

Lesson 21

Spiritual Relationships

Philippians 4:20-23

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. As Paul draws to the end of his letter to the Philippians, he does not end it abruptly but his thoughts run back over the letter. His final remarks were added to impress his most important themes upon his readers. These themes are all about spiritual relationships. Paul concludes this epistle with the words: "To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." These last verses contain two doxologies interspersed with a few brief words of greeting. Behind these words we see the importance of spiritual relationships with God, men and Christ.
- B. In this life we value human relationships, for without them life would have very little meaning. The highest relationship: on a human level are those of husband and wife, parents to children, and, in a few cases, a good friend.
- C. Yet there are relationships more real and more valuable than that on a human level. The most important relationships in the world are spiritual which come through being born into God's family through faith in Jesus Christ. NOTE. This is why it is so wonderful to have both husband and wife or parents and children know the Lord Jesus Christ, for they have the best of two worlds – strong physical ties and beyond that deep spiritual ties.
- D. Spiritual relationships supercede all physical relationships, and this is why a Christian is closer to other Christians than perhaps he is to an unsaved spouse or an unsaved father or mother. There simply is no substitute for spiritual relationships.
- E. In these closing verses, we get some insight as to how the Apostle Paul could be a scholar of the Bible, have a heart for God and also really love men. What was his secret? Spiritual relationships!

II. RELATIONSHIP TO GOD THE FATHER 4:20

A. ***To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever.*** – Paul concludes his letter with his first doxology, exalting, magnifying and glorifying God for all things. Paul was praising God and giving Him the glory due His name for the privilege of being a Christian and suffering for Christ, for at that very moment he was in a Roman prison and chained to a guard 24 hours a day. Paul was praising God for the Philippians, for the gift they sent him and for his own circumstances. Paul was fulfilling the very purpose of God – to bring glory to God whatever the circumstances. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Surely Paul did not like being in jail, but he knew there was a purpose for it in God's plan for his life. NOTE. Why could Paul give God the glory for all things? Because he had a spiritual relationship with God the Father. He had a biblical concept of God and a personal fellowship with Him.

1. Paul Understood God's Sovereignty. Paul understood in his experience the truth that God is sovereign over all things, and that his puny, human will was insignificant when compared to God's will. Paul's concept of God came from the Old Testament scriptures (***1 Chron. 29:11-12: Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. 2 Chron. 20:6: O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you.***). Paul knew God had control of all nations, even the Roman emperor (***Isa. 40:15, 17, 22-23: Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust. Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. He is enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.***). He realized God does as He pleases with men, even Paul (***Psa. 115:3: Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.***). NOTE. God is sovereign. His will supreme. He is under no law and is a law to Himself, so that whatever God does is right. It is a serious matter to call God's sovereignty into question. NOTE. Before God, presidents and popes, kings and emperors, dictators and councils are less than grasshoppers. Paul realized that if God controlled nations then surely God controlled his circumstances. And for sure, fellow Christian, the God who controls the nations also controls your circumstances. This is true whether you believe it or not, but when you believe it, it gives a great peace and comfort to the ups and downs of life.

2. Paul Understood God's Compassion. Paul also came to know God as a personal God, one of love, compassion and mercy. God is a loving Father. He also received this concept from the Old Testament scripture (***Neh. 9:17, 31: But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love....But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them for you are a gracious and merciful God. Psa. 103:8: The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.***).

The God who had control of Paul's circumstances also cared for him in a very special, personal way.

3. Paul Understood God's Character. God in His character is both sovereign and love. These two attributes of God must be kept in balance or we will become unbalanced as Christians. NOTE. One of the reasons Christians do not have the same attitude towards circumstances, as did Paul, is that their God is too small. Men think God is like they are but it is not so (***Psa. 50:21: You thought I was altogether like you.***). There is none like God who is absolute sovereignty and absolute love (***Exo. 15:11; Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?***). Our responsibility as Christians is to get to know the God of the Bible and enter into fellowship with Him (***Jer. 9:23-24: Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the LORD.***). Martin Luther once said to the humanist Erasmus, "You thoughts of God are too human."

A. W. Pink says it better than I can: "The 'god' of this twentieth century no more resembles the Supreme Sovereign of Holy Writ than does the dim flickering of a candle the glory of the midday sun. The 'god' who is now talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday School, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in most of the so-called Bible Conferences is the figment of human imagination, an invention of maudlin sentimentality. The heathen outside of the pale of Christendom form 'gods' out of wood and stone, while the millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a 'god' out of their own carnal mind. In reality, they are but atheists, for there is no other possible alternative between an absolutely supreme God, and no God at all. A 'god' whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, whose purpose is checkmated, possesses no title to Deity, and so far from being a fit object of worship, merits naught but contempt." [*Attributes of God*]

- B. ***Amen***. – This means "I affirm" or "I believe." This response was not an intellectual concept or a superficial confession from the lips. It was a spontaneous utterance of a heart redeemed by grace and captivated by God's grace. Paul believed God really did exist. He knew his God and lived daily by faith in His sovereignty and compassion. Paul did not live as though God did not exist. NOTE. What about you, Christian, do you live with the reality that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life? Can you honestly say "Amen" to God's sovereignty and compassion? Can you say "I believe" or "I affirm" God's glory in my life? Do you live your life as though God really exists?

