

The background of the entire cover is a photograph of ancient stone ruins. In the foreground, there is a pile of large, grey, rectangular stone blocks, some of which are stacked to form a low wall. In the middle ground, a more substantial stone structure is visible, featuring a semi-circular archway. The ruins are situated on a grassy hillside. The sky above is blue with scattered white clouds. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is overlaid on the upper half of the image, containing the title and author information.

Bible Study Companion Series

Philippians

Verse-by-Verse

Steve Lewis

[online version]

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Bible Study Companion Series:
Philippians Verse-by-Verse

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Preface to the Bible Study Companion Series

Bible study is such an important activity because knowing and doing the will of God depends on an accurate understanding of His written Word. The obedient Christian life is based on the assumption that believers know the truth about what they are to obey. God has not been silent, and He has not left us without detailed instructions for living. We have God's complete revelation for us today in the Bible.

The Bible is a collection of writings that God directed and inspired men to write. It was recorded in the common languages that people used to communicate their ideas to each other. We must remember this as we study the Bible. The principles for Bible study follow the same rules we use every day to understand the meaning of any written communication.

As we study the Bible our goal should be to understand the message that the original text was intended to communicate. This means we are not allowed to make the Bible say what we want it to say. We must let the Bible speak for itself. The hard work of Bible study involves carefully examining the written text of Scripture in order to understand exactly what that text was intended to communicate.

Since the biblical authors used normal language, we must use the regular principles of grammar and sentence structure to understand the Bible's message. Scripture was not written in a secret code that requires a hidden formula to decipher. Instead it was written in the common languages of the people who lived during those times (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). For that reason, this Bible Study Companion contains many references to the words, grammar, and sentence structure of the original languages. This is necessary because most of us are not familiar with the ways that ancient writers communicated, and these insights will help us to clearly understand their message.

We must also remember that the biblical writings were recorded at specific times in human history. They were written to specific readers in specific historical, geographical, and cultural situations. In order to understand the purpose and message of the Bible, we must also study the history, geography, and culture of the original writers and readers. The meaning of each biblical expression is influenced and even determined by the context in which it was written.

This Bible Study Companion will provide help as you go through the text of the Bible just as it was written, in a verse-by-verse manner. Since the original text was written and read in successive order, this companion guide will include definitions, concepts, and ideas that will help you to understand the meaning of the phrases and sentences in the order in which they unfold. It is our prayer that God will guide and direct your study of His Word so that you will experience the rich blessings that come from studying the Bible.

The church in Philippi

The apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians is perhaps the most personal and tenderhearted epistle in the New Testament. Their Christian lives were characterized by kindness, generosity, and moral uprightness, so Paul was quick to commend them for their faithfulness to God and their spiritual maturity. Throughout his many years of ministry, it seemed that he could always count on the Philippians to pray for him, to encourage him, to send helpers where they were needed, to share in his trials, and to support him financially during his efforts to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. They always held Paul in highest regard and expressed their affection for him and their gratefulness for his ministry.

Paul first met the beloved saints in Philippi on his second missionary journey. The Lord Jesus had commissioned Paul to be His appointed messenger to take the good news of salvation to "the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel" (Acts 9:15). He had been ministering in several places for a number of years after his conversion when Barnabas found him in Tarsus and recruited him to teach in the church at Antioch in Syria (Acts 11:28). It was while they were in Antioch that the Lord called them to their first missionary journey on the island of Cyprus and to establish churches in several cities of the Roman province of southern Galatia (Acts 13-14).

Afterward, Acts 15 records that the church in Antioch commissioned a second missionary outreach. Paul and Barnabas separated, with Barnabas taking Mark to

Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas and traveled overland through Syria and Cilicia before visiting the recently established churches in southern Galatia. At Lystra a young man named Timothy joined them, and he was to become Paul's protégé and ministry partner for the rest of Paul's life.

They had probably planned to take the western road into the Roman province of Asia where several major population centers were located, but as they attempted to travel west they were "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" (Acts 16:6). Even though an enormous mission field existed in that area, it was not yet God's appointed time to take the gospel into that region. Instead they followed a road leading north with the hope of ministering in the large cities of the Roman province of Bithynia. "And after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas" (Acts 16:7-8).

Troas was a large coastal city on the Aegean Sea, and it was within a few days' voyage by ship from all the major seaports in the region. At Troas the Lord spoke to Paul in



a vision. “When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them” (Acts 16:10). The Roman province of Macedonia was just across the north-eastern corner of the Aegean, and the nearest major city on the continent of Europe was located there. In God’s sovereign plan this was the right time for the missionaries to establish a foothold for the gospel in Europe.

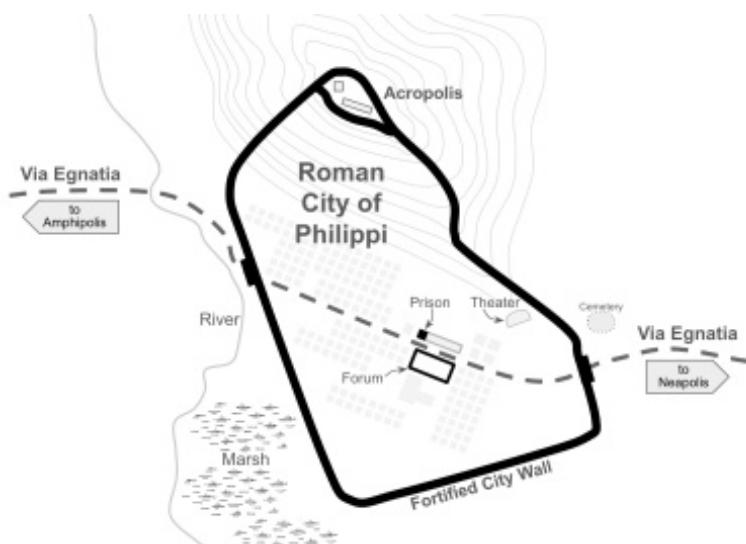
Up to this point in the Book of Acts, its author (Luke) had used the third person plural (“they”) to narrate the activities of Paul’s missionary team, but in Acts 16:10 he began using the first person plural (“we”). This tells us that Luke was in Troas where he joined the ministry team for their trip to Macedonia. With a favorable wind, Luke wrote, “we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi” (Acts 16:11-12). Philippi was an important city with a history stretching back into ancient times. It was located on the famed Via Egnatia, one of the primary military and trade routes between Europe and Asia. As one scholar explained, “It was a strategic place for a Christian church as travelers passing back and forth would come in contact



with the gospel and, if converted, would carry the news to their ultimate destinations.” [Walvoord, 17] It had been designated as an independent Roman colony which was populated mainly by soldiers and veterans. The members of such a colony were proud Roman citizens whose constitution was modeled after that of Rome itself, and their magistrates were attended by “lictors” who carried bundles of rods as their badge of office. The idea of a colony such as Philippi was that it would be a “little Rome” in a remote land.

There were probably very few Jews in Philippi because Luke did not record any of the typical opposition from unbelieving Jews which was common in the other places where Paul had ministered. Paul’s typical practice when visiting a Gentile city was to visit a synagogue where he would find God-fearing people who might be prepared to respond to his message. Since there was no Jewish synagogue in Philippi, he looked for an informal prayer place by the river where it would be typical for small groups of Jewish proselytes to gather. One scholar explains that the word for “place of prayer” (*proseuchē*) was used in the Greek version of the Old Testament for “an open air enclosure near the sea or a river where there was water for ceremonial ablutions....The rule of the rabbis required ten men to constitute a synagogue, but here were gathered only a group of women at the hour of prayer.” [Robertson, *Acts*, 250]

Luke described the beginning of the Philippian church this way: “And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple



fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.’ And she prevailed upon us.” (Acts 16:13-15)

Lydia was a woman from Thyatira, a city which was famous for its unique dyed fabrics. There was a Jewish settlement in Thyatira that was involved with the dyeing industry, and Lydia probably became a Jewish proselyte there. She was conducting a prosperous business at Philippi by selling a highly prized purple cloth, so she was obviously an astute businesswoman. There was a great demand for this “royal purple” fabric since it was used for the official toga at Rome and was coveted by citizens in Roman colonies like Philippi. It is likely that the other women with her were involved in her business and that they were also Gentile proselytes of Judaism.

The Lord had prepared all of these women to expect the Jewish Messiah and to understand their need for God's Deliverer. When Paul explained that the Messiah had come in humility to redeem them through His death on the cross, to reconcile them to God, and to conquer death through His resurrection, the Lord opened their hearts and they eagerly put their faith in Christ. Since they were near the river, all who believed were immediately baptized. It is likely that this group of devout women were all members of Lydia's household. As one commentator explained, "There is nothing here to show whether Lydia's household went beyond the women employed by her who like her had heard the preaching of Paul and had believed." [Robertson, *Acts*, 253]

Luke records Lydia saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." In the Greek language there are several classes of conditional clause, and here Paul used what is known as a first class condition which is often called the "condition of fact." First class conditional sentences mean that if something is true, and we assume that it is true, then the result will also be true. This type of conditional clause might be translated, "*Since* she had proved herself faithful to the Lord." As one commentator said, "She had confessed her faith and submitted to baptism as proof that she was faithful to the Lord. If she was fit for that, surely she was fit to be their hostess. And Paul and his party had clearly no comfortable place to stay while in Philippi. The ancient hotels or inns were abominable. Evidently Paul demurred for there were four of them and he did not wish to sacrifice his independence or be a burden even to a woman of wealth." [Robertson, *Acts*, 253-254] But Luke reported that "she **prevailed** upon us" (*parabiazomai*), using a Greek word that means to forcefully compel someone to do some-

thing. Evidently Lydia was a very persuasive woman. Luke's use of "us" indicates that he himself did not own a home in Philippi, otherwise the missionaries would have been staying with him there.

We do not know the exact length of Paul's stay in Philippi, but it likely spanned a period from several days to several weeks. During Paul's time of ministry in Philippi the only opposition he faced was the result of his kindness to a demon-possessed slave girl whose fortune-telling activities were making a great deal of money for her masters. This provides a hint concerning the level of utter paganism that permeated the culture and life in the city of Philippi. Once the demon had left the girl, she became useless to her owners, but their only concern was for their lost revenue. Luke reports that "when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities" (Acts 16:19). Instead of raising the actual issue regarding the healing of the girl, they brought charges of unlawfully proselytizing Roman citizens. The city magistrates impetuously beat and imprisoned Paul and Silas without a hearing.

In the middle of the night as Paul and Silas were singing and praying, an earthquake shook the prison, opening the cell doors and releasing the prisoners from their shackles. When Paul prevented the jailer from killing himself, he fell at Paul's feet and asked, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30) This urgent plea suggests that he and many others throughout the city already had heard the news about Paul's ministry and his message, so the jailer knew exactly what to ask. Paul shared the gospel with him and all the members of his household, baptizing those who believed. The next morning the city magistrates

apologized to Paul and Silas, but “they kept begging them to leave the city” (Acts 16:39). So after encouraging the believers gathered at the house of Lydia, Paul and Silas traveled west on the great Egnatian Way toward Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Thessalonica.

