

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (05).

July 22, 2007.

Review.

Please turn to *Phil.1:1-6*. (**read**). When Paul went to Philippi to preach, that was clearly God's will and plan. *Acts 16* tells us that Paul went there to preach because of a vision he received from the Lord. A church was established in Lydia's home. Paul's epistle makes it very clear that the Philippian church brought great joy to Paul's heart. This was the only church that faithfully supported Paul in the ministry from its very inception. As always, I shall begin by reviewing our last study.

We began our study with an exposition of the key words in *vs.6*. These words are : **confident; began; perfect; work; and the day of Christ**. Then we looked at several points. **Firstly**, we saw that Paul's confidence expressed in *vs.6* is not rooted in himself or in the Philippians but in God who is faithful. We looked briefly at two passages that taught the same truth concerning God's faithfulness. They are *1Thess.5:23-24* and *1Cor.7b-9*. Indeed, we can join with the prophet in *Jer.3:23* and declare concerning our God, "Great is Your faithfulness."

Secondly, we saw Paul's confidence is rooted in the God who is able to do what He has promised to do. We studied *Eph.3:20* in support of this point. This verse says that God "is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we can ask or think." **Thirdly**, we saw that Paul's confidence is rooted in the God who cannot be thwarted in what He does. We looked at various verses that support this truth. A key verse here is *Isa.46:10* where God said, "My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure."

By way of application, we looked at the contradictory thinking and folly of those who will tell you in one breath that you must not limit God and in the next breath deny that

God is able to save and keep and preserve and bring you safely to glory. Those who reject God's sovereign preserving grace are guilty of making man into a god and making the true and living God into an idol.

This brings us to the **fourth** point : Paul's confidence is rooted in the God who began the work of salvation that was being done in the Philippians. Your salvation is a work of God from beginning to end. *Phil.1:6* has nothing to say about human involvement in what God is doing. The clear emphasis is on God who began the work of salvation in the Philippians. We saw this work was no accident. This work was God's plan.

To remind you, when the verb "**began**" is used of God, it speaks of something that is both decisive and deliberate. In the verb "**began**", God is not acting impulsively. God is not carrying out experiments and hoping for the best results. God is working according to a plan, an eternal plan. And He cannot be thwarted in carrying out that plan. Paul said in *Eph.1:5-6* that God "predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, **according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace**, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." The point is this, Brethren : the God who cannot be thwarted has willed the salvation of His elect people. Your assurance is in being able to say : God has willed my salvation.

We saw that the conversion of Lydia was no incidental detail. The conversion of Lydia was in keeping with God's wise and strategic outworking of His eternal purposes in His Son. In God's plan, Lydia's conversion was key to the establishing and building up of the church in Philippi, a church that would impact other areas with the gospel through its support of the apostle Paul. I made it clear that your conversion to Christ is no incidental detail. God works according to a plan. God does not act impulsively. God does not do anything haphazardly. God does not do anything imperfectly. **Sinclair Ferguson** noted that when God is at work, He does nothing that is inauspicious or insignificant. This includes your conversion to Christ. It is your responsibility to discover and know God's plan for your life and to work along with God in carrying out His plan for your life.

I want to warn all of us and especially the young, it is both foolish and dangerous to resist God's will and plan for your life. The question is asked in **Rom.9:19** : who can resist God's will? And the answer is : no one. King Nebuchadnezzar confessed that no one can ward off God's hand, that is, no one can resist God's will. (**Dan.4:35**). King Jehoshaphat of Judah confessed to God in prayer, "Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You", that is, no one can resist God's will. (**2Chron.20:6**).

It is your responsibility to discover and know God's plan for your life and to work along with God in carrying out His plan for your life. I do not know what is God's plan for you. I could only pray for you and set options before you. God's plan and will for you is not primarily for your benefit. Certainly there will be benefits for you. But the primary benefits are for God and to the praise of the glory of His name. Lydia benefited from what God did for her. But then she discovered that in all that God had done and was continuing to do for her, the primary benefits were for the glory of God in the spread of the gospel. And without hesitation she embraced God's will and plan for her. The result is that she said to Paul and his fellow missionaries, "come into my house and stay". (**Acts 16:15**). And she wouldn't take "no" for an answer. I speak to you from personal experience : it is foolish and dangerous to even try to resist God's will and plan for your life. We come now to continue our study of **Phil.1:6**.