III. RELATIONSHIP TO THE SAINTS 4:21-22

- A. ***Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus.*** – Paul now moves from some very high theology about God to some very practical greetings to the saints at Philippi. Paul never disassociates theological ideas from real life. His theology was always a workable theology in real life. NOTE. Paul sends his greetings and love to every individual Christian in the Philippian local church. Why? Because in Christ Jesus he had a spiritual bond with them which surpassed all human relationships. Paul had the joy of being loved by his friends and loving his friends in Christ because he had a deep spiritual relationship with them. NOTE. How very important Christian fellowship is. Without it, we grow cold to the things of the Lord. Are you, Christian, cultivating deep Christian relationships? Are you opening your hearts and homes to Christians for fellowship around Christ? There is nothing sweeter this side of glory than real, genuine, open and honest Christian fellowship. POINT: Real spiritual intimacy will take place in small groups. This is why HBF has mid-week sharing and caring groups. Our goal is that 75% of our folks will be in a small group.
- B. ***The brothers who are with me send greetings.*** – We do not know who these brothers were but it doesn't matter. It could have been other Christian leaders like Timothy, Mark or Luke. The important thing is that Paul had other believers, probably leaders, who cared for him when he was in trouble. Paul had the joy of loving and being loved by men in the Lord's work. Together, these brethren sent their love to the Philippians. Spiritual love is stronger than human love.
- C. ***All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.*** – Through Paul's imprisonment in Rome, the gospel reached even into the emperor's household. Servants, government workers, magistrates, judges and even those of the immediate family of Caesar had been reached for Christ. NOTE. Those who had been emperor worshippers and haters of the gospel were converted and became one with all Christians in a community of fellowship. There is no question about it. Christ does change a person's life - his attitudes, his motivations, his actions and his friends. The ties that a Christian has with other Christians are stronger than blood family ties. Even those who were once our enemies become our friends because of God's salvation in Christ Jesus.

IV. RELATIONSHIP TO JESUS CHRIST 4:23

- A. ***The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.***
1. Christ's Grace. The "grace" refers not to the initial salvation which was by God's grace but to walking in grace in the sanctification process. This grace is found in a spiritual relationship with Christ. This is appropriating from Christ the grace for: spiritual growth (***2 Pet. 3:18: But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.***), prayer (***Heb. 4:16: Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.***), suffering (***2 Cor. 12:8- 9: Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace***

is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.), spiritual stability (*1 Pet. 5:12: ... this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.*) and production (*1 Cor. 15:10: But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.*). Apart from the grace of Christ, we are unable to live daily for Christ. We must appropriate grace in our daily experience by faith.

2. Christ’s Person. The Apostle Paul begins and ends this letter with the name of Jesus Christ. Throughout this letter Christ is mentioned over forty times. The name of Christ is mentioned in every conceivable relationship, and it is as the Christian has an abiding fellowship with Christ that his relationship with Jesus Christ is made strong experientially. We see the following truth about our relationship to Jesus Christ: Christ our life (*Phil. 1:21: For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*), Christ our example (*Phil. 2:5: Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*), Christ our confidence (*Phil. 3:10: I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.*), Christ our unity (*Phil. 4:1: Stand firm in the Lord.*), Christ our joy (*Phil. 4:4: Rejoice in the Lord always.*), Christ our hope (*Phil. 4:5: The Lord is near.*), Christ our peace (*Phil. 4:6-7: Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*), Christ our strength (*Phil. 4:13: I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*), and Christ our sufficiency (*Phil. 4:19: And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*). The key to Christianity is Christ!

- B. **Amen.** – Paul concludes the Epistle to the Philippians with the word “Amen.”, that is, “I believe” He believed the whole Christian life is wrapped up in a personal by faith relationship with Jesus Christ. NOTE. The Lord Jesus said it well, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

V. CONCLUSION

- A. For you without Christ, you can have no spiritual relationships whatsoever until you are born into God’s family through the new birth. Just as a person is born into a physical family with human relationships, a person must also have a second birth and be born into God’s family which will result in wonderful spiritual relationships.
- B. What must one do to be born into God’s family? He must believe that Jesus Christ died for his sins and that He rose from the dead to declare him righteous before God. The question before you who are without Christ is, “What are you going to do with Christ?” If you reject Him as your personal Lord and Savior, then you must be willing to pay the consequences of judgment for this decision now and in eternity. If you accept Him as your personal Lord and Savior, He will give you the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, bring you into the family of God, establish wonderful spiritual relationships and prepare you to live now and in eternity.