Luke immediately resumed using the third person plural (“they”) in the narrative of Acts, which implies that he had remained in Philippi after Paul and Silas departed. Timothy’s name does not appear with them on the journey to Thessalonica, so he also may have remained at Philippi for a short time to continue strengthening the new believers. Initially the church at Philippi consisted of an unlikely assembly: a few businesswomen with Jewish leanings and a staunchly Roman prison keeper, along with the believing members of their households. But this small group of dedicated believers quickly grew and they represented the first fruits of Paul’s ministry on the continent of Europe. As one commentator explains:

The work in Philippi had met with a considerable measure of success. Lydia and the jailer were by no means the only converts. This appears from the fact that when the missionaries have departed from the prison and have re-entered Lydia’s hospitable mansion, they find a number of “brothers” there. To this assembled congregation, the first church in Europe, they speak words of encouragement. Then Paul and Silas wend their way to Thessalonica. Timothy accompanies them or follows a little later. For the present Luke remains in Philippi. [Hendriksen, 15]

This devoted Philippian church would be one of the apostle Paul’s most beloved fellowships. They were blessed with the gift of generosity, and they sent gifts to Paul more than once as he carried on his missionary work (Phil 4:10-20). Paul obviously maintained regular contact with them, and on several occasions he sent his compan-



Ruins in the
ancient city of
Philippi.

ions to them for the purpose of continuing to build them up in the faith. Paul would not see them again personally until about five years later during his third missionary journey when he would travel through Philippi twice on his way to and from Greece (Acts 20:1-6). Their reunion must have been joyful since they held such a special place in each others' affections.

After their last meeting, Paul would proceed to Jerusalem where he would be held in Roman custody after a riot instigated by the unbelieving Jews. His imprisonment would last another five years and he would be kept in custody at Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome pending the appeal of his case to Caesar. Even while Paul was under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30), the Philippian church sent him a gift to help with his expenses. It was during this time that he wrote the epistle which we have

in our Bible as the Book of Philippians.

This letter would have been written at least a decade after he had first shared the gospel with Lydia and the Philippian jailer all those years earlier. Even after so long a time, the Philippians consistently held a very special place in Paul's heart. He gave thanks to God for all of them, and for their faithfulness across the years. He relied upon the Philippians to support his ministry in prayer, he was always encouraged by their love and support. They were true ministry partners with him in his efforts to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

Paul's affection for the Philippians

(Philippians 1:1-11)

Paul's primary purpose in writing was to thank the Philippians for the generous gift they had sent, which was delivered by one of their faithful members named Epaphroditus. But the Philippians had heard that Epaphroditus had been deathly ill, so Paul explained the circumstances and the reason why he was sending Epaphroditus back to them. Paul will share about his own situation as well as several issues in the Christian community at that time. He will go on to warn them about false teaching, as well as encouraging unity among the members of their fellowship.

In the apostle Paul's time, letters would start with what we might call the **signature** which tells who was writing the letter. The signature would be followed by the **address**, identifying the intended recipients. Then there would be a **salutation** that was often expressed using a form of the Greek word "rejoice" (*chairein*), which came to mean: "may you be glad" or "I wish you well" or simply "greetings." An **ascription of appreciation** would then give thanks for something the author appreciated about his readers. In his letters the apostle Paul would usually end that section by adding a prayer for the recipients. Then the main body of the letter would follow, with a conclusion that usually gave final personal greetings.

Phil 1:1 - Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:

Here in the *signature* of this letter **Paul** identified himself as the author, as well as recognizing **Timothy** as his ministry companion. Paul would often mention others who would have been familiar to the recipients of his letters. This does not mean that Timothy was the co-author of the letter, but he would have been respected by the readers since Timothy had spent time ministering to the believers in Philippi. Paul added that he and Timothy were “**bond-servants**” (*doulos*), using a Greek word that identifies a servant who voluntarily devotes himself to his master’s will without regard for his own interests. Paul’s use of this descriptive term most likely corresponds to the Hebrew custom of a household slave who willingly committed himself to his master for life. Exodus 21:5-6 says, “But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,’ then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently.” Paul and Timothy had both committed themselves to serving their Master forever. Rather than claiming a title as Christ’s designated apostle or as a high-ranking leader within the Christian movement, Paul wanted the Philippians to remember him primarily as a devoted servant of Christ, with all of the glory and praise being directed to his Lord and Master.

Paul followed his signature with the *address*: “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi.” The believers at Philippi are called “**saints**” (*hagios*) or “holy ones,”

and this term refers to someone who has been separated and consecrated for the exclusive use of God. When the Philippians put their faith and trust in Christ for their salvation, they were expressing their response to God's call and His choice of them. But they were not saints because of any attitude or action on their part. They were saints only because God set them apart by placing them **"in Christ Jesus."** Jesus Himself had promised, "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (John 14:20). As Paul had explained in his earlier letters to the Corinthians and the Romans, the saints are "those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling" (1 Cor 1:2), and those who believe the message of the gospel have eternal life because "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23). The only safe place to be is "in Christ Jesus" by grace through faith.

At the end of this verse Paul used the word **"including"** (*sun*) which means "together with" or "in union with" others. He is addressing this letter to **"all"** of the believers in Philippi, along with their leaders. He wants each and every one of them to read or hear his letter read, rather than having a select group read it to themselves and then interpret his words for others. Paul mentioned two different terms for the leaders of the local church at Philippi: overseers and deacons.

The compound word **"overseers"** (*episkopos*) literally means "watch over." This term describes the church leader's role in looking out for any signs of danger that could threaten others in the local assembly of believers. In the New Testament there are two other synonyms for these leaders: "shepherd" and "elder." The word **"shepherd"** pictures the leader's "pastoral" role in pasturing

the flock, which involves the care and feeding of those for whom he is accountable. The word “**elder**” describes the quality of maturity and wisdom in decision-making on behalf of the local church. All three of these terms refer to a single office within the local church, as we can see from Peter’s admonition to church leaders: “Therefore, I exhort the **elders** among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, **shepherd** the flock of God among you, exercising **oversight** not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God” (1 Peter 5:1-2).

The word “**deacons**” (*diakonos*) identifies those who serve others, especially in their designated role within a local church ministry. In fact, the word “ministry” in the New Testament is usually a translation of this same Greek word. In the context here, rather than a general term for serving, Paul is obviously referring to the office of deacon in the local church. The qualifications for the office of deacon are almost identical to those for the office of overseer/elder/shepherd (compare 1 Tim 3:1-7 with 8-13). However, a deacon typically handles the more tactical aspects of ministry within a local church in order to free the elders for more strategic tasks and for ministering the Word of God. The important observation from Paul’s use of these terms in this verse is that, even from the beginning, there were designated leaders who were responsible for the ministry within each local church. Additionally, it is clear that it was customary to have more than one overseer and deacon in a single local church, since Paul used the plural number for both of these words.

Paul continued in the next verse by sharing the **salutation** of his letter.

Phil 1:2 - Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here Paul's salutation included: "**Grace to you and peace.**" In Paul's time the salutation was often expressed using the Greek word "rejoice" (*chairein*), but Paul adapted and deepened it by using the word *charis* (a form of the word *chairein*). This word is translated "**grace**" which describes the unmerited favor of God. It is His goodness toward those who cannot earn and do not deserve His favor.

Among the Jews the customary greeting was the Hebrew word *shâlôm*, "**peace.**" Here Paul used the Greek word for peace to communicate the deep inner sense of tranquility and well-being which is given to those who have been reconciled to God through what Christ accomplished on the cross. The apostle Paul typically combined the two concepts of grace and peace in the salutation of most of his letters, and the order of the words is important. People cannot experience this type of peace unless they first receive God's grace.

Paul also mentioned the source of grace and peace, which is "**from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**" The grace and peace that believers need in order to handle the trials of life do not come from within themselves, but they are provided by God Himself through His indwelling Holy Spirit. This verse also affirms the co-equal deity of God the Father and Jesus the Son.

Phil 1:3-4 - I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all,

In this verse Paul will begin the letter's **ascription of appreciation** where he will thank God for several things about the Philippians. The word "**remembrance**" (*mneia*) indicates an activity involving the memory. During Paul's imprisonment he had ample time to reflect on the events of his life, and his memories of the Philippians immediately caused him to profess his profound and heartfelt gratitude to God in prayer. When Paul thinks of these beloved saints, his overriding sentiment is extreme joy. This is the first time he used the word "**joy**" (*chara*), but he will express it repeatedly throughout this letter to describe his affection for these dear friends in Christ. We know that his joy is extreme because of his excessive use of the word "**all**" (*pas*), which he repeated four times in these two verses. We could paraphrase it this way: "I thank my God for you in **all** my remembrance of you at **all** times in **all** my prayer for **all** of you." Paul leaves no room for doubt about the magnitude and extent of his joy as he remembers these dear brethren.

Paul had known the Philippian believers throughout their entire Christian lives. He had been there to witness their spiritual birth, and he had nurtured them as babes in Christ. Over the past decade he had watched them grow and mature in their walk with the Lord, and he had seen them become actively involved in ministry as a result of their faith and devotion to Christ. During his confinement in Rome, we can imagine Paul reviewing his memories of the Philippians. It may have been similar to how we might flip through the pages of an old family photo album, pausing to recall the circumstances surrounding each image that was captured. Every memory prompted him to pray for them with thanks to God.

Phil 1:5 - in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

In this verse Paul shared one of the major reasons for his gratitude to God. From the very beginning the Philippians had eagerly participated with Paul in the ministry of the gospel. The word “**participation**” (*koinōnia*) is a rich term that literally means “sharing in common.” It can be translated as participation, partnership, or fellowship, and it includes the ideas of continual association and comradeship. One scholar explained, “While he was with them several of them had ‘contended at my side in the cause of the gospel’ (4:3) and after his departure they continued their active witness. They prayed for him regularly (v. 19), they maintained contact with him through messengers like Epaphroditus (2:25-30); they sent him gifts as opportunity offered.” [Bruce, 31] Here Paul may be recalling all of their times of co-laboring together for the sake of the gospel. In this letter he is especially thankful for their regular and liberal contributions toward his support over the years.

Paul described their bond of fellowship as immediate and lasting – “**from the first day until now.**” In the world of Paul’s day as well as in the even more fast-paced world today, *constancy* is a rare characteristic. This is the important quality of the Philippians to which Paul is calling attention and for which he praised God. Their ongoing partnership with Paul was a sure sign of the work of grace that God was accomplishing in their lives, which is what Paul will mention in the verse that follows.

