

A Decade of Grace

Philippians 3:12-16

We have been blessed as a church with ten wonderful years. As far as church plants are concerned, God has been remarkably kind to us and seems to not be letting up. The church at Philippi was also a healthy church, but it would only remain so by pressing toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. So must we.

Summary of the Text

Paul has been writing about the enormous blessings he has in Christ—*“the righteousness which is from God by faith”* (3:9). But even though he has this perfection already, he has not yet laid hold of the resurrection of the dead, the thing for which Jesus laid hold of him (v. 12). Therefore, he leaves behind his accomplishments and everything else to press toward what’s ahead: the prize the Lord has for Him in Christ Jesus (vv. 13-14). He exhorts the mature to understand this, and even if some don’t get it yet, God will reveal it to them soon enough (v. 15). Nevertheless, the Philippians must live up to what they’ve been given and walk together in like-mindedness (v. 16).

Not There Yet

There are a few Christians today who think the resurrection is past, but not many. Far more don’t think much about the resurrection at all. Paul speaks about it constantly and here as his explicit hope. Resurrection is the goal of the Christian life and the Christian church. This is where we want to go. It’s necessary to think and speak this way because Scripture does, and it emphasizes the continuity of our life now with the life we’ll have in the resurrection. We have bodies in both. We’re not trying to escape this life to get to heaven, but to be faithful especially while suffering so as to obtain a *“better resurrection,”* as the author of Hebrews says (Heb. 11:35). Paul has preached city to city, planted churches, testified before kings, written lots of Scripture, nearly been murdered on many occasions, and yet he spends no time staring into the trophy case (which he doesn’t have). What an example of not letting your right hand know what your left hand is doing. It’s not that he can’t remember or even use his accomplishments for Christ when need be (cf. 3:4-6; 2 Cor. 11:22-12:6), but he will not allow himself to be distracted by them. This is how we ought to be as individuals and as a church on mission to worship and glorify God. Once the mission becomes to keep the lights on or have an encouraging service or attract the right kind of people or not offend someone with Scripture or anything else, we are fundamentally compromised. Next to Christ, Paul counts everything as loss and therefore can run with eyes forward, set on the prize (vv. 7-8, 13-14). Neither complacency nor regret are consistent with striving for the resurrection.

Of the Same Mind

What do you tell a faithful church like the Philippians to do? They are not like the foolish Galatians, lukewarm Laodiceans, or loveless Ephesians (Gal. 3:1; Rev. 3:16, 2:4). If you were the Devil, how would you mess up a church of committed Christians like this? You’d make them self-righteous, individualistic, and argumentative. You’d get them to rename selfishness, envy, and lack of love as being principled and concerned. So Paul exhorts them against this, *“to fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself”* (Phil. 2:2-3). The church ought to have people at different places in their walk with Christ, differing levels of spiritual maturity (v. 15). This is a feature, not a bug, and it doesn’t prevent the church from being like-minded and walking together (v. 16). This is different than calling for a group hug, everyone to “just get along” while ignoring differences and disagreements that matter, or pretending there are no enemies. Paul warns against dogs, evil-doers, and mutilators of the flesh (3:1-2). This is not a “tone change” but straight

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talk for a church that he loves. They really have been blessed and are full of true faith in Christ, and therefore they must live up to it and not take it for granted. *“For everyone to whom much is given,”* Jesus said, *“from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more”* (Lk. 12:48). A Scottish church plant is one where the church can’t worship together and so it splits. Emmanuel Church started from an opposite desire. We very much loved being at Trinity Church but felt the call to multiply the ministry. We’ve supported various churches and hope to do so more in the future. The ability to do this depends on our faithfulness to walk in what we have already attained. In this sense, every church must be conservative, preserving the faith, wisdom, doctrine, desire, and vision that God has given. We don’t want an ecclesiastical mid-life crisis. We don’t want to buckle in Covid-round-two, whatever that will look like. But every church also must be progressive in way of sanctification and striving for the upward call. Age does not necessitate maturity. Old churches, perhaps especially old churches, split over the new color of the carpet. The issue is never really the carpet but being totally off-mission before it ever came up. The answer in these situations isn’t just to sort out the decision, but why rancor ever broke out over such a non-issue in the first place. When Paul says to “walk by the same rule”, the image is of a group walking together in formation. It’s embodied in our worship service where we stand, sit, sing, listen, say Amen!, and eat together. It’s not hard to get a bunch of individuals to go walking at the same time. But to walk, work, worship together as the church takes the grace of God.

Without Complaints & Disputes

Our body is filled with productive people doing a lot. We encourage you to educate your children in the Lord, pray together, show hospitality, pursue your callings, meet as men, women, boys and girls, come to Psalm Sing, study the Bible and great books, be active in your neighborhood and communities, and live out your faith in Christ in all of life. As a body, we want to do everything as get-tos, not got-tos, free of burdens and anxiety and therefore burnout. Paul tells the Philippians to *“Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world”* (2:14-15). It’s easy to “obey” with a bad attitude, with edginess, with just enough of a whine so that people know you are put upon. In other words, it’s not just whether we obey and serve God, but how we do it. The word “complaining” is also translated “grumbling” or “murmuring.” It’s a low-level fuss, like a dog quietly growling but not willing to bark. It’s not that there’s nothing to complain about. There always is, so choose not to. You could be anxious for everything, but instead be anxious for nothing. God has been so good to us and we know His grace only deepens in our hearts, minds, and lives as we follow Him. May He give us not just more years but generations of faithfulness.