

Excellence

Introduction. In Philippians, there is great training for us. The apostle Paul obviously enjoyed a pleasant relationship with these Christians, and He wanted his personal gratitude to be conveyed to them (1:3-5). But he also wanted to urge them to become better (1:27; 2:12-16). It is clear that Paul held these people firmly in his heart and was grateful to God for them, but was anxious to urge them on to greater diligence.

In Philippians 3:7-16, Paul offers himself as an example. All through this passage there is healthy spiritual ambition to grow, to attain to everything that is better, to forget what is behind, and press on. He said – in v. 16 – what every Christian should be able to honestly confess.

This is the language of excellence, which is the pursuit of quality. He speaks of maturity and attainment. Pressing toward the goal. Reaching forward. Doing your personal best. Striving to do better. Living in such a manner in Christ, we eagerly wait for Him to come. This involves discipline, purpose, and endurance of hardship.

Every Christian should excel to do more. Saying you are a Christian is not sufficient. Baptism, if not followed by daily obedience, is of no avail. Attendance, if not accompanied by a faithful life, is not adequate. Excellence is not attained on easy terms. Nevertheless, it ought to be cherished and pursued by every one of us.

I. Excellence In Knowledge

- A. Do you excel in knowledge (Colossians 1:10)?
 - 1. Do you know more of Christ now compared to a year ago (2 Peter 3:18)?
 - 2. Do you come to issues and places in life where you honestly have to say to yourself, “I ought to know that?”
 - 3. Do you let other people put the time in to study – and then let them tell you what to believe?
- B. Surely we are aware that an increase in knowledge cannot take place without personal initiative (Philippians 1:9-10).
 - 1. Excellence in knowledge requires your personal contact with the Bible.
 - 2. The mere passage of time does not automatically result in an increase in knowledge.
 - 3. You will have to read the Bible, think about what it means, and study it.
 - a) Learn of Christ in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
 - b) Discover the meaning of conversion in the book of Acts.
 - c) Find out for yourself what it means to live by faith in Romans.
 - d) The responsibility of being a member of a local church is in 1 Corinthians.
 - e) The work of an evangelist is found in 1-2 Timothy and Titus.
 - f) If you want to become better informed about the sacrifice of Christ, the value of His blood, and the meaning of the New Covenant, read Hebrews.
 - g) If you want to know the activity of faith, read James.
 - h) Learn the glory of suffering as a Christian in 1 Peter.

II. Excellence In Service

- A. Do you do what you are able to do, to the best of your ability (Romans 12:1-8)?
 - 1. The question is not, “Do you do what others do?”

2. The question is not, “Do you do what others do better?”
3. The question is, “Have you searched yourself to discover what you are able to do, and then, are you doing that to the best of your ability — teaching, serving, exhorting, giving, leading, showing mercy, etc.?”
- B. I believe that in each one of us there is the capacity to serve in some way, and to improve, to excel in that service.
 1. You start by self-examination, to find your place, gift, or talent.
 2. Then you engage in that good work – with all the appropriate attitude and joy – in pursuit of excellence (Hebrews 13:16; 1 Peter 3:8-13).
 - a) Good physical works (Acts 9:36-43).
 - b) Good spiritual works (Acts 18:24-28).
- C. One preacher wrote of a man who obeyed the gospel late in life, and struggled to discover what he could do.
 1. He was not comfortable doing anything in public. His background did not prepare him for song leading, praying, or preaching.
 2. He did not have much to give.
 3. He was already suffering from the infirmity of age.
 4. He always arrived at the church building early, and it was his practice to stand at the back of the building and greet people as they came in.
 5. One day a light went on in his head, and he said, “This is what I can do!” He did it well; he excelled.
 6. In time, he gained more confidence and would go downtown and pass out invitations to church services and gospel meetings. Then later, he would hand out tracts.
 7. Before he died he was responsible for leading several people to the Lord.
 8. It all started when he decided that however small it may seem, he would do what he was able to do, and would excel in that service.

III. Excellence In Influence

- A. In Colossians 4:5, influence is identified by one phrase: “toward them that are without.” We can never take the influence we exert on others lightly.
- B. In preaching the gospel, everything you do when you stand before an audience, sends a message.
 1. How you approach the podium.
 2. How you are dressed.
 3. Your eye contact.
 4. Your tone of voice, demeanor, and gestures.
- C. Life is the same way — everything about you has some influence on others, good or bad.
 1. What you say and how you say it (Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 4:6).
 2. What you wear (1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Peter 3:3-4).
 3. Where you go (Psalm 119:59; Proverbs 4:26-27).
 4. Who you are with (Proverbs 22:24-25; 1 Corinthians 15:33).
 5. How you respond to various circumstances (Mark 10:21; 14:61).
- D. People see what we do; they see what kind of people we are — and some will imitate us! Paul Gilbert wrote, “You are writing a gospel, A chapter each day, By

the deeds you do, By the words that you say, Men read what you write, Whether faithless or true, Say – what is the gospel, according to you?”

Conclusion. Never – in any time, in any dispensation, with any people – has it been acceptable to God to simply go through the external motions of religious practice! Some may have the impression that under the Old Covenant, the Jews only had to offer the right sacrifices at the right time at the right place; that no devotion of heart or excellence was required, but that is not correct!

Over and over again, God said He wanted their hearts. The sacrifices and assemblies had their meaning. God set those shadows in motion (Hebrews 10:1). But God wanted everything done from a good and honest heart (Matthew 22:34-40; cp. Deuteronomy 6:5).

Obedience from the heart will express itself in excellence. Pressing toward the goal. Reaching forward. Maturing in the faith. Growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. The challenge for us is to excel in Philippians 3:7-21. That can only come from individual purpose of heart. Obedience to the gospel is the place to begin.

I am deeply indebted to Warren Berkley for the use of his material.