He Who Began (continued).

We ended our last study with the conversion of Lydia and that is where I want to begin. **Acts 16:14** says "the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." Lydia was from the city of Thyatira. God moved her to Philippi. In her mind she was making a strategic business move when she moved to Philippi. Philippi was populated by retired Roman soldiers who had financial means. Romans loved to dress in purple clothing as a symbol of their financial and political status. The purple dye needed to produce purple fabrics was produced in Thyatira. Purple dye was very expensive.

What Lydia did not know was that God had a greater and more glorious plan for her when He moved her to Philippi.

If God did not bring your grandparents or great grandparents to this country through the slave trade or indentureship, where would you be today? Regardless of how and why they came here, your forbears coming to this country was God's plan for your salvation in Christ. It is one thing to be caught up in the horrors of slavery and indentureship, it is another thing to see beyond those horrors and see the glorious hand of God working out His eternal plan for your salvation in Christ.

You young people have gone through, are going through or will go through the phase of thinking that the worst thing that could have happened to you is to be born to Christian parents and be raised in a Christian home. Life would have been much better if you were not born to Christian parents. What about if God had caused you to be born to a father who was a drunk and to a mother who was a drug addict? What if you were born in some mountain village in China where Buddha is god? What if you were born on the banks of the divine Ganges river, described as the filthiest river in the world, where your sunset view was the dead bodies of animals and humans, where you must bathe every morning as an act of worship? What if you were born in a family of suicide bombers? What if you were born in a village where you could have ended up being dinner for some chief?

The only reason you can live in the midst of God's blessings, enjoy them and yet hate them is because you are blind to the glorious hand of God working His plan in your life. You are blind to the fact that God in His grace and mercy towards you has placed you in the midst of the gospel and the benefits that accompany the gospel. You are blind to the fact that God has given to you a life of hope in the midst of multiplied millions of children and young people living in this world without hope, in total despair and without the gospel and its benefits. You have been given hope. Are you trampling upon this hope?

Two years ago I found some documents on my father's parents that gave me the opportunity to do a search for my relatives in India. I found them. But what I saw greatly dismayed me. Two things stood out very clearly from the pictures I saw : extreme physical poverty and extreme spiritual poverty. Symbols of their deep spiritual darkness were painted on their foreheads. And the looks on their faces were those of futility and despair. And I have become more and more grateful to God that He brought my grandparents to Trinidad.

Jesus said in *Matt.7:6*, "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine (pigs), or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces." Young ones, where do you fit in here? Are you behaving like a dog or a swine? Or are you grateful to God for the pearls He has set before you and the holy things He has placed you in the midst of? Ingratitude is a serious sin. *2Tim.3:2* warns that in the last days people will be ungrateful and unholy. *Rom.1:21* shows us that those who are ungrateful for the pearls of the revealed truths God has brought to them will become idolaters. Their foolish hearts will be darkened and God will give them over to the folly and futility in their hearts.

The Lord moved Lydia to Philippi and then He redirected Paul to Philippi. Paul began preaching the gospel and the Lord opened Lydia's heart to respond to the gospel. The Lord is in charge here, moving, directing and working out His plan to perfection. I want you to note the loving individual attention and care the Lord gave to Lydia in saving her. The Lord stopped and redirected a whole missionary team to Philippi in order to save her. The Lord made sure she was at the river when Paul would go there to preach. Lydia was chosen in eternity but she did not get lost in God's files. God kept her before His eyes. Think of this for a moment – the God who has the heavens and the earth to attend to, the God who has a lot more important people in this world He can deal with, this God condescended to single out and deal graciously and lovingly with a little insignificant Thyatiran lady living in Philippi.

Have you ever stopped to consider why the Lord condescended to single you out for His grace, love and salvation? Have you ever stopped to consider the kind of details the Lord lovingly worked out in order to save you? Have you ever consider how many life-threatening things the Lord protected you from in order to bring you safely into the kingdom of His Beloved Son? Nothing in that whole process happened by accident or by coincidence. God was at work, lovingly and perfectly working out His plan to bring you to Christ. You didn't seek the Lord. The Lord sought you. You didn't find the Lord. The Lord found you and brought you into His fold.