Phil 1:6 - For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

Paul had a unique perspective on the spiritual lives of the Philippian believers. It was similar to the viewpoint of a parent who has spent many years watching a child grow to maturity. He had assisted as a midwife when they were born again, and he ensured that they were cared for and fed from the Word of God. In this verse he expressed his confidence in God for their spiritual growth. The word “**confident**” (*peithō*) means to be persuaded or convinced, and here it is equivalent to faith in the faithfulness of God.

“He who began a good work in you will perfect it.” This encouraging phrase is full of theological truth. From beginning to end, our salvation is the work of the sovereign God who can be trusted completely. Our Creator chose us and set His love upon us from eternity past. Throughout our earthly lives He has providentially preserved us and called us, drawing us to Himself. At the moment of our salvation He applied to us all of what Christ accomplished, including redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness, justification, regeneration, and adoption, just to name a few of the many blessings of salvation. Afterward God continues His work of sanctification through which He nurtures our spiritual growth and devotion to Him. This ongoing sanctification should become increasingly evident as it works its way out in the life of believers through their growing righteousness and holiness of thought, word, and deed.

Even though believers still struggle against the flesh during their earthly lives, God does not give up on us as He continues to conform us incrementally to the image of Jesus Christ. The word “**perfect**” (*epiteleō*) is an intensified form of a term that looks forward to the ultimate goal which God has in view for every believer. The word “**un-**

til” expresses the idea of a terminus or a desired final state. God will continue His work in each of us until that goal is achieved (cf. Rom 8:29).

At the end of this verse Paul identified the time when this goal will be realized. A believer’s final glorification will ultimately occur in “**the day of Christ Jesus.**” This refers to that future day when Christ Jesus will deliver believers from their current imperfect state, at which time He will perfect them in holiness. As one commentator explained, “It will be the time when Christ returns for His church, salvation is finally completed, everyone’s works are examined, and believers are rewarded.” [Kent, 790] Paul did not provide specific details in his Philippian letter concerning this time of glorification, but he had written about that day in his earlier letters to the Corinthians and Thessalonians (see 1 Cor 15 and 1 Thess 4:13-18). This is the day that believers look forward to as their “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13). We can be encouraged that our faithful God will continue to accomplish His good work in us until that day of completion.

Phil 1:7-8 - For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Here Paul returned to explaining his joyful gratitude for the Philippians. He said, literally, “just as it is right for me to think this way about you all.” The word translated “**feel**” (*phroneō*) means “to direct the mind” or “to take thought.” Clearly Paul’s mental picture of the Philippians caused him to express deep feelings of affection for them.

He clarified his intended meaning by adding “**because I have you in my heart**,” which expressed his intense fondness for them.

In 1:5 he had described their “*participation in the gospel*” using the word *koinōnia* (“fellowship or partnership”), and here he reconnects with that thought by saying that they are “**partakers with me**.” This translates a single compound word that has the prefix *sun-* (“together with”) and *koinōnos* (“one who shares”). This is the first time Paul has mentioned his current “**imprisonment**” in Rome and his upcoming hearing before Caesar, during which he will be called upon to “**defend**” and “**confirm**” the gospel for which he has been detained by the Roman authorities. One commentator explains:

Paul is probably thinking of his approaching hearing in which he must give a defense of the gospel he preached and in which he hoped also to offer clear proofs of its truth and validity. In Paul’s view, all Christians were on trial with him, for the outcome could ultimately affect them all....Even when it might have been dangerous to identify themselves openly with Paul, they had treated his misfortunes as their own and had come to his assistance with their gifts. [Kent, 791, 790]

Paul explained that the Philippians were “fellow partakers” of God’s “**grace**” (*charis*). All of the accomplishments in the ministries of Paul and the Philippians were due only to the good will, loving-kindness, and unmerited favor of God which was at work. Here he called upon God as the witness who can confirm the truth of his inner affection for the Philippians. To “**long for**” (*epipotheō*) is an intensified form of the Greek word *potheō* which means to yearn for or desire greatly. Paul’s feeling was not merely a natural affection, but it was produced by the Spirit of Christ Jesus who was dwelling within him.

Phil 1:9 - And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment,

As Paul closed his ascription of appreciation for the Philippians he will “**pray**” (*proseuchomai*), using the normal word for offering prayers and communing with God. His first request is for an increase in the Philippians’ “**love**” (*agapē*). They were already expressing Christian love, so here Paul asked that their love may “**abound more and more**” (*perisseuō*). This vivid, descriptive term pictures something that overflows or grows beyond its natural limits. It means to excel or to exist in great abundance, and the present tense carries the idea of continually overflowing in a perpetual fountain of love for others.

The Greek language has several words that can be translated by the English word “**love**,” and here the term is *agapē*. One lexicon explains this type of love: “Christian love, whether exercised toward the brethren, or toward men generally, is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered. Love seeks the welfare of all (Rom 15:2), and works no ill to any (13:8-10); love seeks opportunity to do good to ‘all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of faith’ (Gal 6:10).” [Vine, 382] This kind of love is not based on feelings, but it springs from a deliberate commitment to put the good of others above one’s own through sacrificial action.

Since *agapē* love is not an impulse rising from the emotions but involves a considered, intentional choice to demonstrate love for others, it requires the exercise of two important qualities: *knowledge* and *discernment*. The

word **“knowledge”** (*epignōsis*) is an intensified form of the normal Greek word for knowledge (*ginōskō*), and it implies a more complete or full understanding of what is known. The term **“discernment”** (*aisthēsis*) comes from a root word that means “to perceive with the senses,” or figuratively, to apprehend with the intellect. It can indicate simple insight into people or situations, but it often involves moral discernment in distinguishing right and wrong. Discernment assists in the correct application of knowledge to the situations of life.

If a believer seeks to undertake a self-sacrificing action for another, he should clearly understand whether that action is needed, and if so, he should be fully aware of the impact and consequences of his sacrifice. The most important knowledge is the awareness that a believer is acting in obedience to the Word of God. If that is the case, then he can move forward confidently in the knowledge that God will be glorified through his obedience. Christian love should always be wise and discerning.

Phil 1:10 - so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;

The phrase **“so that”** introduces the result of exercising Christian love with knowledge and discernment. A believer will be able to **“approve”** (*dokimazō*) what is best. This Greek word means to examine or confirm by a process of testing. It pictures the work of an assayer who crushes, melts, and tests mineral ore to verify the quality of the metal. Rather than an emotional decision, this word describes a carefully examined and well-considered conclusion. It is conceptually similar to the word discernment, which also involves a process of examining something in order to determine whether it is in align-

ment with the will and Word of God. As one commentator has said, “*Approve* means much more than simple acknowledgement or agreement that something is right or true. Paul’s appeal is for believers to study, investigate, and determine the best possible ways to obey and please the Lord, and then to live accordingly.” [MacArthur, 47] Something should only be declared to be true, right, or excellent after it has been carefully examined.

The word “**excellent**” (*diapherō*) is literally “to be carried through.” By implication, it means to surpass, be better, or be of more value than something else. This is a striking word picture for testing something in order to carry through only what is of lasting value. The phrase “**in order to**” (*hina*) expresses the ultimate purpose for this attitude and action on the part of believers. The goal is that our lives would be “**sincere**” (*eilikrinēs*), genuine, pure, unsullied, or spotless. This Greek compound word literally means “to judge by sunlight,” and it pictures something that is found to be pure and unblemished when held up to the light of the sun. In addition believers should be “**blameless**” (*aproskopos*), which has the idea of not causing others to stumble and not leading others to sin by the example of our lives.

Paul is asking believers to cooperate with the One “who began a good work in you” and who “will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (1:6). It is not until that future “**day of Christ**” when believers will be completely “**sincere and blameless**” in glory. At that time “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10). There will be things in the life of every believer for which we will be rewarded, but there may also be things

for which we will lose the opportunity for reward. “If any man’s work is burned up [as being spiritually worthless], he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor 3:15). Paul exhorts believers to maximize their reward by following his instructions and cooperating with the indwelling Holy Spirit to live in a way that pleases God.

Phil 1:11 - having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Here Paul explained that living as he previously described (1:9-10) will yield fruit that will be evident in a righteous life. In that future “**day of Christ**” believers will be completely filled or perfected in righteousness and holiness. That transformation will occur only as a result of all that “**Jesus Christ**” has done for us. The perfect tense identifies an action that was accomplished in the past but which has continuing or ongoing effects. The passive voice tells us that this “**filling**” is a work done for us by Jesus Christ through His indwelling Holy Spirit.

A wonderful list of such spiritual fruit was shared by Paul in his letter to the Galatians: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). A believer can cooperate with the Holy Spirit to practice such qualities in this life, with the understanding that God will fully develop them for us in glory. Ultimately, all of this will be “**to the glory and praise of God.**” It is God who deserves all the credit and honor for what He accomplishes in the lives of believers.

Summary

In the first section of this chapter, Paul opened his letter to these dear saints at Philippi by wishing them the grace and peace of Christ. He expressed his loving memories of their partnership in the gospel from the very beginning, and his gratitude to God overflowed with joy for their fellowship. He fervently prayed that they would be filled to the brim with the unselfish, sacrificial love for others which is the very heart of the character of Christ. It is the Spirit of Jesus at work within them who will help them to continually grow spiritually until their glorification at the day of Christ.

Boldness in sharing the gospel

(Philippians 1:12-18)

After opening his letter to the Philippians and sharing his appreciation and gratitude for them, Paul will now provide more information about his circumstances and describe some of the things that have happened as a result of his imprisonment.

Phil 1:12 - Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,

The word “**Now**” (*de*) marks a transition into a new subject that the apostle Paul will discuss with the Philippians. He will address them as “**brethren**” which expresses the close family connection they now have as members of the family of God. There is something that Paul wants them to understand about his current situation. It would be natural for the Philippians to think about what has happened to Paul as being grim or disastrous. His friends may be tempted to conclude that having such a devoted servant of Christ locked away in prison meant that his career as an apostle was over and his ministry ruined. Unexpectedly and quite to the contrary, Paul stated that his circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.

Paul literally wrote, “the according to me [things] rather in progress of the gospel have become.” The word “**rather**” (*mallon*) might be taken as a term of contrast, but it can also mean “more, to a greater extent, or to a higher degree.” This adds emphasis to the meaning of “**progress**” (*prokopē*), a compound word which pictures cutting a path forward or driving forward by beating a way through. It was commonly used in its figurative sense of progress or advancement, and it is the opposite of the related word *egkoptō* which means “to cut in upon” or to put obstacles and hindrances in the path. Paul did not view his ministry as having been inhibited or obstructed, but by contrast he considered his circumstances as benefiting the ministry of the gospel. This counterintuitive assessment must have come as quite a shock to those who viewed his situation in a negative light.

