

Enduring in Philippians

1.Introduction

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Introduction - Understanding the Context

Warm Up Question

Have a think for yourself in your free time.

- Who are you? Where do you come from?
- *Life under uncertainty*: How do you feel...
 - before/after receiving your examination results?
 - before/after entering Imperial?
 - about life under COVID-19 in general?
 - about your future?
- *Religious*:
 - Have a think about how you came across Jesus?
 - How is your relationship with God?
 - What are the challenges your church is facing?

Warm Up Question

- *Impact:*
 - What is the meaning of *impact*?
 - Who/what make a positive impact in your life? *Who in your life are you especially thankful for at the moment, and why?*
 - Who/what make a negative impact in your life?
 - Would you like to change someone's life? How about your community (especially our university)? How about the world?

Warm Up Question

- *Impact Group*:
 - What is *impact group*? To extend - what is *fellowship*? What is *church*? How is that different from just *a bunch of believers*?
 - Why christian unions set up *Impact Groups*? (to be more accurate, why does the UCCF initiate the *Impact Group* campaign?)
 - Do you want to be impacted by this impact group? If so, in what way? Do you want to make impact on this impact group?

Impact

To have an influence on something. (Cambridge Dictionary)

What do you expect from Philippians?

Have you read Philippians before? If so, what strike you the most?
What are the themes of Philippians?

Idea of Bible Study in Impact Group:

Your understanding + others understanding \implies a 'slightly more complete' picture + application + encouragement.

(Note: Impact Group should be much more than that)

Old/New Testaments

Reminder - What is the difference of old/new testaments:

- The Israelites were the chosen ones (everywhere in Genesis and Revelation). But the Israelites had failed God.
- Jesus had sacrificed for our sin - we were no longer be seperated from God. (Matthew 28:51)
- *Great Commission*: We were asked to spread the Gospel to everywhere in the world -

Bible (Matthew 28:19-20)

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

So our task as christian is to advance in and share the gospel – this is one of the main theme of Philippians!

Circumcision

However, the Israelites weren't understanding the gospel. They still believed that they were chosen by God. One thing to distinguish them from Gentiles was *circumcision*. - It was the way to justification.

Paul would address in Chapter 3 on this issue, and then bring out the ultimate goal of life is to follow God and put him to the priority!

Paul

So who is Paul? Why is he so important in early church history?

Bible (Acts 9:15-16)

But the Lord said to him (Ananias), "Go, for he (Paul) is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

The Gospel was not exclusive to Israelites anymore - the name of God was to be carried before the Gentiles. In fact, this indicates nothing about whether Gentiles > Israelites and the other way round. **We are all sinners.**

Paul was the one to spread the name of God and develop churches around the Middle East. In fact, God has urged Paul to develop churches in the Philippians in Macedonia (~ Greece).

Bible (Acts 16:9)

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

We will recall Paul's story throughout this study.

Of course, as you might notice in latter part of the book (Acts 28:30-31), Paul was imprisoned by their work at Philippians. (~ AD 61). How would the members of church at Philippians responded?

- They did sent someone to help Paul (named Epaphroditus), and that had not gone ideal...

Philippians (4:10)

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

- Apparently they were really concerned (**Note:** They didn't imply they were afraid. In fact they were more confident. (Philippians 2:14))

That form part of the reasons why Paul had written this letter - to give thanks to church at Philippi and strengthen the faith of believers.

Carson's Main challenges of Christians

It is very important to understand the challenges the Philippians church was facing right now, and the relate those to our daily life. DA Carson (Carson, 1995) had pointed out three problems Christians were facing in the 1995 *Word Alive* conference:

- Secularisation (Maginalisation of religion.)
- Self-indulgence.
- Philosophical Pluralism - no absolute truth.

Carson's Main challenges of Christians I - Secularisation

A state where there is a formal separation between religion and state is considered secular.

But *secular* means more than that. It means marginalising religion from your life. Do you think the Philippians church was encountering this problem?

In fact, do you/your church encounter the same problem? e.g. When you encounter challenges, would you find God for help or find others instead?

Carson's Main challenges of Christians II - Self Indulgence

Which is doing what one want (often sinning). Paul has heavily criticised in Romans 1:18-32 on that:

Bible (Romans 1:21)

For although they (the sinners, or us) knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened...

So clearly this is not a new problem. Have you done anything you want but others (especially God) don't want? How would that impact church negatively?

Carson's Main challenges of Christians III - Pluralism

There were countless of God/idol in Roman times. They believed no God was above other. Nowadays, some people believe there aren't any truth above other statements – right or wrong is 'relative'...

- Do you believe God's word is absolute truth?
- Carson has pointed out a contradiction to such thought – where is the contradiction?
- If someone say 'you have your own God, I have mine, let's not offend one another', how would you respond?

Humbleness

There are some more issues the Philippians church had faced - one of them is disagreement in church.

Philippians (4:2)

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

As noted by Matt Waldock, it is hard enough to maintain harmony in a small (impact group), so it would be even more challenging to maintain harmony in a big church. And we could see how arguments ruin church.

Were there any arguments in your church?

At the very end, what had brought us together in church/impact group? It was Jesus.

Bible (Matthew 16:17-18)

And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

We were united by the same 'life' (1 John 5:12). Therefore we should 'bear his cross to follow him.' In fact, Paul had wrote a hymn (2:6-11) outlining the humility of Jesus. It is deep - if you don't know well about Jesus' story, you should go to the curious group and ask.

Summary

Here is something that you should look for: (not all of them, apparently)

- How to deal with challenges/cultures in communities, especially in university?
- How would we grow to become more like Jesus?
- How should we bring church to unity?