How many times did you hear the gospel before you believed? Why didn't you go on rejecting the gospel? You didn't go on rejecting the gospel because on that particular day the Lord opened your heart to respond positively. Like Lydia, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. You may have been a deeply religious person like Lydia. You may have been a good person by comparative standards. You may have been a not so good person. You may have been a religious pagan and idolater. You may have been an immoral person. Regardless of your condition, you were a sinner and spiritual dead and without the ability to respond to the gospel. Then the Lord intervened and opened your heart to respond as you heard the gospel.

I am saying it over and over because I want the truth to grip your soul. You are no incidental detail in God's plan. Dispensationalists say that the Jews rejected their Messiah and that the church is God's contingency plan. You are not God's contingency plan. You are not God's second choice. God chose you in Christ from eternity and in the fullness of time God put His plan concerning you in motion. There are no secrets about you. The psalmist confessed that God's eyes have been upon him from the moment he was conceived. (*Psa.139:15-16*). Paul said, "God ... set me apart even from my mother's womb." (*Gal.1:15*). God did not set Paul apart as a rampaging persecutor on the road to Damascus. From the day he was conceived he was set part. The verb Paul used also means "*to mark off with a boundary.*" From the day he was conceived he was marked off and fenced in. He tried hard to break out with his fierce and violent

hatred of Christ and the church. But he couldn't because God had marked him off and fenced him in.

God knew the very moment you were conceived in the womb because God was involved in making sure you were conceived. *Psa.139:13-16* says when you were an unshaped glob of fused sperm and egg God's eyes were upon you. These verses clearly teach that your growth in the womb was not merely biological processes taking over. God was at work, putting you together in the womb. The psalmist pictured God as the Divine weaver. From your physical birth to your rebirth in Christ, God was at work and, with loving and gracious care, He was making it all happen.

The psalmist, overwhelmed by God's dealings with him, declared in *Psa.139:17*, "How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!" You may be insignificant in this world but you are precious in God's sight. *1Pet.2:9* describes the Christian as "God's own possession". This is a quote from *Exod.19:5* where Israel was described as God's "own possession". **The Hebrew Word Study Dictionary** says the Hebrew word used here gives us one of the most memorable depictions of the Lord's relationship to His people. The Hebrew word means "unique possession or special treasure." This word was used to describe the "treasure" of gold and silver David gave with delight to the house of God. (*1Chron.29:3*). You may be of no value to this world. You may be seen by persecutors as sheep to be slaughtered. (*Rom.8:36*). But to God, you are His own possession. You are His special precious treasure. The world may not have any eyes for you, but God's eyes are constantly upon you. (*Psa.34:15*).

We come now to our **fifth point** : **Paul is confident that the God who began this good work of salvation in the Philippians** "will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." *Firstly*, I want to emphasize that this work of salvation is a "good work". When God created the world, we are told at the end of each day's creation work that what God did was good. And at the end of the sixth day, when God's creation work was finished, we are told that "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good."

(*Gen.1:31*). The good work of creation God began, He finished and it was very good. Creation was all God's doing. Creation did not help God or co-operate with God. This was God's work and God alone was doing it because He alone had the wisdom and the power to do it.

According to *Gal.6:15* and *2Cor.5:17* God's work of salvation in you is a "new creation" work. This new creation salvation work is also described as a "good work". But when God is finished with this new creation salvation work, it will be better than "very good". *Rom.8:30* says it will be glorious. *Eph.5:27* says Christ will "present to Himself the church in all her glory." In *Rev.21* the church is the new Jerusalem and its glory is indescribable. (*vss.2, 9-10*).

Secondly, let me refresh your mind. The verb "perfect" has a three-fold picture. The picture is : (1) to be perfecting; (2) to carry on this perfection towards completion; (3) to finally complete the perfecting. The work of salvation God is doing in you is a good work that He has promised to complete. Now I want you to note this : **God has promised to perfectly complete the good work of salvation He has begun in you.** God has *not* promised to complete any work of salvation that you have begun in yourself. God has not promised to complete any work of salvation some pastor, or friend, or parent has begun in you. In *Matt.15:13* Jesus said, "Every plant which My Father did not plant shall be uprooted."