Phil 1:13 - so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,

In this verse Paul focused on the fact that the gospel message – “**the cause of Christ**” – was being publicized everywhere as a result of his imprisonment. News was being shared widely that a righteous man was being held for trial in Rome simply because of his belief in the salvation of mankind provided by grace through faith in Christ. In modern terms we might say that the headlines and social media were abuzz with this latest situation in Rome. It was common knowledge that Paul was not a dangerous criminal or a rebel who actively sought to overthrow the government. Reports about the capture of such people also would have spread rapidly, but the news about Paul’s situation would have been even more intriguing. Detaining a man with such a righteous reputation would grab

people's attention and peak their curiosity to find out why this was happening.

When Paul said that his situation “**has become well known**” he used the Greek word *phaneros* which has the idea of causing something to appear by bringing it into the light (*phōs*). The facts of Paul's surprising or unexpected imprisonment had the effect of shining the light of public attention on the cause of Christ. This was a consequence that pleased Paul, even while he was enduring confinement in Rome. Interestingly, Paul made reference to “**the whole praetorian guard**.” We might wonder why Paul would draw attention to the fact that his guards knew about his situation. Why would mentioning his guards be more noteworthy than the fact that “**everyone else**” already knew about him?

When Paul appealed his case to the emperor (Acts 25:11-12), he became the emperor's prisoner and would have been placed in the custody of the emperor's guard. The “**praetorian guard**” consisted of several thousand select soldiers who were responsible for protecting the emperor and keeping the peace in the empire, functioning as a sort of military police force. They were an elite group whose pay, under emperor Nero, was three and a half times that of a regular soldier. The Praetorians became quite influential and were often involved in affairs of state. It is said that after the assassination of Caligula, the Praetorian Guard found his uncle Claudius hiding behind a curtain in the palace. They brought him out and announced him as the new emperor, the first in a series of emperors proclaimed by the Praetorians. The Roman senate acquiesced and ratified their decision rather than risk defying armed soldiers. The Praetorian Guard was feared by the general population as well as by the senate. One

scholar described Paul's relationship to the Praetorian Guard during his captivity:

The apostle was probably chained to a Roman soldier twenty-four hours a day, with a new guard every six hours. No doubt this was a most trying experience which subjected Paul to all the evil characteristics and whims of his guard even when he talked to his friends, when he prayed or when he attempted to write. Always there was this Roman guard.

The circumstances, however, also afforded him the priceless opportunity of witness, and each guard heard Paul's story. The claims of the grace of God and the transformation it afforded in his life subjected him to the scrutiny of each guard to see whether his testimony was genuine. The slightest deviation, impatience, or irritation would disqualify his testimony to the guard, and any lack of consistency in life would soon be communicated to others. The apostle's sincerity and his glowing account of God's grace manifested to him apparently were effective as guard after guard came to know Jesus Christ in an effective way.

Only God knows what went on in the rented room in which Paul was permitted to live. There the guards heard the conversation of Paul with his intimate friends and were able to ask questions about the strange words which they heard from their prisoner. In the lonely hours of the dark night, illuminated only by the moon, many a guard probably heard the testimony of Paul – his early career as a Pharisee, his antagonism and persecution of Christians, his remarkable conversion, and the causes of his imprisonment. No doubt all this was the subject of much conversation in the praetorian guard, and raised sympathy among the soldiers as they understood his unjust imprisonment. His chains had become an effective line of communication to the elite soldiers of the Roman Empire who, if converted, could carry the gospel to the ends of the earth as they were moved from place to place.

[Walvoord, 37-38]

As another commentator expressed it, “The faithful believers in the church at Rome had no doubt prayed that the Lord would open a way to witness to the elite and influential praetorian guard. In His sovereign wisdom, He answered that prayer by making members of that guard captive to Paul for two years.” [MacArthur, 60-61] Those soldiers would have come under the constant influence of Paul’s personality and his example of holiness in living to please God. Even though he was experiencing difficult circumstances, he would have displayed an inexplicable graciousness, patience, and love as he demonstrated his personal concern for each of the individual guards that God brought to him every day. His character alone would have been a profound influence on those hardened soldiers, and many of them probably put their faith in Christ for salvation. We do not know whether Paul had any direct contact with the members of Caesar’s household during his imprisonment, so it is likely that converted members of the Praetorian Guard were the ones who spread the gospel to Caesar’s household (4:22).

Phil 1:14 - and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

In the previous verse Paul had explained that public awareness of the gospel had been heightened by his imprisonment. Now in this verse he will describe the effect of his imprisonment on other Christians’ activities in sharing the gospel. Here he identified “**most**” (*pleiōn*) of the brethren, using a word that means “very many” or “the most part.” These brethren were “**trusting in the Lord**” (*peithō*), and here the perfect tense is used to describe an action that happened in the past with ongoing

results that continue into the present. Those believers had already put their trust in Christ at some time in the past, but their faith was being strengthened and they were emboldened by Paul's imprisonment. This implies that prior to his imprisonment believers in Rome may have been reluctant to share the gospel in the way in which it was now being shared. It appears that the public attention being focused on Paul's situation had encouraged everyone to talk openly about the reason for his imprisonment, and this provided a platform for believers to share the gospel message.

Because Paul was in the public eye, it motivated believers **“far more”** (*perissōs*) than previously. This word is related to the one Paul had used when he prayed that their love would **“abound”** (*perisseuō*). As it did there (1:9), here in this verse it means “to greatly surpass beyond measure.” This pictures the extent to which the Roman church was enabled to share their faith with others. The word **“courage”** (*tolmaō*) includes the ideas of being bold, daring, or venturing to take a risk. This boldness resulted in their ability to **“speak”** (*laleō*, “to express in words”) the message of Christ. This word does not mean “preach” but simply to speak in everyday conversation with others. Paul's imprisonment provided an open door for discussion and helped to pave the way for telling others about Christ **“without fear”** (*aphobōs*). Rather than being terrified of reprisal, Paul's imprisonment had provided opportunities to speak up since many people actually wanted to hear and understand. The **“word of God”** became an open topic for public discussion, and the members of the Roman church were able to take advantage of that opportunity.

Phil 1:15 - Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will;

In this verse and the following three verses, Paul will describe the contrasting motives of those who are **“preaching Christ”** (*kērussō*) or formally proclaiming the gospel message. Here he identified two different approaches which reflect these believers’ attitudes toward Paul himself. First, he said that some were proclaiming the gospel out of **“envy”** (*phthonos*), using a word that means resentment toward someone because of what he has which you lack. A person who envies either covets what the other person has or wishes that those things would be taken away from the other person. In Paul’s case, his freedom of movement had definitely been taken from him, and there were some who were pleased about that fact.

One scholar speculated about the reasons why someone would preach Christ from envy or rivalry:

Perhaps they were envious of Paul’s achievement in carrying the message through so many provinces in such a brief space of time and thought that they could gain a march on him now that he was confined. Perhaps they regarded themselves as followers of some other leader, to whom (in their eyes) Paul was a rival; now that Paul was no longer free to move around, their own leader’s cause could make better progress. Was there already a “Cephas” party in Rome as there had been some years earlier in Corinth (1 Cor 1:12)? [Bruce, 43]

It is true that several years earlier Paul had to deal with the “party spirit” and the divisions which were threatening to tear apart the church in Corinth. Paul had been told there were at least four different sects that were claiming, “‘I am of Paul,’ and ‘I of Apollos,’ and ‘I of Cephas,’ and ‘I of Christ’” (1 Cor 1:12). Paul’s command in response was,

“Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you” (1 Cor 1:10). Apparently there was evidence of a similar partisan spirit between the groups of believers in Rome at that time. This lack of unity among the believers in Rome would become an important theme which Paul would make the Philippians aware of in order to guard against it.

At the end of this verse Paul shared a second motivation of the believers who were sharing the gospel. He said that they were motivated by “**good will**” (*eudokia*), using a word that literally means “to think well of” something or someone. Again, this described their attitude toward Paul personally, rather than their thinking regarding the message of the gospel. These believers were preaching out of *partnership*, rather than *partisanship*. They took the position that they were fellow-partakers of grace with him in the ministry of the gospel (1:7). Paul will continue to describe them in the next verse.

Phil 1:16 - the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel;

Those who were proclaiming Christ from good motives were doing it out of “**love**” (*agapē*). As mentioned in the previous chapter, this type of love is self-sacrificing and always considers the best interests of others as its highest goal (1:9). These believers clearly understood Paul’s role in God’s plan for spreading the Word of God throughout the known world of that day. They could see that God had “**appointed**” (*keimai*) or destined Paul for the defense of the gospel (see Acts 9:15-16). The word “**defense**” (*apologia*) is a legal term which means a reasoned statement or argument. Paul’s life and message were a witness and testimony for the truth of the gospel. In one sense,

the gospel was on trial with Paul in Rome and the result of Paul's case could potentially impact every Christian. Some believers understood that they were "partakers" with Paul in the outcome of his legal defense and confirmation of the gospel (1:7). They could see the bigger picture and did everything they could to help Paul.

One commentator explains:

He had been put here not by his own miscalculations, nor by chance, but by the operation of God's sovereignty for the defense of the gospel. By ways that could never have been humanly foreseen, God had accomplished within the short space of thirty years the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ from its humble beginnings in obscure Judea to its defense before Caesar at the center of the Empire. No doubt it was with some sense of awe that Paul evaluated his situation in this manner. Recognition of the nature of Paul's imprisonment caused many stalwart Christians to respond out of love for him, to step into the breach, and to take their stand with him, eager to ensure that the Gospel did not fail to be proclaimed while Paul was in prison. [Kent, 792]

Phil 1:17 - the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.

He now returned to describing the former group of believers – those who proclaim Christ out of **"selfish ambition"** (*eritheia*). This is an interesting term which definitely has the meaning of selfishness and putting one-self forward in contention for a higher position. But it also includes the ideas of underhanded dealing, intrigue, and conspiring or "electioneering" to win an office. It implies the existence of factions, partisanship, and a party spirit within the Christian community in Rome. Paul clearly stated that this attitude was the opposite of having **"pure**

motives” (*hagnōs*), from a root word that means clean, pure, honest, holy, and sincere.

These small-minded believers were unable to see the bigger picture of God’s purpose for Paul’s imprisonment. Instead they were focusing only on themselves and what they might have to gain from his incarceration. One scholar has said, “They may have supposed that he would bitterly resent their success (just as they did his) and his imprisonment would become all the more galling to him. If so, they failed to reckon with the greatness of the man. ...He was convinced that Christ was preached even by these preachers whose motives were suspect.” [Kent, 793] The fact that Paul did not find fault with the content of their gospel preaching shows that their problem was not *doctrinal*, but *personal*.