The punch line is to **put God and Gospel to priority**. This is what Paul would demonstrate on his letter.

Week 1 - God centered life and fellowship

v1-2: Introduction

Philippians (1:1-2)

Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- (v1) Note that Timothy has been included. We will talk about Timothy more when we reach the end of Chapter 2.
- (v2) Also note the greetings: how important are grace and peace from God? How is the greeting similar/different to other Paul's letter. We will not cover that in detail, though.

v3-8: Paul's Thanksgiving

Philippians (1:3-5)

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

(v3) is ambiguous - in some versions Paul was joyful as he remembered the Philippians, in other versions Paul was joyful as he believed the Philippians remembered him. (Actually they did!) We will not go through that in detail, but we could see the strong bond between Paul and the Philippians.

What kind of partnership?

That is what 'partnership' meant in v5. In fact, DA Carson pointed out that 'fellowship' \iff 'partnership'. The end of Chapter 2 / start of chapter 4 are good illustration to such bonding.

What is the partnership for? We have pointed out as we introduce Philippians - Jesus and the **Gospel** (v5). That is a *vision* we should bear in mind.

Reflection: What might it practically look like for some of your relationships with other Christians to be characterised by 'partnership in the gospel' at university / church this term? (Think about church / local community ... A benchmark is to see how your vision closely related to the gospel itself.)

The Hope from the Trustworthy One

Philippians (1:6)

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ...

- How does a disciple grow? (Think about the 12 disciples!) Did they grow rapidly, or otherwise? Those examples suggested that the growths were gradual and we couldn't see immediate effect. Moreover one could not grow in an unbalanced rate.
- Therefore, v6 serves as an reassurance that we will grow in Christ and bear fruit. (see other Paul's letter for detail).

Now think of how you feel about your growth as a christian? Is it quick, slow or not manageable?

The Hope from the Trustworthy One

Philippians (1:8)

For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

- What had Paul yearned for in v8? Surely the disciples had been impacted by Christ Jesus (in what way?) as the gospel spread, but why did Paul ask once again?

That is the principle behind why we need to prioritise God to the very first.

v9-11: Three Items

Philippians (1:9-11)

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.

Paul had therefore prayed for three thing (aspects of growth):

- Love may *abound* more and more...
- in knowledge and depth of insight,...
- ... to discern what is best \implies pure and blameless until the day of Christ.

As commented by DA Carson, the ultimate purpose of these petitions is to bring glory to the God who redeemed them.

Love

Note that there wasn't a specific object to love. Love toward God and each other are both essential. Recall the Great Commandment:

Bible (Mark 12:30-31)

*...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength...
(Deuteronomy 6:4-5) You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
(Leviticus 19:18) There is no other commandment greater than these.*

What were the priorities of the commandments: is the first commandment more important than the second one? Probably not! In fact, Jesus had reiterated the importance of the second commandments (also called the '*Great Commandments*')

Bible (John 13:34)

Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

The source of love is Jesus.

Also recall the importance of love as Paul outlined in 1 Corinthian:

Bible (1 Corinthian 13:1,13)

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, ... If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing... so now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

So serving without love makes no *impact*. In fact, this had pointed us the the arguments in Chapter 2/4 – the members of church debated without love and thus reducing the significance of their service! Therefore love (from God) is essential to making positive impacts in other's life. *How would you demonstrate that love in your local communities, including university and church?*

Knowledge and Insight

- Clearly Paul was not praying love from 'feeling' or 'sentimental gush' (see the Message version)! Love comes from something more concrete.
- What is *knowledge*? What is *insight from God*? This is clearly knowledge of God (especially his character), and insights to live our life in God's way.
- It is very important to endure in God's word. Have you done so (especially studying/meditating in Bible)? Through morning devotion, bible study and/or meditation ... If you, are you picking up a routine?
- Are we treating those knowledge as 'idol'? Having knowledge of bible doesn't imply growing in that knowledge. It requires *repentance* and *humbleness*.

Discerning what is best.

What is the *best* for Christianity?

- The Amplified Bible interpreted as *recognise and treasure what is excellent [identifying the best, and distinguishing moral differences]*.
- We are going beyond recognition / identification. We are treating them as *treasure*. We are also going beyond *good* and towards the *best*.
- In fact, we have attempted to identify good / bad by ourselves in Genesis 3 by eating the fruits from the *Tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, but failed. (This is an interesting connection!)
- How can we identify and treasure the *best*, then? (See last slide).

Pure and Blameless

- Is there a benchmark for 'what is the best'? ESV suggested
 - Pure and Blameless
 - Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ (Message: bountiful in fruits from the soul),
 - to the glory and praise of God. (Message: getting everyone involved in the glory and praise of God.)

Pure and Blameless

- The Message has emphasised that our life should be 'a life Jesus will be proud of'. As a warning, **it is obvious we don't need to do anything to be saved and make God happy**, yet we could relate to Jesus' stunning sermon in the mountain:

Bible (Matthew 5:13-14)

You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world...

The reason of being the *salt* and *light* were to demonstrate the glory of God and facilitate the advancement of Gospel, provided we are role models as suggested by 1 Timothy Ch. 3. We will discuss this more in Chapter 2.

- This is the best for our local community and would certainly make positive impact! Think about how we confront with conflicting moral values in the societies (e.g. abortion, same-sex marriage)? How can we cope with it?

Final Question

- Do you believe God care about you in every aspects?
- Remember the punch lines is to '**put God to the priority.**'
Are there anything which stop you from doing so?

Thank you! See you next week!