WHY DO WE NEED PHILIPPIANS STUDY?

“What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ…” (Php 3:8)

Philippians is a familiar book to UBF Staff members. Most have studied it multiple times, while they have not studied other books of the Bible even once. Why do we need to study Philippians again instead of an unfamiliar book? We tend to study Philippians for the purpose of maturing in Christ personally. Of course, this is essential, but we need to study from a more holistic and ministerial point of view. Paul’s purpose in writing Philippians was not just to edify individual people, but to empower the Christian community as a whole to advance the gospel among the people of their times. In order to do that he shared his Christ-centered life and secret of joy in a personal and testimonial manner. Furthermore, he encouraged the Philippians to have the same mindset as Christ Jesus in relation to one another. This would enable them to strive together as one in the faith of the gospel, overcoming the threats of enemies and to shine like stars in the sky. At this time, we need most a Christ-centered life, the secret of joy and the mindset of Christ in relation to one another. This letter resonates particularly with the college students of our times. Paul’s Christ-centered life and personal testimonial way of sharing honest struggles has a great appeal to college students who are seeking genuine examples and longing for true joy and personal relationships. This is the reason we want to study Philippians at this time. We find three main themes for our Philippians study.

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First, God has a clear life-goal for us: to know Christ and grow in his image. Many Christians have no idea that God has a goal for them after saving them. They focus on justification, ignoring sanctification. They are like people who cross the starting line in a race and then begin to celebrate. They remain self-centered. As a result they have many problems within themselves, as well as in family and social life. They repeat the same mistakes again and again without ever finding the root problem. Even though their bodies age, their character remains immature, yet they are unaware of this. God made us to grow. As time passes, we should mature spiritually, emotionally and intellectually and become like Jesus. Then we can be a blessing to others, not a burden. Through Philippians study we want to set our life goal to grow in the image of Christ. It is to be transformed from a self-centered person to a Christ-centered person.

Second, God wants us to rejoice in the Lord always. Christian life is meant to be joyful like a wedding feast, not gloomy like a funeral service. Many Christians live dutiful lives without having true joy in their hearts. They are seeking joy in other ways, not in the Lord. In many cases, their joy depends on their circumstances. When in favorable circumstances they rejoice. But in unfavorable circumstances they become gloomy and complain. Joy is not just an emotion; it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22). Where does true joy come from? It comes from living a Christ-centered life. When we live a Christ-centered life, we have joy. Through Philippians study we want to learn a Christ-centered life and have real joy welling up in our souls always.

Third, God wants us to have Christ’s mindset in relation with others. Christian life is not lived only on an individual level; it is lived in community with others. God works through his church. Yet the church is composed of forgiven sinners who are not fully sanctified in the image of Christ. Conflicts, dissension and division arise over cultural, generational, ethnic and gender differences. Throughout church history, secondary theological issues have also divided Christian brothers. Usually behind these theological issues there is a power struggle. More fundamentally, the cause is often unchanged elements in someone’s sinful nature such as selfish ambition, jealousy, pride, indifference, and so on. This was the case in the Philippian church. Paul especially noted a conflict between two powerful women: Euodia and Syntyche. When they could not get along, they polarized the church in Philippi. Paul urges them and us to have the same mindset as Christ.

When we know Christ and grow in his image and live a Christ-centered life, are joyful always in the Lord, and have the mindset of Christ, we can make an environment full of love and joy and peace. When students come into this environment they will feel the presence of Christ and grow as his disciples. This is essential part of Christian witness. When we do so, we can fulfill God’s great purpose for the church to advance his kingdom on earth.