Bible Class **Notes** Sunday, 20

September 2026

A Selfless Life

Philippians 1–4, ESV

Voluntary self-demotion is a hard sell. Almost no one asks for a lower place. People want the promotion, or at least they want to keep the place they have. Paul is asking the church to step down, to put others first, to be less important. The book of Philippians gives the reason. What he saw among them was selfishness and self-centeredness that had to be named. That problem has not expired. Pride and the itch to move up are still who we are apart from Christ.

Serving and following Christ always comes first. The welfare of others is to be sought even above our own. Paul celebrates and encourages selfless Christian love. He gives himself as an example. He puts their good ahead of his comfort. Then he shows what selflessness looks like, what it does not look like, and what blessings come with it.

Not About Me

Paul wrote from prison. He was not moaning. He was glad the gospel was moving. Chains had made other believers bolder. Some were even preaching from envy, hoping to afflict him and he refused to take the bait. If Christ was proclaimed, he rejoiced. The letter keeps turning the same corner: it is not about me (Paul). It is about you. It is about the gospel. It is about your brother.

He did not know whether he would rather depart or remain. What he expected, and what he thought best for them, was to stay and keep laboring for their progress and joy in the faith. That is why he presses them to live in a way that matches the gospel.

"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents." Philippians 1:27–28

Worthy of the gospel here is not first a ban on coarse speech or a list of private morals. Paul tells them what he means. Stand firm. Do not give up the gospel. Do it in one spirit, with one mind, side by side. Not as lone operators. The church needs more fellowship, more harmony, more regard for one another. Opposition from the world is a sign the Philippians were on the right track, and God will deal with those who oppose.

What He Tells Them to Do

In chapter 2 Paul first tells them the behavior, then he shows it in four lives. He says the same thing four ways in two verses, which is how you know he is not decorating.

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Philippians 2:3–4

Do not act from selfishness. Do not act from empty conceit. In humility regard others as more important. Do not look only to your own interests. Look also to theirs. Four lines make up one command: put the other person first.

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Philippians 2:12–13

Verse 12 is easy to love and isolate. Get to work. Verse 13 is why the work is not a badge of personal honor. God is the one at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. If there is a will in you this morning to please God, you do not get the credit for inventing it. He created the will. He creates the work. Then he tells them how that life sounds in the room.

“Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.” Philippians 2:14–15

All things means home, work, traffic, the store, the assembly. Grumbling is what we do to ourselves. Disputing is what we do with each other. Paul does not say the church will look different if it merely avoids the usual list of public sins. He says if it will stop complaining and stop bickering, it will stand out, because that is what everyone else does.

Four Lives That Show It

The first example is Jesus. “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). He lowered himself. He took the form of a servant. He died an agonizing death for us. Paul has told them to put others first. Jesus did it in a way that cost him everything.

The second example is Paul.

“Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.” Philippians 2:17–18

He thinks he may die. His whole life has already been poured out in the service of Christ and of this church. He calls that joy, and he invites them into it.

The third example is Timothy. Paul almost repeats verses 3 and 4 when he describes him.

“For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy’s proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.” Philippians 2:20–22

The fourth example is Epaphroditus: brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier, messenger, and minister to Paul’s need. Fellow is the word to hear. Paul has been asking them to do this together. Epaphroditus already does. He did not put himself first.

What Selflessness Looks Like

Chapters 3 and 4 get more practical. If you live a selfless life, Jesus is everything, the world is nothing, and the church is one.

Jesus Is Everything

Philippians 3:1–16 is about as plain a description of the Christian life as the New Testament gives. Paul starts with a warning.

“Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.” Philippians 3:2

The language is harsh because the teaching is destructive. These are judaizers: people who wanted Jesus and the old law, who said a Christian still had to keep it. That spirit is not a museum piece. Legalism lasts because people love a list they can check and a feeling of superiority it gives them. Law can only condemn. It cannot give the life people think they are pursuing with it. The same spirit shows up whenever private judgment hardens into "this is how I see it, therefore you must see it this way," or whenever the law is kept in the back pocket so we can treat people as we please.

Paul sets the opposite in place.

"For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh." Philippians 3:3

The circumcision that matters is of the heart. God cuts away the worldly mind. Worship is in the Spirit, not in the letter. Confidence is not in what we can make happen in the flesh, even when we still use the words faith and grace.

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith." Philippians 3:7–9

Loss here is an accounting word. It is not "lost." This is a debit. What he was before Christ was working against him. Everything that does not bring a person closer to Jesus is a detriment, or a debit. You can chase a righteousness of your own from the law, or you can receive the righteousness that comes through faith. You cannot run both books based on two standards.

"That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." Philippians 3:10–11

Knowing Christ includes the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings. If we are in him, we are in the One who was beaten and killed. Suffering is not an elective. It is part of being found in him, on the way to being raised.

The World Is Nothing

Every person has a god. The unbeliever's god, Paul says, is the belly: appetite, whatever I want, whenever I want it.

"Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." Philippians 3:19–21

A citizen away from home is still a citizen. Values, longing, and allegiance stay with the country that "owns" him. The Christian's home is heaven. The Savior who comes from there will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of his glory. That promise does not depend on how a body was buried. A body in the ground a thousand years is gone the same way fire would take it. When he comes, the living will be changed and the dead will be raised, and they will look like him. That is why chapter 4 opens with "therefore."

"Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved." Philippians 4:1

The Church Is One

"I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life." Philippians 4:2–3

These are not fringe names. They had struggled beside Paul in the gospel. They were core. They were all in. They still needed to be told to agree in the Lord. Doctrine can be sound, attendance can be perfect, a person can preach or lead or teach, and still need someone to say: stop fighting,

stop being stubborn, live in harmony. Sometimes the two cannot settle it alone. Paul asks a true companion to step in and help them work it out.

What Selflessness Gives

Selflessness sounds like misery: stop what you are doing, spend what you have, put the other person ahead of the thing you wanted to finish. Paul says the opposite. Blessings arrive along three lines: spiritual, material, and the life of the church family.

Spiritual Blessings

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice." Philippians 4:4

He says it twice, and he had already said it in 3:1. Selflessness is the only way to joy. A selfish life never has enough. Someone will always be in the way. Let your gentleness be known. A self-centered heart is short, snappy, and hard. Gentleness requires a self that has stepped down. The Lord is near. Anxiety belongs to the life that is all about me. Peace comes through prayer when the life is focused on others.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6–7

Dwell on what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable. Practice what you have seen in Paul. The God of peace will be with you.

Material Blessings

"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19

The promise is need, not hoard. Jesus said the same in Matthew 6. Paul said it again in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. The way to be sure you have enough is not to clutch. What is given for others is a sacrifice to God, and God teaches contentment where grasping used to live. He gets the glory in the way ordinary needs are met.

Blessings in the Family

“Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.” Philippians 4:21–23

Brethren. Family. Greet is the word he will not let drop. Nobody in the church is disposable. He ends, as he always does, on grace.

Next Class

Lord willing, the next class is Philemon.