

The
New
Testament
in a Year

Week 26

Ephesians 6; Philippians 1-4

This week's reflections
were written by 2 people.

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Jacob's wrote Monday's reflection on
Ephesians 6.

Steve Huntley wrote the four
reflections on Philippians.
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Monday

Ephesians 6

Living in Jesus' love for us redefines all our relationships: in the church, with the world we live in, our marriages, our parenting, and our work. Just as Paul's words about marriage seem antiquated, so does his advice to parents and slave owners. For me, it helps to know that Paul is speaking into existing structures and calling people to a much higher, grace-filled standard. That's what grace does.

Were Paul to write to us today, what higher, more grace-filled ways might he call us to? What would loving our children, our spouses, our co-workers more like Christ look like? How do we serve others? How do we treat those who serve us?

Stand. After responding to God's grace (sit, walk), Paul reminds us there are times we have stand our ground. It may feel like a battle but it's worth fighting and Jesus' grace and love equips us like armour. Each piece is something Christ gives us to help us stand.

Tuesday

Philippians 1

Paul begins this letter according to the custom of his day using the threefold salutation: signature, address, and greeting. The tone of this salutation is warm and endearing. The Philippians have a special place in Paul's heart.

Paul experienced persecution at Philippi. He endured beatings at the hands of the Romans and anti-Semites. (1:30) (Thess. 2:2) The good citizens of Philippi, (a coastal city on the western shore of Greece), saw itself as a mini Rome, official, patriotic, suspicious of any persons or movements not aligned and loyal to Caesar.

Surprisingly, Paul speaks of suffering for Christ as "grace", and enjoins the Philippians to join in this ministry. This grace is found in living and dying for Jesus Christ, something that Paul believes is not something to be concerned for but finds cause for joy in both.

How does common suffering bond people together? Have you experienced persecution for your faith, or experienced yourself as a Christian island in a hostile sea? What response do you want to honour in the face of opposition?

Wednesday

Philippians 2

Philippians 2, stands as one of the most important chapters of all Paul's writing. I refer to the Christ Hymn, (6-11) , for according to scholars these words were used as hymnody in early Christian worship. Here is the Gospel in all its simplicity, mystery and truth.

St. Augustine said: the cross is the devil's mousetrap, baited with Jesus' disreputable death. "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God. " (1 Cor. 1:18) Paul continues the chapter by speaking of being shining star. If we allow Christ's death to be our only light, then we are in the light indeed.

Paul tells us next to work out our salvation in fear and trembling. Seems at first paradoxical. Our faith is to save us from fear and trembling. Make us bold. Not frighten. Do these words, however, resonate with your faith experience? Many people believe that all we need do is say we believe and that's it! End of story. The greater truth is, that is only the beginning. Our faith deepens and is of greater worth when tested and tried by life's fires. If you experience both fear and trembling in your walk with Christ, know that it is for your goodness.

Thursday

Philippians 3

Again, this rich letter of Paul's pours forth ever more grandeur. Paul warns against the "mutilators" of the faith. At issue is the Jewish rite of circumcision. If this particular "work" is made obligatory for faith, then where do you stop? He saw the law which led to sin being raised up, a sure obstacle for a righteousness that comes through faith. Paul's zealotness for the gospel would not allow him to stand aside for those who put blocks in front of people.

Paul tells not to put confidence in the flesh. He offers his resume as one who could, but counts it all loss except for knowing Christ Jesus. God has no grandchildren. Our heritage, no matter how impressive, is "rubbish" compared to knowing the "surpassing greatness of Jesus Christ as Lord."

Finally, Paul urges them to press forward to take hold "of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." (ie. the resurrection of the dead. Vs 11) Notice Paul continues his emphasis on grace. It is Christ that has taken hold of him. God is the initiator in the human/divine relationship. It is God who first loved us and acted to save us.

What difference does it make in our lives to believe that it is God who acts first?

Friday

Philippians 4

This is a letter, and is responding to the church in Philippi, in part, to address a particular concern.

There has been some conflict in the church. (surprised?) Paul 's love for the people involved is evident. (he pleads)

Disagreement and bickering are anathema to the gospel. If life in the church is no different than life outside than what is the use?

Caution: While what I said is, I believe, true, let us not trap ourselves into believing that we are somehow above conflict because we are Christian! This leads to dishonesty and a culture of niceness, never addressing issues which can ferment for years. Conflict resolved can strengthen the church like nothing else.

Notice that Paul doesn't offer a "how to" to avoid conflict but enjoins them to turn to God. (Rejoice in the Lord always. Vs 4) In the face of the divine our squabbings can seem pretty small.

How can you be a peacemaker in your church? Who are the peacemakers?