

The Hard Thing

October 1 – Philemon 1:1-25

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 273 – 92 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We read Paul's letter to Philemon, a Christian in Colossae. Paul wrote this letter at the same time that he wrote his letter to the Colossians (about 60 AD), while he was waiting for his trial in Rome. It is likely that both letters were delivered at the same time.

Paul's letter to Philemon is unlike anything else in the New Testament. It is a personal appeal to an individual, rather than to a church, and Paul did not include any doctrinal teaching or personal application of the gospel. **He was simply trying to reconcile two brothers in Christ.** Onesimus was a servant or slave of Philemon's, and he had run away from Colossae to Rome (v.16). While in Rome, he met with Paul, who led him to the Lord (v.10, 16). Now, **Paul attempted to reconcile the two men and mend their broken relationship** (v.10-18).

Let's consider the three men in this story, as well as their part in the reconciliation process. First, Philemon was an upstanding Christian man in his church. His reputation preceded him. He was known for his love and faith (v.5). In fact, Paul wrote, "The hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother" (v.7). Could those words be written about you?

Second, it is obvious that Onesimus wronged Philemon somehow (perhaps even stolen something) and ran away to avoid the consequences (v.10-12, 18, 19). But, as God would have it, he connected with Paul, heard the gospel, and gave his life to the Lord (v.10, 16). Now, Onesimus was not just a slave or servant, but he was more than that. He was a Christian (v.16). Our identity is not to be in what we do (our job), but rather to be in who we are as a follower of Christ. Do you see yourself as more than what you do for a living, more than where you live, more than what you possess, and more than the family you inherited? In Christ, you are more than these things. You are His. Your identity is in Him.

When Onesimus gave his life to Christ, it is certain that he came under conviction of the Spirit (and by Paul's teaching) to reconcile or make things right with Philemon. However, knowing what Onesimus had done to hurt Philemon, reconciling may be more hazardous than helpful. Thus, Paul got involved.

As an apostle of Christ, Paul had the authority to order Philemon to accept Onesimus back, but rather than order him, he appealed to him "for love's sake" (v.9). **He also encouraged Onesimus to do the right thing, even though it was the hard thing,** return to work for Philemon. Paul even went a step further and offered to pay for any financial loss that Philemon had incurred because of Onesimus' actions (v.18, 19). Like Christ, who reconciled sinful men to God through His sacrifice, Paul was willing to do the same to bring two Christian brothers together.

Daily Reflection

Though we are not told the rest of the story, we assume that the two men did the right thing. **The right thing is never the easy thing to do, but for the good of the church and the benefit of these two men, reconciliation was essential.**

Has the Lord ever used you to reconcile a broken relationship? How did it go? Was God glorified and victory won? Explain.

Are there any relationships that you need to mend, anyone with whom you need to reconcile? **For love's sake, do the hard thing by doing the right thing.**

Fruitful Labor

October 2 – Philippians 1:1-26

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Day 274 – 91 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We transitioned to Paul's letter to the Philippians. The church at Philippi was special to Paul, as it was the first one that he planted in Europe (*Acts 16:11-40*), and it was the only church that financially supported Paul's ministry (*4:15, 16*). Thus, he was always interested in their well-being and wanted to encourage them.

In the opening of his letter, Paul first wrote about the condition of the Philippian church (*v.1-11*). Then, he followed up with a report about his circumstances (*v.12-26*). Let's look at each of these sections a little more closely.

First, notice that Paul included in his salutation the overseers and deacons (*v.1*). These are two offices of leadership that Paul instituted in the churches (we will study further in *1 Tim. 3*). Their genesis can be found in *Acts 6*, and their teamwork ensures that the spiritual and physical needs of the church body are met.

Second, note the words of affection Paul expressed towards the Philippians (*v.3-8*). Clearly, he loved this church for reasons already mentioned, but also because they were not pew-perchers, but participants in the gospel (*v.5*). The Philippians were a loving church (*v.9, 10*). They pursued righteousness, seeking to obey God's words and will (*v.10, 11*), and they sought ways to finance ministry (*4:15, 16*).