Phil 1:18 - What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,

This verse tells us some important things about the situation in Rome at that time. First, it shows that the differences in people’s approaches were the result of their personal feelings toward Paul himself. It may have caused Paul undue pain to see others reacting to him this way, but he clearly discerned that these were personal attacks rather than involving errors in the message of the gospel itself. Second, the true gospel was being proclaimed. Those who were preaching Christ out of envy and strife (1:15) were not heretics, because Paul never would have let false teaching continue without a vehement rebuttal. As one commentator said, “The problem was not in those preachers’ theology but in their motives, not in what they preached but in why they preached it....preaching the pure

gospel from impure motives.” [MacArthur, 64, 68] This verse presented Paul’s conclusion about this situation. The most important thing to him was that, whether it was proclaimed out of envy or out of love, **“in every way... Christ is proclaimed.”**

The word **“pretense”** (*prophasis*) pictures someone who wears a mask which hides the true state of things behind it. This tells us that those who proclaimed Christ out of selfish ambition were sharing the true gospel message while putting on a righteous front that concealed their inner motives. Paul rejoiced because their wrong motivation was hidden or minimized while the gospel was clearly declared in **“truth”** (*alētheia*). As one commentator explains, “What rejoiced Paul’s heart was that Christ was being preached, even though it was from wrong motives by some. Since the content of the preaching was the same for both groups, the apostle could rejoice. He did not rejoice because there was a faction among members of Christ’s body, for this brought him grief. Instead, it was the preaching of Christ that brought him joy.” [Lightner, 651]

At the end of this verse Paul affirmed his attitude of rejoicing by repeating himself. **“Yes, and I will rejoice”** expressed his deliberate determination to rejoice in spite of the efforts of his opponents to provoke him to sorrow or distress. How he himself was being treated was not as important to him as how Christ was being proclaimed throughout the region.

Summary

The public awareness of Paul’s imprisonment became a platform for Christians to openly discuss the reason and to share the gospel with those who legitimately desired to understand. The fact that Paul was guarded day and night

by a member of the elite Praetorian Guard gave him ample opportunity to witness for Christ to a captive audience of influential people.

Some believers in Rome were preaching Christ from the hidden motive of envy or resentment for Paul. Their selfish ambition provided evidence of a party spirit in parts of the church at Rome, similar to what Paul had dealt with previously in Corinth (1 Cor 1:10-12). But Paul rejoiced that the true gospel was being proclaimed, no matter the motive.

Paul reflects on his imprisonment

(Philippians 1:19-30)

In this section of his letter, Paul will reflect on the possible outcomes of his trial in Rome. This provides rare insight into the thinking processes of a mature Christian man as he considers his circumstances in life. He will conclude this chapter by encouraging the Philippians to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the cause of Christ.

Phil 1:19 - for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

The word “**for**” (*gar*) indicates that Paul will now give an explanation for why he is able to rejoice in these circumstances. When he said “**I know**” (*oida*), he was basing his knowledge on what he had experienced during his previous years of Roman incarceration, as well as on what he had perceived from others around him at the time. It seemed to him that this entire situation would work out in a positive way. When he said “**this will turn out**” (*apobainō*) he employed a word that was used for disembarking from a ship. He pictured his current circumstances as analogous to a rough sea voyage, but that it will come to a successful conclusion when he steps out onto the shore. The word “**deliverance**” (*sōtēria*) is the normal term for “salvation” which can be used in several different ways. Paul probably has his ultimate preservation

and deliverance in mind, since in the following verses he will express uncertainty concerning the outcome of his immediate situation.

At the end of this verse Paul described the means through which he will be able to endure his current imprisonment. First, he acknowledged that he had gained strength through the prayers of his beloved brethren in Philippi. There was a way in which he was able to recognize God's hand in his situation which could only be explained as an answer to the prayers of others. Second, Paul understood that his ability to cope with his imprisonment was in direct proportion to the ways in which the indwelling Holy Spirit supplied grace and peace. Just as he had prayed for the Philippians that they would be "filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ" (1:11), Paul knew that he himself needed exactly the same fruit of righteousness in his life if he were to endure his present circumstances.

Phil 1:20 - according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

In this section of his letter Paul revealed his thoughts about the outcome of his trial in the court of Rome. He stated his "**earnest expectation**" (*apokaradokia*), which is an intensified form of a compound word from "head" (*kara*) and "to think or suppose" (*dokeō*). Paul was saying that it seemed reasonable from his personal viewpoint to hope that "this will turn out for my deliverance" (1:19). Specifically, he anticipated that he would not "**be put to shame**" (*aischunomai*). He hoped that there would be nothing that would bring shame on his work for

God and that he would live up to God's work in him.

The last part of this verse expressed a direct contrast with the first: “**in nothing, shame**” but “**in everything, boldness**.” As Paul looked forward to his trial he desired to speak the truth and to maintain his convictions with all “**boldness**” (*parrhēsia*), which expresses confidence in speaking. Whatever happened, he desired that Christ would be “**exalted**” (*megalonō*), which has the idea of magnifying or extolling His greatness. In the last phrase Paul shared the two possible outcomes of his trial: “**whether by life or by death**.” This is the first time in this letter that Paul mentioned that he could be executed as a subversive influence on Roman society and a disturber of the *pax romana* (Roman peace). It is clear that he was not certain about how his case would turn out. He might be acquitted and released, or the decision could go against him and he might be executed. Upon saying this, Paul felt led to share even more about his thought process in regard to his future.

Phil 1:21 - For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

If he were acquitted and released, he would continue living for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. He would give God all the credit and praise for his physical deliverance, and he would renew his devoted service in the cause of Christ. As someone once said, “He has no thought of living apart from Christ.” In living for Christ, Paul would seek to know Him more intimately and to imitate His character more fully in order to bring more glory to Him.

We might have expected Paul to say, “to live is Christ and to die is Christ,” since that is a perfectly true sentiment. In either case, whether he lives or dies, all is of

Christ. But in the final phrase Paul declared that “to die is **gain**” (*kerdos*), using commercial terminology which can mean interest earned on money lent, or profit secured and advantage gained. Using this illustration from business and finance, Paul pictured cashing in both his principal and his interest in order to have even more of Christ than when he was living. As one commentator explained, “The meaning is, there would be an advantage in dying above that of living. Important benefits would result to him personally, should he die; and the only reason why he should wish at all to live was that he might be the means of benefiting others.” [Barnes, 156] Some of the advantages gained through departing include being set free from the sin nature, from fleshly temptations, from sickness and pain, from attack by Satan, from grief and sadness, and from the fear of death itself.

Phil 1:22 - But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose.

In this verse Paul shared what would result from continuing his life and ministry. Literally he wrote, “to live in the flesh [is] to me a fruit of work, but what I will prefer I know not.” He acknowledged the positive benefit of future efforts to bear more fruit for Christ, but in light of his comment about the advantages of being with Christ after death (1:21), he is unsure which he would choose if the choice were actually up to him.

Phil 1:23-24 - But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

Here Paul wrote that both of these options were pressing in on him. His “**desire**” (*epithumia*), yearning, or eager longing was to “**depart**” (*analuō*), which pictures the act of weighing anchor and putting out to sea in a sailing ship. The joys of being in the presence of Christ forever reflect his deepest desire, and he described that choice as “**very much better**” (*kreisson*), which means more profitable, advantageous, or excellent from Paul’s personal perspective.

But the contrasting option was “**to remain on**” (*epimenō*), which is a compound word that carries the idea of prolonging a stay or continuing to persevere. The advantage of this option is that it is “**more necessary**” (*anagkaios*) for the sake of others. The first option would be advantageous for Paul, while the second option would be advantageous to others. One commentator has said that Paul “was the last man to put his own interests or preferences before the advantage of others. He enjoins on his readers consideration for the good of others in 2:4; the injunction would not have carried much weight if they had not known of the example that he himself set.” [Bruce, 52] It was a difficult dilemma for Paul, and given the choice he would struggle to make the right decision. Thankfully the choice was never up to Paul.

Phil 1:25 - Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith,

When Paul considered that remaining in the flesh would be of more benefit to others, it seemed that the choice would be clear. He would be amenable to either option, but his reasoning had “**convinced**” (*peithō*) or persuaded him that the best choice would probably be for him to “**continue**” (*paramenō*) or remain alongside his

beloved brethren for a while longer. “It was not that he considered himself indispensable, but rather that he was convinced that his ministry to them was not yet complete.” [MacArthur, 81]

The two benefits Paul identified in this verse are their “progress and joy in the faith.” The word “**progress**” (*prokopē*) is the same one he had used in 1:12 when he said that his circumstances had turned out for “the greater progress of the gospel.” As it did there, here it pictures cutting or beating a path forward in order to advance or make headway. The Christian life is a journey which involves continual spiritual growth, sometimes in the face of obstacles and difficulties. There is always more to understand and apply in a life that seeks to be increasingly pleasing to the Lord. The experience of “**joy**” (*chara*) is the result of making progress in the faith, and a growing sense of intimacy with God brings joy. This is such an important goal that Paul would be willing to remain and continue with his beloved brethren in order to help them achieve further progress in the Lord.

Phil 1:26 - so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

If Paul were finally acquitted and released, he would plan to come to them again in Philippi. Such an outcome would be an answer to their prayers, and it would be an occasion for their “**proud confidence**” (*kauchēma*), which means they would have a reason for abundant glorying, boasting, and exultation in Christ Jesus. Although the Book of Acts comes to an end before we hear the outcome of Paul’s first trial in Rome, there are other references which indicate that Paul was indeed acquitted and released. One scholar provided biblical evidence that Paul

did actually visit the Philippians after his first imprisonment.

Having come to the conclusion that his continued life and ministry on earth are more needful than to depart to be with Christ, he proceeds confidently to assert his assurance of his acquittal at his coming trial, which would permit him to continue his ministry to the Philippians and others. In other words, because staying would be more helpful than going to heaven, Paul is assured of his release and his continual ministry....This is not so much prophetic insight as human judgment; but, according to 1 Timothy 1:3, he fulfilled his purpose to revisit Macedonia....There is considerable evidence that he fulfilled a fourth missionary journey....References to a visit to Crete (Titus 1:5), the winter in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12), the trip to Macedonia which is not mentioned in Acts (1 Tim 1:3), the visit to Troas and Miletus (2 Tim 4:13-20), all support this view. [Walvoord, 43, 44]

Phil 1:27 - Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

In the final verses of this chapter Paul turned from discussing his own situation to focusing on how his Philippian readers (and we too) should conduct themselves. To **“conduct yourselves”** (*politeuomai*) is from a word that literally means “to behave as a citizen” and to live according to the laws and principles of one’s governing authority. As a proud Roman colony, the citizens of Philippi would have immediately grasped the implications of this term. The phrase **“in a manner worthy”** (*axiōs*) carries the idea of acting suitably, appropriately, or in correspondence with **“the gospel of Christ.”** They are to behave like citizens of the heavenly empire to which they now be-

long in Christ.

