

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

Paul's transformative focus on Jesus, Galatians 2:20

Paul wrote that he had “been crucified with Christ” (*Galatians 2:20*), a well-known phrase describing the nature of his relationship with Jesus. Knowing Paul’s desire to be like Jesus and recognizing that it should occupy a similarly important place in our lives does not, by itself, bring clarity to that expectation. Therefore, we will consider Paul’s letter to the Philippians in which he offers insights into how his focus on Jesus shaped his life and explore how his transformation offers guidance to us.

Paul, Jesus, and the Philippians

Paul described himself as a devout believer prior to meeting Jesus (*Galatians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:5-6*). But his encounter with Jesus radically changed his devotion, moving it away from “the traditions of [his] fathers”¹ to Jesus (*Galatians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:4-10*). The ways in which Jesus changed his focus prepared him to receive Jesus’ commission to be “a chosen instrument...to carry [his] name before the Gentiles and kings and children of Israel” (*Acts 9:10-16*). A key part of the responsibilities Jesus gave to Paul included a series of missionary journeys that Luke records in the book of Acts.

Paul stopped at Philippi on his second missionary journey and established a community of Christians in the city (*Acts 16:11-40*). While Luke’s record of Paul’s visit to Philippi does not offer much insight into his connection to the Christians in the city, Paul’s letter “to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi” (*Philippians 1:1*) resonates with warmth and gratitude for the church and its relationship with him generated by their mutual commitment to Jesus and their shared experiences of persecution (*cf. Philippians 1:3-11, 29-30; 4:1, 10-20*).

Having heard that they were “engaged in the same conflict” he experienced (*Philippians 1:29-30*), Paul addressed the Philippians’ suffering by encouraging them to live in a manner “worthy of the gospel of Christ” (*Philippians 1:27*) and offered his readers his life as an example (*Philippians 3:17*). Consider some of the things he wrote about himself:

- In response to those who proclaimed “Christ out of selfish ambition...thinking to afflict [him] in [his] imprisonment”, Paul wrote “only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice” (*Philippians 1:18*).
- Even though he was writing from prison, Paul did not focus on his physical circumstances but devoted himself to living in a way that “Christ will be honored in [his] body, whether by life or by death” (*Philippians 1:20*).

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- Even though he had reasons to boast about his accomplishments, Paul wrote that, “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” (*Philippians 3:7–8*).
- Paul’s desire to know Jesus motivated him to even “share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (*Philippians 3:10*).
- So complete was his focus on Jesus that Paul disregarded his past and strained toward the future, pressing “on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (*Philippians 3:13–14*).
- “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me (*Philippians 4:11–13*)

Paul offered the Philippians the example of his life to help them understand the transformative power of devotion to Jesus. The example of Paul’s devotion to Jesus illustrated for the Philippians some of the essential characteristics that attend Christlikeness. If, like Paul, we commit to being like Jesus, then the following characteristics should come to define us:

Humble selflessness

Followers of Jesus put the concerns of others ahead of their own concerns (Philippians 2:1-8).

Peacefulness

Followers of Jesus seek peace in their relationships with others (Philippians 2:14).

Joyfulness

Followers of Jesus experience genuine and abiding joy because of their relationship with Jesus rather than merely the physical circumstances of their lives (Philippians 3:1; 4:4).

Hopefulness

Followers of Jesus confidently anticipate a better, future reality guaranteed to them by God through Jesus (Philippians 3:20-21).

Purity

Followers of Jesus embrace God’s “blameless and innocent” expectations and reject the world’s corruptions (Philippians 4:8-9; 2:14-15).

May God help us to, like Paul, devote ourselves to following Jesus’ example.