What is clear by the Philippian model is that membership in a church is not like membership in a club, where you can simply enjoy all the benefits. **Rather joining a church is to commit to a service organization, where all members are expected to participate.** Too many people in the church today have the idea that they attend only to be ministered to, when, in truth, every member of the body of Christ is to be a minister. **As Christians, we have a responsibility in the local church not to watch, but to do, not only to receive, but to give, not only to enjoy being ministered to, but to engage in ministry.**

Next, Paul shared about his circumstances in Rome (*v.12-13*). He was still waiting trial before Caesar. However, he wanted the Philippians to know that God had used his circumstances "for the greater progress of the gospel" (*v.12*). Evidently, he and others were sharing Christ freely, and people were getting saved (*v.14-18*). In that, he said, he could rejoice.

Daily Reflection

Finally, Paul described the two options that he saw for his future — discharge or death — both of which he wrote would "turn out for his deliverance" (*v.19, 20*). He recognized that he would be "free" one way or the other. Still, Paul wrestled with these two options, not "knowing which one to choose" (*v.22*). In his mind, both were preferable. "To me," he wrote, "to live is Christ and to die is gain" (*v.21*). For most people, to live is gain and to die is loss. In other words, life is good, and death is bad, But, for Paul, it was quite different. While life was good, death was "very much better" (*v.23*).

For Paul, to remain on earth was to live for Christ, but to die or to depart from this world was to live with Christ. Today, we tend to hold onto this earthly life in such a way that reveals our misunderstanding of what is to come. We act as if we were leaving behind something better for something worse, when, in truth, we are leaving behind something "good" for something "very much better." This life, as "good" as it might be, pales in comparison to the life that is to come — the joys of heaven!

However, while heaven was waiting for Paul, he believed that staying on earth was better for the Philippians. His release meant more "fruitful labor" (*v.22*). Paul was referring to ministry, labor that bears eternal fruit, not temporary reward. **We work all the time, but for what — a paycheck, groceries, gas, stuff? Is that fruitful labor? Our time is short on the earth. Are we wasting it or working to produce fruit that is eternal? To live is Christ, so let's get busy!**

From Inside Out

October 3 – Philippians 1:27-2:18

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Day 275 – 90 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Like his challenge to the Ephesians (*Eph. 4:1*), Paul exhorted the Philippians to conduct themselves “in a manner worthy of the gospel,” to behave in a way that was consistent with what they believed (*Phil. 1:27*). Thus, what follows is an expression of that idea.

Paul’s focus was unity. He wanted to hear of them “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel” (*v.27*). Knowing that the church must act as one to be effective, Satan sows seeds of discord, discouragement, and division, to derail the church and nullify its efforts. How often do believers spend their time striving against each other instead of striving together? Though Christians are on the same side, Satan has successfully relocated the battle to inside the church walls. Jesus warned that “a house divided against itself cannot stand” (*Mk. 3:25*). Let us save our ammunition for the enemy, instead of wasting it on one another!

The stronger the bonds of unity in a church, the more effective will its efforts be in promoting the gospel outside the church. A divided church is a poor testimony of the gospel and hinders its effectiveness. Is a church filled with turmoil attractive to the lost? Not at all.

So then, Paul provided the Philippians with the road map for building unity in the church (*2:2*). **The key is for every person to practice selfless servitude** (*2:3, 4*). We must pursue Christ’s agenda, not ours. All disunity in a group can be traced back to the simple truth that too often we act selfishly and consider ourselves better than others. Such behavior is characteristic of unbelievers, not Christ-followers.

Regarding selfless servitude, Paul held up Christ as the one to emulate (*2:5-8*). He left heaven, where He was king, to come to earth, where He became a servant. He set aside His will to be obedient to the Father’s will. As the only capable

mediator between God and man, He achieved what no one else could — salvation. As a result of His selfless sacrifice, God the Father “highly exalted” His Son and “bestowed on Him the name which is above every name” (*2:9-11*).

The message is clear. In God’s eyes, the way up is down. He is opposed to the proud, but He exalts the lowly. We achieve unity with humility. When we seek to serve others, we will not quarrel with them. By following the selfless sacrificial example of our Lord Jesus, by considering others as more important than ourselves, we can conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel and achieve unity.

Daily Reflection

To summarize, Paul wrote, “Work out your salvation” (*2:12*). Of course, he was not suggesting that we are to work for our salvation, but to work out our salvation, meaning to live it out, to put feet to what they believed and knew to be true. **When we “work out our salvation,” we will be humble and selfless, we will emulate Christ’s example of servitude and be promoters of unity.**

Paul also reminded his readers that “God is at work in you” (*v.13*). **If we are truly His followers, then we are being transformed from the inside out.** Having said that, God uses the circumstances in our lives, especially the difficult ones, to stretch and grow us into the image of Christ. Therefore, we must be careful not to gripe about trials when they come our way (*Phil. 2:14*). As people who view problems in a positive light, we will prove to be different.