This is why Paul exhorted the Corinthians, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves." And don't fail the test! (*2Cor.13:5*). Peter exhorted, "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you." (*2Pet.1:10*). Was it the Lord who called you and saved you or was it some preacher who called you via his altar call and then pronounce you as saved? In the early decades of my life, how many I have seen who were pronounced as saved by evangelistic preachers! But then they never followed the Lord. Some followed for a short time. Some followed for a longer time. But then they fell away. We were told they were now backsliders and worldly and carnal. The truth is they were never saved. Men

pronounced them as saved. But God did not pronounce them as saved because He did not begin His good work in them.

Do you examine yourself? You say, *"I do not need to. I know I am saved."* God has said to you via two commands that you must examine yourself. The verb **"test"** calls upon you to discover what kind of person you are. You are being called upon to discover the spiritual truth about yourself. Are you religious or are you saved? Are you christianized or are you truly Christian? The verb **"examine"** calls upon you to see whether you are approved by God. To be approved is to be accepted and welcomed. To be disapproved is to be rejected and cast out. Paul used the same verb in *2Tim.2:15* when he said, **"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God."**

Peter's verb **"be diligent"** stresses the urgency of the exhortation he has set before you. The verb calls for the exertion of diligent effort in examining yourself and to do so with urgency. Why? You cannot afford to be wrong about the eternal welfare of your soul. To be wrong is to be eternally wrong. Even though you may be certain that you are saved, it is good to examine yourself and see the evidences of the workings of God in your life and encourage your heart before God. Examination is good because it helps you to see if you are making spiritual progress or if you are falling back.

When God saved you, His good work of grace in you was only begun. The goal of that good work is glorification. (*Rom.8:30*). The process to glorification is God perfecting you, God putting the finishing touches on you. For some people, the perfecting process is finished quickly. For others, God's perfecting work in you may last a lifetime. Note now the emphasis in God's new creation work : God began. God perfects. God completes. It does not depend on you. You do not help God in any form or fashion. This is God's work from beginning to end. God alone has the wisdom and the power to do it. Paul is confident because His dependence is upon God – the God who promised. The God who is faithful. The God who cannot be thwarted.

Here, Brethren, is **grand encouragement for your soul**. Here is where you can lay down any fears you had about your soul's salvation and walk away from them. Salvation is for you. But salvation is not about you. It is about God and the glory of God displayed in you in saving you and bringing you to final glorification. Paul expressed this truth as follows in *Eph.2:7*, "so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." The guarantee in *Phil.1:6* is that God does not fail. God will be glorified. And because God will be glorified, the Christian will also be glorified.

Here, Brethren, is **grand assurance for your soul**. This assurance guarantees the final outcome of your salvation in the day of Christ. But very importantly, it also guarantees every experience of every day of your life. The daily guarantee is that in all that you are experiencing, God is putting His perfecting touches on you with a view to completion in the day of Christ. So whether it be good news or bad news; blessings or difficulties; gain or loss; unexpected happiness or unexpected grief; times of plenty or times of little; they all have to do with this specific purpose in view : God is putting His perfecting touches on you with a view to completion in the day of Christ.

And concerning all such situations and experiences, the eye of faith affirms : I need this because God is using it to perfect me for the day of Christ. Without this I will not be ready for the day of Christ. Without this I will not grow into Christ-likeness and live for the glory of God. This is no theory. This is real. This is not an easy truth but it's real. Without exception, God is using every event in your life, every situation, every experience to perfect you for the day of Christ. And so, in everything give thanks. (*1Thess.5:18*). Why? Because I need it. Because it is part of God's perfecting process in me.

I had to learn this lesson and it is a lesson I have never forgotten. After Dennis' funeral I began to sink into a dark hole. Day by day I was sinking deeper and deeper. In the midst of that I had to keep pastoring this church and keep fulfilling all my responsibilities. Two months later I was preaching from this very text in Australia and making this very point

when the truth of it gripped me right in the pulpit. I froze for what seemed like an eternity and then, before the entire church, I publicly confessed my submission to the truth I was preaching. And the light of God broke through and brought me out of the darkness I had sunk into. The days that followed were no easy walk in the park. The pains and soul distress didn't suddenly disappear. I didn't understand and I still do not understand how Dennis' death was for my good. What changed was that I was no longer walking in darkness. What changed was that I came to understand that in God's dealings with him *Phil.1:6* was fulfilled. God's perfecting work in him was completed and so God took him home.

