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Paul’s Spiritual Accounting Practices Philippians 3:4-11 Part 6

Bill Tagliaferro, a member of this fellowship, recently died. I had known him for over 20 years and I knew him well. I knew much of what he thought. I knew much of what he believed. I knew much of what he valued. But it went beyond knowing about him. I knew him. We were ministry partners.

We served as elders together at Valley Bible and we went through a lot of things together. We went through good times together and we went through bad times together. I shared his heart and passion for the welfare of this fellowship. I shared his concerns in respect to certain threats facing this fellowship. I shared with him the pain of personal attacks. All of these shared experiences bonded us together. But nothing bonded us more closely together than what we suffered together.

When he recently passed away someone said, “This must have been a great loss for you” and it was a great loss. Not because I knew about Bill but because I knew Bill not only in the good times but most importantly in our times of mutual suffering. His death took from me a very special relationship forged by many shared memories and forged in a crucible of fire This thought of shared suffering and difficulty while pursuit of common goals prepares us for the message that I will be sharing with you this weekend from Philippians 3.

In **Philippians 3:1-3** we considered Paul’s warning concerning the Judaizers. The Judaizers were individuals who were saying that in order for gentiles to be saved, they, in addition to believing in Jesus, needed to be circumcised and adhere to the Jewish Law.

In order to focus attention on the danger and futility of that message, Paul compares the Judaizers’ willingness to place confidence in circumcision and adherence to the Mosaic Law with his own past personal experience. All of this is described for us in **Philippians 3:4-11**.

He begins this section by speaking of his own so-called spiritual advantages he once valued so highly in **Philippians 3:4-6** prior to his conversion. Let me read these verses for you, “**Although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: (5) circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law , a Pharisee; (6) as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.**”

After listing for us these so-called advantages he speaks of a very dramatic change in his thinking in **Philippians 3:7-8**. Let me read these two verses for you, “**But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. (8) More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.....**” What was Paul’s dramatic change in thinking? Paul came to see that everything that he once considered so valuable needed to be viewed as rubbish. And Christ, who he had at one time thought to be rubbish, needed to be his singular treasure, surpassing everything else in his life in value.

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This dramatic change in Paul’s thinking led to an adjustment in his spiritual ledger that totally changed his life. The positive benefits of that adjustment are then spelled out for us in **Philippians 3:8-11**.

What are the benefits that comes to someone who is willing to make this adjustment to their spiritual ledger? WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE RAMIFICATIONS OF GAINING CHRIST?

The first positive ramification of gaining Christ is knowledge. In **Philippians 3:8** Paul declares that he counts all things as loss **“in view of the surpassing value of Knowing of Christ.”** The word for “knowing” (GNOSIS) when it is used with a personal object as it is used here, refers to knowing in terms of a relationship or experience. Paul was willing to move everything that he had considered important and valuable to the loss column in order to enter into a personal relationship with Christ, the Lord of glory.

The second positive ramification of gaining Christ is righteousness. Let us read **Philippians 3:9**, **“And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.”** Why did Paul transfer everything in his life that he ever felt was important to the loss column so that he might gain Christ? The first thing that he lists is knowledge. But we cannot have a personal knowledge of Christ or in other words a relationship with Christ without simultaneously taking possession of the righteousness which comes from God which is the second positive ramification of making the adjustment that he made to his spiritual ledger..... What is the third positive ramification of gaining Christ that Paul lists in this passage of Scripture.

The third positive ramification of gaining Christ is power. We find it at the beginning of **Philippians 3:10** where he says, **“that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection.....”** Paul had already referred to the surpassing value of knowing Christ in **Philippians 3:8**. In fact I have already shared with you that this was the first positive ramification of gaining Christ. But here he is again emphasizing his desire to know Christ. But now he is more specific in the ways he wants to know Christ. And he tells us that he wants to know Christ in the power of His resurrection. And this became our third positive ramification of knowing Christ.

This morning we will now consider the fourth positive ramification of transferring everything that we have ever considered important to the loss column in order to gain Christ. What is the fourth positive ramification of gaining Christ?

The fourth positive ramification of gaining Christ is suffering. Let me again read for you **Philippians 3:10** but this time I will continue to read a little further, **“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings**” If we are going to know Christ fully and intimately we must not only be willing to share His prosperity but also His adversity. In fact, if there is anything that is going to bond us experientially to Christ more than anything else it will be knowing Christ in the fellowship of His sufferings.

What does Paul mean by the phrase, **“and the fellowship of his sufferings?”** Let us first of all look at the word **“fellowship,”** The word “fellowship” (KOINONIA) is best understood in an active sense of participation.

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This would be consistent with the way the word (KOINONIA) is translated by the New American Standard Bible in **Philippians 1:5** when Paul speaks of the Philippians “participation (same word KOINONIA) in the gospel from the first day until now.”

Paul wanted to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings or in other words, Paul, in his desire to know Christ fully, wanted to participate in the sufferings of Christ.But how should we understand this participation?

When Paul speaks of the sufferings of Christ we must see those sufferings as distinct from the sufferings of mankind in general. Every person who has ever been born into this world suffers. What do the Scriptures teach us, **“Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward.”**

This last week I am sure many of you have suffered in the very same way that the people in this world suffer. Perhaps you have suffered a financial setback. Perhaps you have suffered a family setback. Perhaps you have suffered a job setback. Perhaps you have suffered a health setback. All of these various setbacks are common to mankind and certainly Paul was personally familiar with many of these setbacks prior to his conversion. But even though this was true, he did not in any way in his epistles represent these setbacks, these various sufferings, in and of themselves as the sufferings of Christ. And neither should we.