Finally, as Christians, our lives should be “blameless and innocent, above reproach, as lights” in the darkness (*v.15*), not that we are perfect or sinless, but that we stand out. We must “hold fast the word of life” (*v.16*), which is the gospel. We do not act differently than the world to gain attention for ourselves. Everything we do (i.e., unity) is for the sake of the gospel.

Proven Worth

October 4 – Philippians 2:19-30

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Day 276 – 89 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Before Paul closed his letter to the Philippians, he wished to encourage them by sending two men — Timothy (v.19) and Epaphroditus (v.25). Since Paul was in prison, awaiting his trial before Caesar, he was not able to come and go as he pleased. Thus, he often sent messengers with letters on his behalf. However, he was hopeful that he would soon be released and get to visit Philippi again in person (v.24).

Before we look specifically at the two messengers, let's back up and look at the larger context of this passage. Paul just challenged his readers to strive for unity, then he provided the key for achieving it — selfless servitude (2:3, 4). "Look not to your own personal interests," he wrote, "but also to the interests of others." Then, he pointed to the perfect example of Christ (2:5-11). To follow, Paul offered three other imperfect but commendable examples — Timothy, Epaphroditus, and himself.

Epaphroditus had been sent by the Philippian church to Rome, to encourage Paul (4:14-18). We are not sure what it was that he brought, but the Apostle wrote that he had "received everything in full," and that he was "amply supplied" (4:18). As the one chosen for this task, and the one who would carry Paul's letter back to the church, we can assume some things about Epaphroditus. For example, he was trustworthy, having been given such an important assignment. He must have had a servant's heart to have undertaken such a menial but difficult task, to take time off to travel so far away (700 miles), and to accept the errand without any recognition or compensation. He must have been caring. The Philippians were known for their loving spirit, and they would have sent someone who embodied that spirit (v.29, 30). Evidently, Epaphroditus had fallen ill while in Rome, perhaps even for an extended period of time, because he feared that family and friends would begin to worry about him (v.26-28).

Paul was also going to send Timothy to the Philippians, so that he could "learn of their condition" (v.19). But why would Paul need to learn of their condition when Epaphroditus had just come from there? Didn't he tell Paul what he needed to know? I am sure that he had news, but he may have also had troubling news, perhaps news about problems that needed to be resolved, issues that required someone with more knowledge, wisdom, or experience. Since Paul could not go himself, he sent Timothy.

In Timothy, Paul found a "kindred spirit," a person like him in disposition, calling to ministry, passion for the gospel, hunger for the Scriptures, care for the health of the church, love for the people of God, and fearlessness in the face of persecution (v.20; 2 Tim. 1:15). Timothy was well-known to the Philippians, since he was from Philippi (Acts 16), and the people knew of "his proven worth" (Phil. 2:22).

Daily Reflection

In Paul's mind, **someone of proven worth has three qualities**. First, he is **genuinely concerned for the welfare of others** (v.20). Second, he **pursues the interests of Christ** (v.21). Third, he **serves to advance the gospel** (v.22).

Too many Christians today pursue their agenda, and too many are consumed by their fame, fortune, or power. Too many Christians are derailed by worldly pursuits. We need to be more like Timothy and Epaphroditus, people with an eternal perspective on life.

Where do your interests lie, in making your way or following the Lord? **How would Paul describe you in a letter, as one of proven worth?**

One Thing

October 5 – Philippians 3:1-4:1

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Day 277 – 88 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul focused our attention on Christ, who is to be our first love, our one thing, our priority in life. First, he warned the Philippians to watch out for the “dogs” (worthless people) who would steer them away from Christ as the only thing they needed for salvation (v.1-3). We can’t “put confidence in the flesh” (i.e., circumcision) or anything else to save us (v.3).

Second, Paul said if works worked, then he would have far more confidence in the flesh than anyone (v.4-6). He was circumcised. He was trained in the Mosaic Law by the Pharisees. He followed the Law to the letter. He was zealous to protect Israel from enemies and even persecuted the church. If anyone could boast about his works, he could. Yet, everything that he once “counted as gain, he now counted as loss” because of “the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus.” (v.7-11). Simply put, when he met Christ, Paul took all his “trophies” and threw them in the trash. There is salvation or gain in nothing else. **Christ was his one thing.**

Third, after salvation, **Paul revealed his three life goals — to know Christ, to be like Christ, and one day to be with Christ.** Christianity is about having a personal relationship with Christ, not about following religious rules. Paul desired to know Christ, not just know of Him, but to experience Him (v.8, 10).