Paul again mentioned two possible outcomes of his own situation, and here he said that whether he was with them or apart from them he hoped to hear that they were “**standing firm**” (*stēkō*) and “**striving together**” (*synathleō*). These two verbs express the actions that Paul wanted them to take. “**Standing firm**” pictures the foundation of a building that is firmly established, well grounded, and immovable. “**Striving together**” is a term from the athletic games in which a team coordinates their strength and efforts to fight or work side by side in order to win a contest. He wanted the Philippians to stand their ground and strive together for the “**the gospel of Christ**” and “**the faith of the gospel.**” In their objective sense, these phrases identify the teaching or truths of the faith. One commentator of a previous century expressed it this way:

There is a way of living which is appropriate to the gospel, or which is such as the gospel requires. There is something which the gospel would secure as its proper fruits in all our conduct, and by which our lives should be regulated. It would distinguish us from the frivolous, and from those who seek honor and wealth as their supreme object. If all Christians were under the influence of the gospel, there would be something in their dress, temper, conversation, and aims, which would distinguish them from others....If people live as “becometh the gospel,” they live well. Their lives are honest and honorable; they are people of truth and uprightness; they will have no sources of regret when they die, and they will not give occasion to their friends to hang their heads with shame in the remembrance of them. No man on a dying bed ever yet regretted that he had framed his life by the rules of the gospel, or felt that his conduct had been conformed too much to it. [Barnes, 160]

Paul also mentioned the important attitudes that will facilitate their standing firm and striving together for the faith. He said they were to be **“in one spirit, with one mind.”** He used the numeral **“one”** (*heis*) for both of these characteristics, and this emphasized the unity in which they were to stand and strive. They were to be motivated by a single **“spirit”** (*pneuma*), which can refer either to the unified guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit or to the unity of their own human spirits, which would be the ultimate result of the Spirit’s fruit in their individual lives.

They were also to act **“with one mind”** (*psuchē*), using a word that means the human soul. The soul encompasses several aspects of a person, including the mind, will, and emotions. Paul was urging them to have a single-minded focus in striving together to represent the faith of the gospel. The subject of unity within the body of Christ is the important topic that Paul will address in the following chapter of his letter.

Phil 1:28 - in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God.

In this verse Paul explained that the contest in which they are striving will almost certainly have **“opponents”** (*antikeimai*) or adversaries that they will need to resist and overcome. Because they are standing firmly on the truth, they should not be **“alarmed”** (*pturō*), startled, or frightened by opposition, and they should not be taken by surprise when it happens. Active opposition to God’s truth will only result in **“destruction”** (*apōleia*), which is a word that means ruin or loss, whether physical or spiritual, temporal or eternal. Those who may fight against believers in Christ are in reality fighting against Christ

Himself, and that is a losing battle for them. Their opposition to the truth is a clear “**sign**” (*endeixis*), evidence, or proof that they are on the road to destruction, but it also functions as a sign “**from God**” of the “**salvation**” (*sōtēria*) or deliverance of those who are contending for the truth.

Phil 1:29-30 - For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

In this verse Paul continued his thought from the previous verse. The word “**For**” (*hoti*) is usually translated “because,” so here Paul provided the reason for the opposition he mentioned in the previous verse. He said that “**it has been granted**” (*charizomai*), using a word that means a gracious gift from God. In God’s sovereign grace, He grants that not only were they to believe in Christ for salvation, but they were also called to stand firm in the truth to the point of suffering affliction for their faith if necessary.

In this last verse of the chapter Paul offered himself as a personal example of the truth he had just shared. Those who put their faith in Christ and stand up for the truth are likely to “**experience**” (*echō*, literally “to have”) similar conflicts. The word “**conflict**” (*agōn*) is another term from the olympic or gladiatorial games, and it is the source of our English word “agony.” In the case of the Philippians, they had been eyewitnesses of Paul’s suffering when he first arrived in Philippi (Acts 16:16-24), as well as being aware of his current circumstances under Roman confinement awaiting trial for the sake of the gospel (Acts 28:30-31). Paul was preparing them to be

willing to experience suffering, if necessary, in the continuing cause of Christ.

Summary

In this section of the first chapter of Paul's letter he provided a stellar example of how a Christian should live, even in circumstances that are extremely difficult or uncertain. He was in a situation where it would have been natural to feel despondent and to express bitterness. But Paul was able to maintain a remarkable purity of spirit, and this was a positive testimony to everyone who came into contact with him. He was about to be put on trial for his life, and the outcome was unknown. As one commentator has said, "He was surrounded with enemies, and there were not a few false friends and rivals who took advantage of his imprisonment to diminish his influence and to extend their own. He was, perhaps, about to die; and at any rate, was in such circumstances as to be under a necessity of looking death in the face." [Barnes, 162] But, far from being disheartened, Paul was grateful and joyful in the midst of his difficulties. He was ready to accept either outcome – to die and be with Christ, or to live and continue ministry for the glory of Christ. Rather than focusing on his own situation, he was constantly concerned about what would be best for others. He encourages the Philippians (and us) to be united in spirit so that great things can be accomplished for the Lord.

Christ's example of selflessness

(Philippians 2:1-11)

Paul had just finished sharing some of the things that had occurred in the Christian community at Rome where he was being detained pending his trial before the emperor. One of the issues he described was evidence of selfish ambition and partisanship among some of the believers in Rome. He said that they were “preaching Christ even from envy and strife” (1:15), hoping “to cause me distress in my imprisonment” (1:17). In light of that negative example, Paul admonished the Philippians to stand firm “in one spirit, with one mind striving together” in unity (1:27). The low standard of Christian unity that Paul had just seen in Rome will prompt him to exhort the Philippians to greater unity in their fellowship.

Phil 2:1 - Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,

The word “**therefore**” connects what Paul will say here with what he had just said in the previous chapter. He began this section in somewhat dramatic fashion by making four declarations in the form of conditional clauses (“**if**”). In each case, these are Greek first class conditions, often called “conditions of fact” because they are assumed to be true. Each of these “**if**” statements could be rephrased as follows:

“if any encouragement in Christ” (*paraklēsis*) – It is true that “in Christ” you have been urged forward in your spiritual life. Jesus Himself also exhorted believers toward love and unity (e.g., John 13:34-35; 15:12-13, 17).

“if any consolation of love” (*paramuthion*) – It is true that from God’s kind of selfless love you have experienced gentle comfort which provides an incentive for action.

“if any fellowship of the Spirit” (*koinōnia*) – It is true that from the Holy Spirit you have experienced communion with God and sharing in common with other Christians.

“if any affections and mercies” (*oiktirmos*) – It is true that you have experienced heartfelt affection and abundant mercies both from God and from other believers.

Since all of the conditions presented in these “if” statements (*protasis*) have been amply met, we would expect them to be followed by the consequent result (*apodosis*). These present blessings are the basis of Paul’s appeals in the next verse. One scholar summarized this verse: “A Christian who is exhorted by Christ, encouraged by the knowledge of His love, experiencing fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and possessing a true heart of compassion and attitude of mercy is equipped to realize spiritual unity.” [Walvoord, 50]

Phil 2:2 - make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

The conditional clauses in 2:1 set up a logical sequence: “If a condition is true, and it is true, then this will result.” Here in this verse Paul presents the logical conclusion.

The Philippians need to follow through by obeying the command that Paul will give in this verse. They should **“make complete”** (*plēroō*) Paul’s joy, which is an imperative that depicts a cup being filled to overflowing. Here Paul shared four important aspects for discharging this duty, and they are listed along with a literal translation.

“being of the same mind” - “continually think the same” (*phroneō*, present tense verb).

“maintaining the same love” - “the same love having” (*agapē*, “selfless dedication”).

“united in spirit” - “souls together” (*sumpsuchos*, adjective).

“intent on one purpose” - “one-minded” (*phroneō*, participle).

These aspects of the Philippians’ unity are a more important result than increasing Paul’s joy. His joy might be a peripheral benefit, but the Philippians’ efforts should be focused on the four items Paul listed at the end of this verse. As one commentator has said, “On the basis of what was presented in 2:1, Paul exhorted his readers to show in practical ways the unity which was theirs in Christ. Their expression of that spiritual unity would make his joy complete. Corresponding to the four realities in verse 1 are four specific ways in which their spiritual unity would be realized. They would be like-minded, have the same love, be one in spirit, and be one in purpose.” [Lightner, 653] All of these things are involved in the challenging work of building a growing unity of heart, mind, and spirit within the body of Christ.

Phil 2:3 - Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

The first part of this verse in the Greek text does not have any verb, and the nearest previous verb is “*continually think*” (*phroneō*) from 2:2. We could put this sentence together in this way: “[thinking] **not according to selfishness nor according to self-esteem.**” It is particularly important to connect this sentence to the previous verb (“think”) because it places this exhortation squarely into the realm of the believers’ thought life and mindset. Our *doing* flows from our *thinking*, so Christian unity is primarily a matter of thinking in the correct way about ourselves and others.

As Paul often does, here he presented the negative aspect first, followed by the positive aspect of our thinking. We are “**not**” to think according to “**selfishness**” (*eritheia*), which is the same word he had used in 1:17 (“**selfish ambition**”). As it did there, here it means self-centeredness or putting oneself forward in contention for a better position. This can involve manipulative behavior in order to gain a superior place, and it implies the existence of rivalry within the body of Christ. Paul added that we are “**not**” to think according to “**empty conceit**” (*kenodoxia*), using a compound word from *kenos* (“empty or fruitless”) and *doxa* (“glory or honor”). This term carries the ideas of pride, conceit, self-love, self-centeredness, and egotistical vanity that ultimately is fruitless, worthless, or void of meaning. In Paul’s words, this kind of pride is “**empty**,” foolish, and even dangerous. Unfortunately, these negative ways of thinking about ourselves come naturally to our sin nature and are the normal reaction when believers act according to the fleshly mind.

By contrast (“**but**” *alla*), believers are to cultivate “**humility of mind**” (*tapeinophrosunē*), which is a compound word meaning lowly-minded. It is interesting to note that in secular society at that time this term had a negative connotation (“low-minded or having a malicious, petty spirit”), which is quite the opposite of its meaning among believers. As one scholar explained, “Humility was not generally esteemed a virtue in pagan antiquity, in which the Greek word here translated ‘humility’ bears the meaning ‘mean-spiritedness.’ The Old Testament attitude is different: God ‘mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble’ (Prov 3:34, quoted in James 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5).” [Bruce, 62] So this is an example of a term that was appropriated by the writers of the New Testament for a more noble purpose.

