

Welcome and Reminders

Welcome to any visitors and welcome back to the group members. It is important to remember that everything said and done in this group is confidential. The expectation is that there will not be discussion about our conversations to anyone outside of the group that is represented here and now. We understand that sometimes personal insights or information may be shared by someone who feels comfortable doing so in this group and not around others. Let's be respectful of that and carry our commitment to confidentiality as we leave this group. *(Pass out the confidentiality reminder to anyone who has not yet received one).*

Prayer and Praises

Introduction

In the last study we discussed Paul's amazing display of joy in the second chapter of Philippians. In this same chapter Paul encouraged us to commit acts of unity and to face our situations without grumbling or complaining.

- *Did you find yourself, at any time in the last two weeks, seek opportunities for acts of unity, intentional joy or positive talk? If you feel comfortable sharing, please do.*

Read Philippians 3:1-3

¹Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. ²Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. ³For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—

One might be tempted to think Paul is just name-calling in vs. 2 in his indignation about those who teach a false gospel. But just leaving it with that assumption cuts out an even simpler understanding of the text. According to Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament, 'the dogs' were "a well-known party-the Judaizers. These were nominally Christians who accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but as the Saviour of Israel only. They insisted that Christ's kingdom could be entered only through the gate of Judaism. Only circumcised converts were fully accepted by God." Paul, then, was addressing a specific teaching that excluded sincere believers based on the law and their understanding of holiness.

- *What might be a similar claim from religious leaders today who seek to exclude others based on 'the law'?*
- *Paul writes that these Judaizers are 'evildoers' - what was 'evil' about their actions?*
- *Once again, are there similar comparisons that can be drawn to today's religious leaders?*

Read Philippians 3:4-14

...⁴though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

⁷But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

¹²Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Paul seems to be using the accounting method of profit and loss. A profit and loss report (PandL) shows how much money a company gained or lost in its reported period. Here, however, Paul is taking inventory of losses and gains in his personal life and spiritual journey.

- *Share with the group one or two things you would consider to be the greatest accomplishments of your life?*

Now, consider those things you just mentioned... can you imagine moving this from the proverbial profit column to the loss column? Paul's attitudes and perspectives had become so drastically transformed that it would have been as if he had picked up a previous PandL of his life and completely exchanged the profits and loss columns. Even more extraordinary is that his new profits included sharing in suffering and being like Jesus even in his death.

- *What does it look like to identify with Jesus in his death and sufferings?*

Can you imagine sitting in a prison cell, having survived abuse, ridicule, execution attempts, perilous travels, and all the while looking at an uncertain future and saying, "Life is now profit!"

This is all great!" Either Paul was phoney and insincere trying to pull something over on his readers, or he truly experienced the reality that life without purpose is loss and life with Christ's purpose is completely worthwhile. Let's consider the specifics of what he called a loss compared to the greatness of knowing Christ:

- Ritual/religious purity (born a Jew, circumcised on the eighth day)
- Racial privilege (born of the tribe of Benjamin)
- Cultural pride (Hebrew family, Hebrew language, honored Hebrew customs)

These are often things we may associate with God in our lives or with who God created us to be - but to Paul they were just incidental things in comparison to having a relationship with Jesus and sharing in his mission.

It is amazing to think, in all his excitement and enthusiasm, that Paul realizes that this is only the beginning of the course. He understands the incredible privilege of the journey he has begun but also the responsibility of what he still has to do. His focus is not on what he has done but what is to come. He knew the importance of looking forward to the journey.

- *When it comes to your spiritual life, do you have a goal towards which you continue to press forward?*
- *Has or can this goal allow you the perspective that your trials are worthwhile? Elaborate.*

Read Philippians 3:15-

¹⁵All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

¹⁷Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. ¹⁸For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

To conclude this passage Paul moves from the hope that he is currently realizing to the challenge of seeking spiritual maturity. It seems to be a choice between not growing and finding ourselves stagnant - worshipping the futile, temporary, and shameful things in life - or moving on to further maturity in Christ.

- *Discuss any thoughts you may have on this last part of Philippians 3*
- *Discuss any other thoughts that may have occurred to you during this discussion.*

In the next few weeks, I encourage you to think about what in your life can or should be moved from the profit to the loss column to allow you the opportunity to experience God's 'profit' created just for you. Look for opportunities to resist the easy feel-good fixes and press on toward maturity in Christ.

For the next session, which will be the final session in this series, read Philippians 4.