Paul also wanted to be like Christ (v.10). He desired to “be found in Him,” to be conformed to His righteousness, and to follow Him in His sufferings. However, God will not complete that work (called sanctification) until we are with Him in eternity (Phil. 1:6). So then, Paul admitted that he had not obtained perfection, but he was pressing towards that goal (3:12-14). **“One thing I do,” he said, “I forget what lies behind and reach forward to what lies ahead” (v.13).** He used the illustration of a runner in a race. He doesn’t look for other runners, but he keeps his eyes on the prize.

Another one of Paul’s goals was to be with Christ. He “eagerly awaited the Savior who would transform his lowly body to be like Jesus’ glorious body” — sinless (v.20, 21). Our citizenship is in heaven, and one day the process of our sanctification will end in our glorification, when we will see Him as He is!

If these are to be the goals of the Christian life, the enemy will certainly put obstacles in our way. One obstacle is our past sins and failures. But remember, we are to “forget what lies behind” (v.13). We must not listen to Satan. He is a defeated foe. Another obstacle he might use is our successes. He appeals to our pride to boost our self-confidence. Satan may also distract us with all that the world has to offer. He also likes to discourage us with people who have fallen away from the Lord (v.15-19). He is only trying to drag us down, but we must not pay attention but keep our eyes on Christ.

Daily Reflection

In 1991, Hollywood produced a movie called “City Slickers.” Three middle-aged yuppie businessmen from New York City join a cattle drive with some rough and tough cowboys. Their purpose was to find the meaning of life. On the trail, one of the men was floundering in a mid-life crisis. That’s when he was confronted by a leathery roughneck who gave him some advice. He held up his pointer finger and said, **“Life is about one thing.” When the city boy asked what that one thing was, the cowboy replied, “That’s what you have to figure out.”**

Have you found your one thing? What motivates you to do the things you do? What is the meaning of life? Remember what Jesus said to Martha? **“Martha, Martha, you are bothered and worried about so many things, but only one thing is necessary” (Lk. 10:41, 42).** He was talking about Himself. **Life is about one thing — Christ.** He is to be your one thing. **Don’t let your life get so crowded with other things that you miss your one thing.**

Disarming Disharmony

October 6 – Philippians 4:2-9

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 278 – 87 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul turned his attention to an issue between two individual church members — Euodia and Syntyche (v.2). Evidently, these two women (pronounced “ee-oo-da” and “send-thee-hee”), who had worked alongside Paul, Clement, and others in the work of the Gospel (v.3), did not see eye to eye on some things, and it was causing disharmony between them and, perhaps, even affecting the church. He asked “the true companion” (who is unknown to us) to help them navigate through their differences.

Satan has used the divide-and-conquer strategy on many congregations. All it takes is for two people to demand their way, and the damage is done. Thus, it is crucial for members to treasure unity while acknowledging their diversity, or else the presentation of the gospel is tainted, and the effectiveness of the church is jeopardized. Though Paul had written much about unity (1:27-2:16), perhaps because of this conflict, he added a few more comments. While the next few verses (v.4-9) could be viewed as disconnected comments, let’s consider them in light of this relationship, for twice he mentioned the word “peace” (v.7, 9) which is the result when a conflict has been resolved. How could Paul’s counsel be applied in the case of disharmony?

First, Paul wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord” (v.4). **Our joy should not be attached to people. They are flawed and will let us down. We are to rejoice in the Lord. He will never let us down.** Likewise, when two people are in disharmony, it is usually because each of them is demanding his way or looking only to the negative qualities of the other. Instead, if both parties sought to rejoice in the Lord and join in His work, harmony would be achieved. **God does not expect us to discount our differences but rather to overcome them by finding common ground in Him.** As both parties set aside their agenda and rejoice in His, peace results.

Second, Paul wrote, “**Let your gentle spirit be known to all**, for the Lord is near” (v.5). While we are free to disagree with others, we are not free to be rude, hateful, or disrespectful. As we represent Christ (He is near or present in each of us) through the power of His Spirit, who is working to produce fruit in us, we will be gentle towards others, forbearing and forgiving, patient and merciful, and lenient towards their faults and failures. Our sinful flesh is too quick to go to blows, to defend our pride, to put people in their place, when God says, “A gentle answer turns away wrath” (Prov. 15:1).