Paul goes on to define “**humility of mind**” by saying that it consists of “**regarding one another as more important than yourselves.**” The word “**regard**” (*hēgeomai*) is an interesting choice because it typically means “to lead the way or to take the lead,” which would seem to put it in opposition to the meaning Paul wanted to communicate. But *hēgeomai* can also be used figuratively, “to give something a leading place in one’s thoughts,” and that is the way it is intended here, almost as a play on words. Believers are to give others a leading place in their thoughts and consideration. They are to regard others as “**more important**” (*huperechō*), a word that has the thought of giving others superiority or considering them to be above or better than ourselves. One commentator said, “Such unity involves a deep and passionate concern for God, His Word, His work, His gospel, and His people. No two Christians – no matter what their level of spiritual maturity and knowledge of Scripture – will understand everything exactly alike. But if they are

controlled by humility and love, they will be genuinely united in spirit. They will not allow inconsequential differences to divide them or to hinder their service for the Lord.” [MacArthur, 108]

Phil 2:4 - do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

In this verse Paul went on to describe the practical outworking of the unselfish attitude of humility which he expressed in the previous verse. The original American Standard Version (ASV) gave a more literal translation: “not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others” (present continuous action). To “**look out**” (*skopeō*) is a term that means to fix one’s eyes, direct one’s attention, and take notice of something. Many modern Bible versions include the idea that believers should look to their own as well as to others’ interests. Even though one’s own basic needs should be looked after, that is not the focus here. The only word in the original text which might provide support for looking to one’s personal interests is the conjunction *kai* that can be translated in a variety of ways (“and, even, also”). However, the teaching of this verse is that believers are to put the interests of others ahead of their own. This is one of the ways in which believers “regard one another as more important than yourselves” (2:3).

Like the other principles mentioned here, looking out for the interests of others is indispensable for spiritual unity. Also like them, it requires deliberate and persistent effort to apply sincerely and unconditionally. And although the meaning is obvious and easy to understand, it is difficult to apply. It is the practical outcome of the exceedingly difficult command to regard others as more important than ourselves. [MacArthur, 114-115]

Phil 2:5 - Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

Starting in this verse Paul will share his supreme example of an unselfish attitude of humility. So far this entire chapter has been focused on the believers' mindset and thinking, so here also he used the present tense imperative of the verb *phroneō* ("to think"). Paul commanded them to continually think, keep in mind, or have a specific "**attitude**" – the same attitude which was personified in the example of Christ Jesus. In verses 6 through 8, Paul will describe the specific ways in which Christ exemplified this attitude of humility of mind.

The concepts that Paul will discuss in these few verses are deep and profound, to the point of being almost incomprehensible to the human mind. In this brief hymn on Christology, Paul will dance around the edge of a deep well, touching on the inscrutable essence of the Triune God. He will hint at the unfathomable dual natures of Jesus Christ, referred to by theologians as the "hypostatic union" of the divine and human in a single person simultaneously. Even though we may not be able to fully grasp the intricacies of these concepts, we should clearly understand that the incarnation of Jesus Christ is the ultimate illustration of humility of mind, which is the point that Paul is making in this section.

Phil 2:6 - who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

This verse focuses on the divine nature of Christ Jesus before His incarnation. Paul said, "**He existed**" (*hyparchō*), using a word that means "to exist in the beginning," and it is in the present tense which indicates that His ex-

istence is continuous or perpetual. Paul could have used the Greek word *eimi* (“to be”), but instead he chose a word that speaks of the divine nature or essence which belonged to Christ from before the world began.

When we see the English word “**form**” it is almost impossible for us not to think of the external shape or appearance of something, but that is not how the original Greek word (*morphē*) is used here. Paul is using this term to describe the essence or nature of Christ Jesus as God. This is a clear statement of the absolute deity of Christ. He has always existed as fully God. To use the words of the Nicene Creed, Jesus is “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.” This verse clearly states that Christ has the exact nature and being of God, rather than merely resembling or representing God somehow. The complete deity of Christ Jesus is essential to Paul’s argument here. If we do not understand this point, then the rest of Paul’s illustration will make no sense.

The first part of this verse stated that Jesus has always existed as God, or using the words of Paul from the second part of this verse, Christ Jesus has always had “**equality with God.**” In the second half of this verse we see the first hint of the attitude of selfless humility that Paul wanted to illustrate from the life of Christ. Even though He is fully divine, with all the rights and privileges He possesses, He did not regard His position as “a thing to be grasped.” The word “**regard**” (*hēgeomai*) is the same term Paul used in 2:3 where he said that believers are to “regard one another as more important than yourselves.” As it did there, here it means to give others a leading place in one’s thoughts. Even though Christ Jesus is in every way the absolute sovereign leader or ruler of

the universe, He had an attitude which gave the needs of others a leading place in His own thoughts and actions. In His mind He did not consider His position (“equality with God”) to be a **“thing to be grasped”** (*harpagmos*). This noun identifies something to be seized upon or to be held fast and retained for oneself.

How many of us, when we have attained a certain position, status, or achievement, would be willing to hold those things in an open hand and, if required, would do something totally out of character for a person of our stature in order to meet the needs of others? Most of us would probably defend our hard-won position and would be unwilling to sacrifice any of the rights and privileges that we possess as a result. However, that is not consistent with the example Paul illustrated for us here from the life of Christ Jesus.

Phil 2:7 - but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

In verses 7 and 8 Paul will explain the actions that Jesus took as a result of the unselfish attitude described in verses 5 and 6. There are two parallel verbs in these two verses, “emptied Himself” (2:7) and “humbled Himself” (2:8), and they both express a definite point-in-time action (aorist tense). Note that Christ Jesus took these actions voluntarily, and Paul is exhorting the Philippian to have a similar attitude so that they take corresponding actions voluntarily. The message of Paul’s magnificent description of the example of Jesus Christ is that, although the essential nature of created human beings is quite different than that of Christ, even we can strive to have the same attitude and take similar types of actions that are consistent with our capacity as redeemed people.

In verse 7 Paul shared the first action taken by Christ when he declared that He “**emptied Himself**” (*kenoō*). This Greek verb literally does mean “to empty,” but it also can be used figuratively to mean “to bring to nothing, to make worthless, void, useless, or without effect.” Many Bible versions translate this word simply as “emptied” (ASV, NASB, LSB, ESV, CSB, RSV, NET), but several translate it figuratively (KJV, NKJV, NIV, NLT). This word occurs five times in the New Testament and in each case a figurative sense is used. The intended meaning of *kenoō* here must be consistent with the thought in verse 6, that He did not consider His position (“equality with God”) a “thing to be grasped.” The KJV accurately renders it as “He made himself of no reputation.”

If we say that Christ “emptied Himself,” it causes us to wonder what Christ emptied Himself of, or what parts of His divine nature Christ gave up at the incarnation. But those are the wrong questions to ask. Christ Jesus did not give up any aspect of His divine nature when He added a human nature. Although He has always existed and will continue to exist in the “**form of God**” (divine essence), Christ Jesus took on the additional “**form of a bond-servant**” (sinless humanity). In both cases the Greek word “**form**” (*morphē*) means the essential nature, here of both divinity and humanity. The text of this verse does not say that Christ traded the “form of God” for the “form of a servant.” On the contrary, it indicates that while remaining in the form of God He added the form of a servant. As one scholar explained, “The one who was existing in the form of God took on the form or nature of a servant. The word ‘taking’ does not imply an exchange, but rather an addition. The form of God could not be given up, for God cannot cease to be God; but our Lord could and did take on the very form of a lowly servant when he

entered human life in his incarnation.” [Kent, 797] The word “**taking**” (*lambanō*) is in the same tense as the main verb, which indicates that it occurred simultaneously. In what may appear to be a contradictory expression, we could say that Christ’s “emptying” involved *taking* something to Himself, so that in addition to His divine nature He also took on the nature of sinless humanity.

One of the problems we have with these concepts is that it is almost impossible for our limited and fallen human minds to logically reconcile how a single person could have two such different natures at the same time. It is a similar dilemma to the one we face when we attempt to understand the three-in-one nature of the Godhead, eternally existing as one God in three persons (Father, Son, and Spirit). The Scriptures tell us that these things are true, and we must believe them even though we do not fully comprehend them. As one commentator has summarized:

The Son of God as one Person possessed of two natures determined according to the eternal counsels of the Godhead to draw upon the attributes inherent in His divine nature only as such was clearly the will of the Father. And although “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in Him,” He determined during the brief span of His earthly career to employ those treasures only when, where, and in a manner ordained by the Father, as mediated through the Holy Spirit. “I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things” (John 5:19). See also John 8:28; 11:15; Mark 13:32. This is the true meaning of the Kenosis. [Horne, 28]

Paul presented three participial phrases to explain the effect of Christ’s “emptying.” The first, “**taking the form of a bond-servant**,” included the idea of servanthood which involves submission to the will of another. During His time on earth, Jesus’ relationship to the Father was

characterized by submission to the Father's authority (John 5:30; 6:38). The second phrase, **"being made in the likeness of men,"** includes the idea of Christ's incarnation. **"Being made"** (*ginomai*) probably refers to His physical birth, as the same term is used to describe His birth in Galatians 4:4, **"born"** of a woman (*ginomai*). The word **"likeness"** (*homoioōma*) means something that is made like or similar to something else. As one commentator stated, "Likeness suggests similarity but difference. Though His humanity was genuine, He was different from all other humans in that He was sinless (Heb 4:15)."

[Lightner, 654]

Phil 2:8 - Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Here Paul shared the third participial phrase describing the result of Christ's "emptying." The word translated **"being found"** (*heuriskō*) means to find out by experience, to come to know or recognize through discovery. His **"appearance"** (*schēma*) as a man speaks of how He was perceived by others during His earthly life. The great Reformation scholar John Calvin noted that Christ could not divest himself of Godhead, but he kept it concealed for a time under His humanity. To everyone who saw Him or knew Him, Jesus appeared to be fully human in all respects. He veiled the manifestation and glory of His deity behind His form as a human being whose purpose was to serve others. There were some moments when Jesus allowed glimpses of His deity, for example, when He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, cast out demons, turned water into wine, stilled the waves during a storm, raised the dead, and manifested His glory briefly on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-9). But in general, in the

words of one commentator, “He was so obviously like other human beings that even His family and disciples would not have known of His deity had not the angels (Matt 1:20-21; Luke 1:26-35; 2:9-11), God the Father (Matt 3:17; 17:5), and Jesus Himself (John 8:58; 14:1-4; 16:13-15; 17:1-26) revealed it to them. And despite His countless miracles, His enemies rejected the idea of His deity out of hand. In their eyes, He not only was merely human but the lowest kind of human, a blasphemer (John 5:18; 10:33).” [MacArthur, 130]

There was nothing special in the appearance of Jesus’ humanity that would have been considered remarkable to those with whom He came in contact. In the words of Isaiah 53:2-3, “For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” Everything that others would see in Him would have corresponded to normal humanity, with the exception of the fact that He did not have a sin nature and He never sinned.