But what about the Philippians? This was no easy truth for them. They had come under the heavy hand of persecution and the price was great for them. Remember that Philippi was the home of retired Roman soldiers. Philippi was generally a middle income to wealthy society. The Philippian jailer would have been a middle income man. When Paul wrote in *Phil.4:22*, "All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household", what did Paul mean? "**Caesar's household**" was the code name for Caesar's praetorian guard, Caesar's greatly feared elite body of soldiers. Christians in Philippi would have had sons who were in the praetorian guard. What this tells us is that there were retired Roman soldiers in the membership of the Philippian church.

Let us note now what had happened to these Christians. Please turn to *2Cor.8:1-5*. (**read**). Note firstly, they had come under "a great ordeal of affliction." The word "**ordeal**" is the same word "**examine**" we met in *2Cor.13:5*. They had come under a great approval test. This test was "**affliction**", *thlipsis*, the pressure that crushes. Did their faith get crushed? No! The crushing pressure of persecution produced an abundance of joy. Now turn to *Matt.13:20-21*. (**read**). Note carefully the contrast here. These received the word with joy. But when affliction, the pressure that crushes, and persecution arose, they lost their joy and they fell away.

Part of the affliction the Philippians were experiencing was "deep poverty". Because of their faith in Christ they were reduced from a fairly good life with means to poverty.

This was no mere poverty. This was not hand-to-mouth living. This was deep poverty, rock-bottom poverty. This was being reduced to life below the starvation line. Paul was saying to them God has determined that you need this and God is using this to perfect you and make you glorious. In this poverty their joy turned into abundant joy. In this poverty and abundant joy their generosity never died. In their poverty their generosity became sacrificial. Firstly, they gave according to their ability. And then they gave beyond their ability. They gave what they could give. And then they gave what they couldn't afford to give. And they became before God a fragrant aroma and an acceptable sacrifice. (*Phil.4:18*).

Now turn to *Phil.1:27-30*. (**read**). The persecution had reached such a level, the Philippian believers were becoming alarmed. The verb **“alarmed”** described corralled horses that are being spooked by a deadly snake and they are ready to bolt from their corral. The Philippians had become alarmed by the persecution they were experiencing and were ready to bolt. They were ready to leave Philippi and find a safer place to live.

Paul's response was, **“don't leave!”**. Firstly, **“stand firm”**. Dig in like a good soldier and hold your ground. The verb Paul used pictures a soldier under attack with no hope of victory but refusing to budge even one inch from his post. Secondly, **“strive together”**. Form your battle line, lock arms with one another and march forward. Don't run, you need this. God is using this to perfect you and glorify you.

Are you confident that the God who is wise, faithful, loving and caring, knows what He is doing in your life? Like Joseph, you may not understand all that God is doing in your life. But do you trust Him? And are you willing to wait until He shows you what He was doing in your life, how He was perfecting you, how He was preparing you for glory? The psalmist says, **“Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning.”** (*Psa.30:5*).

As you look back in your life you will see things and you would not understand how they were for your good. I am sure the Philippians never knew that their conduct and example

after they were reduced to abject poverty would be recorded in God's word as an ongoing lesson for His people until Christ comes. But there is a day coming when all things will be made clear and you will be able to confess with Joseph, "God meant it for good." (*Gen.50:20*).

In closing, if you are not a Christian, what is God's will for you? Are you elect? I do not know. Are you predestined to adoption as the children of God? I do not know. But I do know this : God's revealed will for you is that you repent of your sins. *Acts 17:30* says, "God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent." God's command, God's order is that you must repent. The verb "**declare**" also means "**to command; to order.**" God's revealed will for you is that you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ to save you. *Acts 16:31* says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." The verb "**believe**" is a command that calls upon you to believe and to do so with utmost urgency. You are being called upon to treat this matter of belief in the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation as a matter of utmost urgency.

I close with these words. On Friday I received an e-mail from Pastor Bruce Ray. He witnessed to a man who attended their special service last Lord's Day. The man rejected the gospel. He went home and worked on a Bible study entitled, "**How good is good enough**" and mailed it to the man. On Friday morning he got word that the man died on Thursday night. The eternal welfare of your soul is a matter of utmost urgency. The only time you have to deal with the eternal welfare of your soul is now. I plead with you – deal with your soul's eternal welfare now.