Third, **dealing with people can cause a great deal of anxiety or worry.** It is easy to stew on their words, their actions, or their attitudes, and allow them to brew discontentment, anger, or bitterness in our hearts. The solution is to release control of the situation and the person to God through prayer (Phil. 4:6). Only He can change people, so why would we fret about what we can never accomplish? Let us talk to God, release the tension through prayer and exchange the overwhelming pressure for His indescribable peace (v.7). Attempting to control people and circumstances is a hopeless endeavor. Its end is only fear and frustration. Let us release control (or acknowledge that we have no control) and appeal to the King of heaven who controls all things.

Daily Reflection

The next step is the most difficult to enact. It is to dwell only on the positive aspects of a person or circumstance (v.8). Our sinful flesh feasts on gossip, rumors, and lies. We tend to focus on the negative, on getting revenge, on holding grudges and harboring resentment. It must not be this way! We must put our guns down or, if not, aim them at the enemy instead of each other. We are on the same side, fighting the same battle. Let us work together instead of destroying each other! Follow the words and wise example of Paul and let the peace of God rule in your relationships (v.9).

Giving and Receiving

October 7 – Philippians 4:10-23

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Day 279 – 86 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

One of the primary reasons for writing to the Philippians was to thank them for their generosity and thoughtfulness in sending him a financial gift. But Paul was more delighted that God was stirring their hearts to give it (v.10). The Philippians had concern for the spread of the gospel, but they also cared about the wellbeing of those chosen to do the work.

However, Paul was not counting the days before he received another gift (v.17). Though he appreciated the offering, he was not greedy for it. God had taught him to be "content in whatever circumstance" (v.11). To be content is to be satisfied with a minimum and to have a mind at peace. Most of what we have today is excessive and unnecessary. We could live without it, or could we? Why do we live to get what the Father says we cannot keep? **We must view material wealth in light of God's purposes. He blesses us so that we can bless others, not so we can have more, but so that we can do more for Him.** When we learn contentment, we are free to be generous and give to His causes.

As difficult as it sounds to be content in a world so addicted to materialism, Paul shared that he had found the secret (v.12). "He could do all things through Christ who strengthened him" (v.13). **When we seek to do the will of God, we do not need to be anxious about resources. What God calls us to do, He will finance. He will meet our needs** (v.19). Because of our faith and joy in the Lord, we can rejoice as if we have everything, even when we might have nothing.

No other church supported Paul's work like the Philippians. They had sent gifts to him more than once (v.15, 16). Thus, he told them that "they had done well to share with him in his affliction" (v.14). Notice that to give to the Lord's servants is to "share in their affliction," their work and ministry.

In any missionary venture, there are those who go and those who send. Both are important. Those who send must rely upon those who go to do the work. However, those who go must have the support of those who send, their prayers, encouragement, and financial support. Therefore, even though there are more who send and less who go, all are necessary for the work of the gospel, and all share in the success.

When the Philippians gave towards Paul's ministry, they had "done well." What does that mean? He wrote, "Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek the profit which increases to your account" (v.17). When the Lord's people give to His work, it is a blessing to Him. As a way of returning that blessing, the Lord responds in two ways. **First, "He supplies all our needs" (v.19). We can never outgive God (2 Cor. 9:6-8; Prov. 3:9, 10). Second, the Lord "increases our account" (Phil. 4:17). This account refers to "storing up treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:20). God knows what we have given to His work, and one day, when we stand before Him in heaven, He will give us our reward. Christians may not be able to take earthly wealth to heaven, but God has made a way for us to send it on ahead.**

Daily Reflection

Paul described the Philippian gift as "well-pleasing to God, an acceptable sacrifice, and a fragrant aroma" (v.18). These terms are references to Old Testament ceremonial worship. God's people were to give a sacrifice that was acceptable to Him, and when they did, it was a fragrant aroma, well-pleasing indeed. What exactly is an acceptable sacrifice today? **When it comes to giving, there is not one size that fits all. God does not require an equal amount from His people, but rather an equal sacrifice.** Is what you are giving to God's work a sacrifice for you? Is it a fragrant aroma to Him?

God stirs up our hearts to give, uses our gift for His glory, and then returns the blessing to us, the giver. Glory to His name (v.20).