

Messages on Philippians

by

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CHAPTER EIGHT

PAUL'S PERSONAL TESTIMONY

We shall now consider the book of Philippians as a book of personal testimony on the part of the saintly Apostle Paul. As you read through the book, you will scarcely be conscious of the fact that Paul is talking about himself, though he uses the pronouns "I," "me" and "mine" 113 times in this short book. He boasts of himself in every chapter, yet we do not resent it in the least. His is a godly boasting, a holy boldness, a glory that brings glory, for it leaves Christ Jesus supreme and the Apostle Paul His bondservant.

Paul's personal boasting was of three kinds: he boasted of his relationship to God, his relationship to man and his own personal condition and position.

In chapter 1:3-4, 8-9 he speaks of this thankfulness for his prayer life. He boasts of his memory and of the things that he prayed for as touching their interests.

Evidently Paul knew how to pray. He did not have a long preamble, a great prologue, or a marvelous introduction to his prayers. Neither did he instruct God on the meaning of His Word nor how He should do His work. Paul's prayers were to the point. He spoke to his Lord intelligently. He prayed confidently and tersely. He did not beat about the bush nor spar with God for an opening. He states specifically that he was praying on their behalf. We love this kind of praying. It thrills us and inspires us and urges us to pray more. It teaches us how to pray and makes us enjoy praying. Thank God for such an example!

In verses 13-14 he boasts of his attitude toward his unhappy situation. He tells us of his patience in suffering, his godly contentment under very trying circumstances and of his fine example as a prisoner. He reminds the Philippians that others have been inspired and stirred by his example so that they have been ready to preach, to teach and to suffer.

In verse 18 he boasts of his fair-minded attitude toward other preachers. He was sorry that some preachers had wrong motives, but he did not rebuke them nor fall out with them nor scold them. He boasts of his happy spirit toward his enemies. He was a fair servant of God, not jealous of the ministry, or the position of other preachers.

In verse 21 he boasts of his devotion and consecration. There is no uncertain note in his claim.

- He does not say that he is trying to live for Christ.
- He does not say that he wishes he could do it better.
- He does not say that he hopes God is pleased with what he is doing.

He was “straight out from the shoulder.” His whole life was wrapped up in Christ and he boasted of it. He did not hide it nor misrepresent it. He did not wait for someone to say it about him. What a boasting! No one denied it. Everyone knew it was so. His life confirmed his testimony. This man was God’s man and he boasted of the fact.

In chapter 2 Paul boasts quite confidently of his sacrificial effort, which is mentioned in verses 16-17. He expected the saints at Philippi to give him a happy culmination. He boasted that he had not been beating the air nor fighting a visionary battle. He had run the race successfully. He had finished the course with the laurel wreath in his hand. He expected to have some golden grain, some sheaves, some precious jewels to lay at the feet of his lovely Lord when he met Him face to face.

He boasts of his humility. If these lovely Christians should pour him out as a drink offering before God, his heart would rejoice. He was perfectly willing to be spilled on the ground if Christ would be exalted and the saints would be enriched. He gave himself for them. He was willing to part with the company of Epaphroditus for them, as he indicates in verse 28. Paul sacrificed his comfort, his wishes, his desires and most everything else that would be gain to him in order that he might bring such a blessing to them as would make them be what he wanted them to be.

In chapter 3 he again boasts of his humility. In I Corinthians 15:9 he speaks of himself as the least of the apostles. One would think that this was humility enough, because the apostles were great men, and, in the judgment of many, Paul was the greatest of them all. He, however, took quite the opposite view. He was one born out of due time. He came into the apostleship after Judas fell out. Christ did not choose him to be one of the Twelve and it may be that he felt it keenly. Probably he did. Nevertheless, he took the place of the least of the apostles, but the Holy Spirit gave him a wonderful ministry above all the others.

