

A LETTER FROM PRISON



THE PARADOX OF JOY IN SUFFERING
paul's letter to the philippian church

Week 3: Theology 101

INTRODUCTION – Let's Be Clear... To A Point

THE BIBLE IS CLEAR ON...	BUT LESS CLEAR ON...
The centrality and uniqueness of Christ	The metaphysical nature of the Trinity
The expected character of a Christ-follower	The expected structure of church leadership
Basic Christian ethics	End-times prophecy
Our lives as living sacrifices of worship	Worship structure/style in church meetings
God as Creator and Sustainer of life	The accuracy of evolutionary theory
God's tremendous love for us	The exact nature of eternal judgement
Our responsibility for our own obedience and growth	How God's sovereign will intersects and interacts with our will

John 14:29; 16:4; 20:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:18; 1 Corinthians 4:6

Look To The Book

Philippians 2:1-11

- Paul is in the middle of exhorting his readers (hearers) to live in unity as productive citizens of God's kingdom. The method is humble, other-centred love. The motivation is joy (a carrot, not a stick). But unity alone is not the goal. The Nazis were unified in WW2. The goal is unity achieved in line with the Gospel.
- Like actors in a play, Christians should be concerned about group success, not individual performances at the expense of the story being told – the story of Christ.
- The example of Christ in **2:6-11** is written in poetic form, possibly an early church hymn. These few verses make up one of the most theologically rich passages in the entire New Testament, yet it is only an illustration of the main theme – unity in Christ.
- Three stories are echoed in this passage: 1) ADAM: who had it all and yet grasped for more and instead lost so much. We still use our God-given authority to exploit creation rather than serve it. (See **Mark 10:42-45**.) Jesus illustrates the reversal of Adam's fall! 2) ISRAEL: who descended into slavery, but were exalted into a great kingdom. 3) CHRISTIANS: who are called to imitate Christ in serving and suffering.
- These stories are being retold and reframed as the story of God. Jesus successfully completes the story of Adam and Israel, as the true human and the true Israelite and he endures as the ultimate example of how Christians should live – in cruciformity.
- Paul assumes Christ's pre-existence (also see **John 17:5; Colossians 1:15**). Although Jesus was in the "form" (Gk., *morphe*; stronger than *schema*, likeness) of God (which could mean either that he was of the very same substance as God or merely possessed many of the qualities of God), he didn't consider what was his by nature as something to be "grasped" (Gk., *harpagmos*, that is, held on to for his OWN advantage. Also see **Matthew 4:1-11**).
- Christ willingly "emptied" (Gk., *ekenosen*) himself of all rights, privileges, and power to become fully human (not just appearing human). This doctrine of Kenosis helps answer so many theological questions about Christ's limitations while on earth.

- The cross is the ultimate symbol of degradation in Paul's world. Roman citizens could not be crucified and Jews saw it as a sign of being under God's curse (**Deuteronomy 21:22-23; Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 12:2**).
- Paul writes of Christ's exaltation in terms that Jews used to apply to God and God alone (E.g., see **Isaiah 45:23-25**).

So What?... Using The Bible The Way It Was Intended

TAKE OUT #1: We should use Scripture as its authors (and Author) intended. (e.g., If a passage is written for encouragement, let it encourage us. If it is recorded for illustrative purposes, let it illustrate its point. If it is a warning, let us heed its warning.) For Paul, theology is never an end goal, but a means to an end. His emphasis is clearly and consistently on right attitudes and actions.

TAKE OUT #2: We should guard against the common tendency to mistake theological prowess and scriptural acuity for spiritual maturity. Biblically, spiritual maturity is a matter of becoming more like Christ in character and conduct (**Romans 8:29; 2 Peter 1:3-9; etc.**).

TAKE OUT #3: Christian unity is not an abstract goal, but the result of our common focus on our central cause. Like players on a team or actors in a play, our shared goal becomes more important than individual agendas. Are you trying to shine as an individual in opposition to other players, or are you eager to support the success of the entire team/cast?

CONCLUSION – How Are You Using Your Riches?

2 Corinthians 8:9

HOME CHURCH QUESTIONS...

WARMING UP...

1. Take time to review this week's message. What things in the message most challenged, puzzled, or encouraged you?

LOOK TO THE BOOK...

2. Read our key passage (**Philippians 2:1-11**) in various translations if possible. a) What verse or idea stands out to you the most? Why? b) In **verse 1**, Paul bases his call to unity on four assumed Christian experiences. (The word translated "if" could also be translated "since".) Then in **verse 2** Paul calls his readers to four results that he holds them responsible to manifest. In **verses 3-4** Paul paints a more detailed picture of what the church should look like. Keeping these factors in mind, brainstorm examples of things that would make Paul's joy complete if he were to visit i) your Home Church, ii) The Meeting House as a whole, iii) the wider "church" in your city.
3. FOR FURTHER STUDY: Some theologians use passages like **Philippians 2:9-11** to teach that God will save all people in the end through Christ. Other passages used in support of universalism include **Romans 5:15-19; 11:32; 1 Corinthians 15:21-28; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Ephesians 1:9-10; Philippians 2:9-11; Colossians 1:20; 1 John 2:2; Revelation 7:9**. Passages that push back against this theory are many and include **Romans 5:17; 2:5-8; 10:13-14; Matthew 7:13-14; 13:24-30, 36-43; 25:31-46; John 3:16, 36**. If you're feeling theological, investigate the biblical teaching on the final salvation of all people and come to your own conclusions. Just remember, we are united by our faith in Christ, not by our doctrinal conclusions regarding the nature of eternal judgement.

SO WHAT?...

4. As a group, take time to pledge your cooperation to making the things you discussed in #2 above a reality. Discuss practical ways you might be able to encourage each other and hold each other accountable in these areas. Submit this to God in prayer.

Bruxy Cavey @ THE MEETING HOUSE – Sunday, July 8 / 15, 2007