When Paul speaks of the sufferings of Christ we must see those sufferings as distinct from the sufferings of mankind in general. Secondly: When Paul speaks of the sufferings of Christ we must see those sufferings as distinct from Christ’s past sufferings on the cross.

What Christ suffered leading up to the cross and on the cross are detailed for us in by Paul in **Philippians 2:5-8**. Let me read this passage for you. **“(5) Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, (6) who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, (7) but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. (8) And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”**

Because Christ was willing to suffer in the past in this way, we can now in the present have a personal relationship with Christ. This is true. But this is not what Paul is talking about when he speaks about presently knowing the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings. Christ’s suffering on the cross is forever in the past. How many times must Christ die for sins? One time, and that one time happened nearly 2,000 years ago.

Yes it is true that Christians are presently identified with Christ’s redemptive work on the cross through the baptizing work of the Spirit and are therefore dead to sin but it is also true that those sufferings associated with Christ’s death are in the past and are not something we can personally participate with in the present.

We hopefully now know what Paul is not referring to when He speaks of the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings. It is not a reference to general sufferings that every person goes through and it is not referring specifically to Christ’s sufferings while He was on earth. But if this is true then what is he referring too?

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When Paul refers to Christ's sufferings, he is referring to what Christ experiences when the church suffers on His behalf as He seeks to build His church in this world. Christ, I know, has finished His redemptive work on the cross-that is over. But Christ has not finished His work. He is presently building His church according to **Matthew 16** and this work gives us the opportunity to know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings or in other words to participate in Christ's sufferings. Let me try and explain this.

The church is the physical extension of Christ's spiritual body in this world (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Let me read for you **1 Corinthians 12:12-13** **"For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. (13) For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."** Whose body have we spiritually been joined to? Christ's body.

He has sent His body, the church, into a very hostile world with a very specific mission spelled out for us in Matthew 28:18-20. **"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (19) Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you"** As the church goes out as the body of Christ on this mission in this very hostile world they will suffer. This is not simply possible it is certain.

Christ expects the church to suffer in the mission He gave them; in fact, He has called them to suffer (Matthew 16:24). Jesus said in **Matthew 16:24**, **"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."**

When the church, which is the body of Christ, goes into this world and suffers, Christ suffers with them (Acts 9:3-5). Let me read for you **Acts 9:3-5**, **"And it came about that as he (The apostle Paul who was then known as Saul) journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; (4) and he fell on the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (5) And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."** How did Paul persecute Christ? He persecuted the Church. For Paul to persecute the Church for her faithful adherence and proclamation of her faith, was to persecute Christ. Paul was causing Christ to suffer by causing Christ's church to suffer.

If we want to participate in the sufferings of Christ then we must be willing to obediently suffer with Christ as He seeks to build His church. Christ will suffer as His children seek to be obedient to Him in fulfilling the great commission. I want to be one of those children. Hopefully you do as well.

Paul certainly was willing to do this. Listen to a brief list of all that he suffered. Let me read for you **2 Corinthians 11:23-29**, **"Are they the servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. (24) Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.**

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(25) Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. (26) I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my country men, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; (27) I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. (28) Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches.” This is quite a list. Some people might be tempted to feel sorry for Paul. But don’t feel sorry for Paul. He was getting to know Christ better. No one in the church age can fully know Christ without suffering with Christ as He seeks to build His church through them.

We obviously should not seek to suffer for suffering's sake but be assured that we will suffer. And we will through that suffering come to know Christ better. How can we be so assured of this? Look again at **Philippians 3:10, “that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”** The word translated “being conformed” is a present participle and is in the passive voice. Being conformed to Christ’s death is not what we are doing but what God is doing in us. Will the Christian bail out on suffering with Christ in His work of building the Church. No!! Bailing out is not an option.

It is all about closeness. Do you want to be close to Christ? Do you want to really enjoy the Lord of glory on a personal level? Then we must not only tap into His power but we must also tap into His suffering.

People get all excited about knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection. But very few so-called Christians get excited about suffering with Christ in the way that Paul gets excited about suffering with Christ. Why did Paul get excited about knowing Christ in this way? Because He loved Christ. Christ was His magnificent obsession. And He knew that He really could not know Him without knowing Him in His sufferings.

It is really all about closeness. If we really want to get close to a person we can’t pick and choose what experiences we want to share with him.

Some people in this room are not suffering a whole lot. Why? Because they are making a choice. They are choosing to be comfortable rather than suffering with Jesus in building His church. If they are asked to help in children’s ministries, they might say, “I am not, comfortable with children.” Someone might be asked to help work in the Sunday School and they will say, “I don’t want to give up my weekends.” The church may ask them to help by giving some of their money to the church and they will respond.” I don’t even have enough to afford a new SUV to pull my boat. How could I give any money to the church?” This is how far too many people sound. But this is not how Paul sounded.

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CONCLUSION

WHAT DID PAUL SAY? THAT I MAY KNOW HIM AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS. WHAT WILL YOU CHOOSE? WILL YOU CHOOSE TO KNOW THE COMFORTS AND PLEASURES OF THIS WORLD OR WILL YOU CHOOSE TO KNOW THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHRIST'S SUFFERING?