Paul then steps down a bit and considers himself less than the least of all saints (Ephesians 3:8). There were many saints of every kind and character at the time Paul wrote this, yet he felt in himself that he was less than any of them. That is a great step down from his previous confession. He was an apostle and he exercised the powers of an apostle, yet among God’s people, and without regard to his apostleship, he takes the place belonging to the least of all the Christians. Surely this reveals his heart of humility and lowliness.

As though that were not sufficient, he considers himself the chief of sinners (I Timothy 1:15). He felt that he was the chief of sinners because he had persecuted God’s people. He had hated Christ. He had killed the saints. He had rejected the Gospel. He had refused God’s mercy. He had sought to uphold the old law after God had set it aside. He had a humble heart. He repented fully of his religious zeal and accepted the Saviour whom he had formerly despised.

All of that which he had formerly counted as an asset he now esteems a liability and he boasts of that fact.

In verses 9-10 he boasts of his consecration. There is nothing ambiguous about his story of consecration. He tells about it gladly. He writes about it for the world to read. He has laid aside all sorts of religious forms, services and ceremonies in order that he may give his life, his heart, his efforts and his energies to promoting the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. His boasting is good. We love it, we delight in it. We thank God for such a man. He was not backward at all when it came to confessing Christ. Boldness, forwardness and enthusiasm mark his confession.

We find in verse 13 that he boasts of his inefficiency. He is not proud of it, but he certainly is trying to recover from it and find a remedy for it. He says distinctly that he has not attained to that which he would like to reach. He has come short of that which he would like to be. He does not want the saints at Philippi to think that he has reached so high a place as he hopes to obtain. He assures them that he is willing to forget the past with all of its victories, honors and successes. He boasts of his energy, his vision, his ambition to get above where he is and to be better than he is.

In verse 17 he boasts of his leadership and example. He wants them to be like him. None of us would do this. None of us would say to this great company, "I wish you were just like me. I urge all of you to follow my example." We feel our inefficiencies and, of course, we have many of them, but the apostle had very few.

It takes a brave man to say what Paul said. Paul knew that he was living as he should, loving as he should, preaching as he should, learning the Scriptures as he should, and living up to his opportunities and privileges in the sight of God. Therefore, he had a right to say, "**Be ye followers [or imitators] together of me.**"

Paul said this more than once. Certainly one who can say "**For me to live is Christ**" or Christ liveth in me has a perfect right to say "**Follow me.**" Paul boasts of his godly example and his position as God's servant.

In chapter 4 his boasting is of a different nature. In verse 9 he boasts of his purity. He had told them of the eight blessed meditations in verse 8, and now he boasts of the fact that he himself does that very thing. He boasts of his purity, goodness, godliness and righteousness and hopes that the other saints of God will follow his example and will be like him.

In verses 11-12 he boasts of his contentment and position in regard to finances. Sometimes he had plenty of money for all his needs; many times he did not. Under either condition he acted as a godly man should act and was contented. When he had plenty it was not squandered; when he had nothing he did not fuss about it nor raise a complaint. He had learned to be a contented man and he boasts of it.

He boasts of his sufficiency in verses 13 and 18. "**I can do all things**" is certainly a marvelous statement of faith and indicates the unlimited power that was at his disposal because he kept his hand in the hand of God. He was not afraid of any test.

The fear of man was unknown to him. He felt able to undertake missionary journeys, establish churches among the heathen, face the most difficult conditions and go forward when the Red Sea and the wilderness were in front and behind. He boasts that he can do anything. He boasts of the gifts that were sent to him and then of the sufficiency of his soul because of their lovingkindness.

In verse 19 he boasts of his faith and trust. He knows God and he knows what God will do. He tells us that he does. He is not ashamed to say so, for he knows it will be accomplished. What a boasting! He boasts in faith and trust. He is not guessing at it. He is not merely hoping it may be so. He very graciously and wonderfully gave all the credit to his Lord and boasted that he knew the God of his life. I trust that we have many things in our lives of which to boast — the things which God mentions to us and does for us.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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