Him and He had to wear down your resistance until you yielded to Him like a defeated enemy. If there was a time in your lost state when you thought you were seeking Him, it was only because He was moving you to do it. Salvation is always of God. We love Him because He enables us to. If this is true of the first moments of our salvation – then it is true of every moment of our Christian life!

Do you ever wonder why God saves us this way? The answer's in the Bible. God saves us this way so that no one can boast in His presence (Eph 2:8-9). God will have no one in heaven boasting about how they got there. He will not let anyone say, "Well, God did most of it but there were times of crisis in my life where I had to hang on tight. I'm really here because of my faith." That's human thinking and God will have none of it. No one will be in heaven except saved sinners, those who deserve hell, and they will be there because salvation is entirely of God. God never begins anything that He doesn't intend to finish. And when He does it, God does it all!—in spite of our foolishness, in spite of our running away, in spite of ourselves! We're brought to safety, not by our own efforts or devices but solely by the faithfulness of our heavenly Father.

So far, this has all been an encouragement for believers, but there's a somber side to it also. If you're a Christian, God hasn't saved you just to

save you. He's saved you for a purpose as v6 clearly states. Have you ever thought of this verse in that light? As in, "I know God saved me for a purpose and He'll keep on whittling away at me until it is accomplished in me, whether I want Him to or not." It's a somber thought, but it's certainly what the verse teaches.

In fact, Paul says God is determined to do a good work in us. What good work? It's not spelled out clearly here, but it is in [Rom 8:29](#). We know [Rom 8:28](#), but do you know the next verse? It explains what that purpose is. Think of it: God is so delighted with Jesus that He calls millions of sinful human beings to Himself so that Jesus can reproduce Himself in them and this universe can be populated with millions of Christs. This doesn't mean we'll become divine. We'll still be His creation but we'll be like Him. That's the point. We'll show forth His character; we'll be conformed to the image of Christ.

This means that our growth in the character of Christ will be accompanied by growth in the knowledge of our own sinfulness. Some people believe sanctification means becoming aware of how perfect we are becoming. But biblical sanctification means discovering how sinful we are and learning to turn to Jesus for forgiveness and cleansing. The more we come to know Jesus, the more we realize how far we are from His character, the more conscious we become of our great need to know Him even more.

That's the way of the Christian life. When we're first saved we think we're not too bad. But as we live with Christ we begin to see how sinful and ignorant we really are. Instead of thinking that we're pretty good, we begin to see that we're pretty sinful. Eventually we say with Paul, "I am the chief of sinners" ([1 Tim 1:15](#)). That's sanctification. No true Christian here today will think as well of them 5 years from now as they do this morning. That's because God's purposes will not be thwarted, even in the sanctification of Christians.

The purpose of this process is to teach us to rely on God. God doesn't take pleasure in forcing us to develop low opinions of ourselves, but He knows that we will never rely on Him fully, as we should, until we realize that we can't rely on ourselves. I once heard a Pastor describe his previous job as a lineman for an electric company. He said they purposely started trainees on climbing short poles because they hadn't yet learned the secret of climbing

a pole. The human tendency is to hug the pole; unfortunately, the spikes on your boots don't bite very well that close to the pole. If you made any progress, you'll fall and pick up all the loose splinters along the way. The secret is to lean all the way back on the big leather belt that encircles your body and the pole. The farther out you lean, the deeper your spikes bite, the higher you climb and the longer you stay up there.

It's the same in this Christian life. God wants you to climb. That was His purpose in saving you. He wants you to rise to Christ's own stature. In fact, He's going to insist on it. He's going to teach you to climb by resting on Him. There will be times when you think you can hold on better by grasping in your own strength rather than by leaning on Him, and when you do you will slip spiritually and God will let you get covered with splinters. He'll do it because He knows that it's the only way you'll learn to trust Him, and trusting Him is the only way to climb. And, He will keep at you; He won't let you quit.

Now, you might think this is unreasonable; that God can't work like that; that it must depend on you. But it's the way God works, and you'll find it out sooner or later in your Christian life. Maybe you're thinking that you will run your own life, pick your own goals, and choose your own purposes. Well, that's fine. Just know that if your self-appointed goals and purposes don't line up with what God's already planned for you (from the foundation of the world) then He may need to come alongside of you and break you until you learn that He's determined to accomplish His purposes in you.

On the other hand, maybe you'll just be willing to learn to rely on Him, to grow in His grace as He molds you into the image of Christ. If that is the case, then v6 will become a blessed truth for you rather than a bitter lesson.

From a Christian perspective, God's pursuit of sinners is a wonderful thought. Maybe not so much for the lost soul being pursued but eventually, they come around. The truth is, we all start out in the same boat – we all have the same guilty verdict of sin hanging over our heads ([Rom 3:23](#)). That sin can't just be swept under the rug, it must be addressed; it must be answered for. The Bible says that the result of sin is death, physical and spiritual. Thankfully, God paid the price for sin when Jesus died on the cross. His death made it possible for unforgivable sinners to be forgiven by a Holy and Just God. He paid the price, He did all the work, the only part we

have in it is acknowledging our need for forgiveness and accepting the gracious offer of salvation being extended to us by God Himself. 😊