

STUDY GUIDE

LETTERS FROM PRISON: PHILIPPIANS (Week 6)

A MESSAGE SERIES AT NEW CITY CHURCH

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Philippians 2:12-17

12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. 14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing; 15 so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.

Background

In our previous study (weeks 4 and 5), we learned that Paul encouraged the Philippians to take on “the mind of Christ.” This week, we get a glimpse at what it means when followers of Christ take that mind into the world.

Living as light.

Martin Luther said that Christians are “privileged to participate in the providential care of the kingdom.” That is what Paul is challenging us to do when he says “*to prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world.*”

As Christians, we should make a noticeable difference in the places we find ourselves in, turning “dark” to “light” by the way we live. In turn, the institutions we serve in, whether schools or business, should be impacted by believers bring light to the world.

But, it appears we are losing on many levels. For instance:

Questions for Reflection

1. Who has more control over what kids desire today? The Church or Disney? Why?
2. Who or what has more control over how you eat? The institution of fast food or the Bible? Why?
3. How about the institution of marriage? Who has more control, media or the church? Why?

The Cultural Mandate.

Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. - Genesis 2:15

When God put us in the Garden of Eden he basically told us to “make culture.” The word for cultivate here is the Hebrew word, *avoda*. This word is all encompassing. *Avoda* could be used to take the place of words like work, worship, ministry, arts, and service in the English language. The idea that these things are separate acts is a purely western, evangelical construct. In truth, all of our lives are an act of service, work and worship to God. As we do these things, we create culture to fulfill the original cultural mandate. A mandate that has been frustrated by sin and the fall but a mandate that we are still called to live.

Questions for Reflection

4. Talk about what it means to create culture.

Bringing Shalom.

“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, 5 ‘Build houses and live *in them*; and plant gardens and eat their produce. 6 ‘Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. 7 ‘Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare. **Jeremiah 29:4-7.**

When God’s people are in exile, His commandment to them is clear: seek the flourishing of everyone, not just those who think how you think. The word for welfare in this passage is “shalom,” which means complete peace. It is difficult to have shalom in a city and not seek to serve those who are different than us. The New Testament is full of reminders that we are “aliens” in a foreign land. (see 1 Peter 2:11 for one example) As aliens, or exiles, we are called to do good to all of those around us in order to show the Glory of God.

Jesus, after the resurrection, told His followers: “Peace be with you”. He used the Greek word *eirene*, which is the New Testament equivalent to *shalom*. He told us that we should aim to be true spiritual peacemakers between humanity, believers or non-believers, and God (Matthew 5:9).

Questions for Reflection.

5. How can you bring shalom to your home, school or workplace?

Changing the World.

James Davison Hunter, in his book, *To Change the World*, writes:

*The call to be “in the world but not of it” is a call to abide in the will and purposes of God in the present world disorder with integrity, and the only way to reach for that integrity is to recognize the **tension** and to reside within it knowing that failure*

is inevitable, forgiveness is ever available and the work of the Holy Spirit to transform and sanctify our efforts is always inscrutably at work.”

Sometimes our first instinct is to withdraw from the world and create our own safe-havens. However, we are not called to do that. Paul is telling the Philippians to be “lights” in a dark world. He calls us to do the same.

To change the world, we must remember:

1. **We must be “in there.”** If we view Christian mission as “outreach” we can begin to take on an “us versus them” mentality. We need to be in the culture and a meaningful part of it.

2. **We must have Jesus with us.** As we interact with the world in our schools and places of work, we must remember that Jesus is with us. We don’t do this on our own.

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." - Matthew 28:18-20.

Questions for Reflection.

6. How does Matthew 28 give you confidence as you endeavor to carry out the cultural mandate in your home, office or school?