In verse 7 the primary verb stated that He “emptied” Himself, and here at the end of verse 8 we see the second controlling verb: “**He humbled Himself.**” In verse 7 Paul explained that Christ took on humanity, so here in verse 8 he goes further to describe Christ’s additional humiliation in His humanity. As one commentator said, “A deliberate act of self-humiliation is indicated; there is little difference between ‘he humbled himself’ here and ‘he made himself nothing’ in verse 7, unless it be that ‘he

made himself nothing' in becoming man and then, having become man, 'he humbled himself further.' His whole life from the manger to the tomb was marked by genuine humility." [Bruce, 71]

In His form as a bond-servant He voluntarily subjected Himself to the commands of the Father. He not only obeyed all of those commands, but He became **"obedient to the point of death."** This was the ultimate purpose for which He had come. Jesus was willing to sacrifice His life for the good of others. Mankind finds itself in a hopeless situation. Since the Fall (Gen 3), all people are sinners by nature as well as expressing that nature through sinful thoughts, words, and deeds (Rom 5:12). Sin against a holy God requires atonement, and death is the penalty for unrighteousness. But only the sacrifice of a man would be accepted on behalf of men. In God's sovereign wisdom and plan, He became man in order to do for mankind what they could not do for themselves. He would reconcile sinful man to a holy God by sacrificing His own life (Heb 2:14-17).

The **"death"** (*thanatos*) Paul mentioned here included both physical and spiritual aspects. Death by definition means separation, and physical death involves separation of the immaterial part of a person from the material part (Luke 23:46). But Christ's death was also spiritual since it involved complete separation from the Father during the process of atoning for the sins of the world (Matt. 27:46). "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). The only person who was without sin humbly sacrificed Himself by dying on behalf of sinners. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor

5:21).

However, His was no ordinary death. It was “**death on a cross.**” Crucifixion was the most torturous and painful death known to man. One scholar commented, “It is difficult for us, after so many Christian centuries during which the cross has been venerated as a sacred symbol, to realize the unspeakable horror and disgust that the mention or indeed the very thought of the cross provoked....In polite Roman society the word ‘cross’ was an obscenity, not to be uttered in conversation. Even when a man was being sentenced to death by crucifixion, an archaic formula was used that avoided the pronouncing of this four-letter word – as it was in Latin (*crux*). This utterly vile form of punishment was that which Jesus endured.” [Bruce, 71]

Even worse than the excruciating agony, Christ endured the divine curse (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13). God the Father turned His back on the eternal Son of God who had taken upon Himself the sins of the world. In the continuing words of Isaiah 53:4-6, “Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.”

Phil 2:9 - For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

The final verses in this section tell the rest of the story. Christ's death and burial were followed by His resurrection and ascension. The phrase "**highly exalted**" (*huperupsoō*) is an intensified form of a word that means "to lift up on high, to raise to a position of dignity and honor." In the continuing words of Isaiah 53:11-12, "My Servant will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors." Ultimately, God the Father answered Jesus' prayer when He asked the Father, "glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5). One commentator clarified this by saying, "The exaltation which Christ experienced when He went to heaven was not only the resumption of the glory which He had before the incarnation (Jn 17:5), but the added glory of triumph over sin, suffering and death, and the fulfillment of God that in His death He would reconcile the world unto Himself (2 Cor 5:19)." [Walvoord, 58] As we will see in the following verses, Christ Jesus was highly exalted to a unique position at the head of the universe.

Upon the exaltation of Christ, God "**bestowed on Him the name which is above every name.**" In ancient cultures the name represented much more than simply identifying an individual. Besides designating a person, the "**name**" communicated the person's character, reputation, dignity, achievements, rank, or position. In the case of the name of God, it stood for deity in all its expressions. So it is not merely the name that is bestowed on Christ, but Christ is given everything that accompanies the name which is above every other name in the uni-

verse. This includes all of the glory, power, position, and authority that are required in order to occupy the highest place. When this verse speaks of the “**name**” it encompasses everything that a preeminent name represents.

Phil 2:10-11 - so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The final two verses in this section describe the actions that will be taken or enforced as a consequence of Jesus’ exalted position of preeminence over the universe. First, “**EVERY KNEE WILL BOW**,” which the NASB version prints in uppercase letters to indicate that this phrase is a quote from the Old Testament. Isaiah 45:22-23 says, “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.” Paul also quoted from this passage in Romans 14:11.

From ancient times, kneeling before someone was an outward sign acknowledging the authority and power of that person over one’s life. As if the word “**every**” (*pas*, “all, the whole, everyone”) were not enough, Paul added “**of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth.**” These three categories encompass everything, indicating that the scope of this submission to Christ’s authority will be universal. As someone once said, this will apply equally to all rational beings, whether celestial, terrestrial or infernal.

In verse 11 Paul concluded his thought, in a paraphrase of Isaiah 45:23, by adding that **“every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”** As noted previously, this will apply equally to **“every”** (*pas*) creature with the power of speech. Not only will there be universal kneeling in acknowledgement of Christ’s sovereignty, but also there will be outward public confession and open declarations from all in agreement with the truth of Christ’s supremacy. The word **“confess”** (*exomologeō*) is an intensified form of a term that literally means “to say the same thing or agree.” Here it means to confess, profess, or acknowledge open agreement with what God the Father has declared to be true about Christ the Son.

The ultimate result will be **“the glory of God the Father.”** The greatest glory that can be given to God the Father is to agree with His declaration concerning God the Son. To glorify one member of the Godhead is to glorify all. Jesus declared the mutual glory that was shared within the Godhead when He said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately” (John 13:31-32). This is a sublime picture of the glory that will be acknowledged by all in submission to the righteous authority of God.

Summary

In this section the apostle Paul set out to exhort the Philippians toward greater unity with one another. It would require a lifetime of effort for a believer to attempt to put into practice only one of his commands: “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves” (2:3). Paul briefly mentioned but did not expound

upon the complexities of the relationships within the Godhead and the dual divine/human natures within the single person of Christ. But it seems that when Paul looked to Christ as the prime illustration of unselfish humility, he simply could not speak of Him without at least touching on some of these things. It is noteworthy that the simple qualities of Christian humility and unity (2:3-4) are connected to some of the deepest and most profound theological truths (2:5-8).

One scholar summarized by saying, “The act of incarnation in which God became a man, the humble circumstances and sufferings of Christ in life, and the supreme act of dying on the cross established Jesus Christ as the greatest illustration of one completely unselfish and entirely devoted to others.” [Walvoord, 52] Although the theological truths in this section are magnificent, we should not forget that Paul was using them to urge the Philippians (and us) to avoid selfish ambition by considering the needs of others to take priority over their own. If Christ could step down from the glories of heaven to sacrifice Himself for us, then surely we should be able to do something much smaller and more insignificant by yielding our rights for the good of others.

Models of selfless service

(Philippians 2:12-30)

As we saw in the last section, Paul began chapter two by urging the Philippians toward greater unity with one another for the sake of Christ. He presented the Lord Jesus as the greatest example of complete unselfishness in sacrificial love for others. Now in this section Paul will continue his exhortation to unity among the believers by sharing three additional examples of selfless service on behalf of others.

Phil 2:12 - 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;

The words “**so then**” (*hōste*) can be translated “consequently.” As a follow-up to what he had just said, Paul declared, “Here is what I want you to do in light of Christ’s example of selfless sacrifice for others.” He addressed them as “**beloved**” (*agapētos*), which expressed the deep love and tenderness he felt for the Philippian believers. This was the first time he used this term of address, but he will continue to have his love for them in mind throughout the rest of this letter (see 4:1).

Next he will speak about their obedience, saying that they had a consistent history of obedience whether he was present with them or not. The word “**obeyed**” (*hupak-*

ouō) literally means “to hear under,” especially in the case of someone under authority who listens attentively in order to carry out the commands of a superior. Ultimately, their superior is God and the commands are contained in the Word of God. But God had put Paul into a position of authority in their lives, and as he shared God’s commands with them, they had always obeyed what he had spoken or written to them. This will give Paul the confidence to write several more imperatives in this letter.

This epistle was written to a specific audience, that is, to “saints” (1:1; 4:21-22), “brethren” (1:12, 14; 3:1, 13, 17; 4:1, 8, 21), or believers who already had put their faith and trust in Christ alone and have eternal salvation through Him. The command Paul included in this verse, which he anticipates they will obey, is to “**work out your salvation.**” The phrase “**work out**” (*katergazomai*) is an intensified form of a word that means to do, to produce, or to bring forth a result. This verb is a present tense imperative, which implies continuous or habitual action, so they are to constantly put their faith into practice so that others will see the results in the fruit of their lives. But if these saints already have “**salvation**” (*sōtēria*), what does it mean to continue working out their salvation?

There are three phases in our experience of salvation, which can be illustrated by the three grammatical tenses of verbs (past, present, and future). The first phase of salvation begins at the moment when people understand the message of the gospel, believe it to be true, and put their complete trust in what Christ accomplished to pay sin’s penalty by dying in their place. At the moment of salvation, God provides many things for the believer such as justification and reconciliation with Himself. The righteousness of Christ is applied to the believer, and from that

moment on he has salvation from the penalty of sin. This corresponds to what happened in the ***past*** for the Philipian believers to whom Paul was writing. The final or ***future*** phase of salvation will occur at their glorification when Christ resurrects and transforms believers, giving them a glorified existence and immortality at the day of Christ (Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16; 1 Cor 15:50-58).

The middle or ***present*** phase of salvation involves the ongoing process of continuing to learn about God and His ways, growing spiritually, and seeking to bring their daily lives into alignment with the character of Christ (1 Pet 1:13-15). This is often referred to as the *sanctification* of the believer, where faith begins to work itself out and become increasingly evident in the thoughts, words, and actions of the saints. This is the phase or aspect of salvation that Paul is referring to in this verse. The implications of our restored relationship with God will work themselves out in a believer's behavior and conduct before a watching world.

At the end of this verse Paul shared one motivation for doing what he has commanded. Because a believer has chosen to submit himself to the authority of God, he becomes aware of God's character and the standard of holiness that God requires. But even though believers have been reconciled to God and are renewed in spirit, they still exist in a fallen body of flesh whose thoughts, words, and deeds lean in the opposite direction from what God desires. Paul admitted his own struggle in this conflict between the flesh and the spirit (Rom 7:15-25). A believer's awareness of this struggle creates a degree of anxiety, or as Paul said here, "**fear** (*phobos*) and **trembling** (*tromos*).\" This \"fear\" is a reverential awe which results from respect for a holy God, but it also includes a sense of con-

cern, uncertainty, or anxiety as to whether we will be able to measure up to God's standards, given our current condition as fallen human beings. But God is fully aware of our condition, and in the following verse Paul will describe the help that God has already provided so that believers are not required to rely on their own limited strength for living in a way that pleases Him.

Phil 2:13 - for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Believers can rejoice in the fact that God Himself is “**at work**” (*energeō*) within them. This is the word from which we get our English word “energy,” and it means that God is actively operating in a powerful way within believers. The believers’ obedience is based on their sensitivity to the leading of the indwelling Holy Spirit as He works in their lives to help them be conformed to the character of Christ. So often believers fail to remember that the Holy Spirit is within us, but He is there (even if we do not feel that He is there) because God’s Word tells us He is there. We must believe what God says so that we rely on His work within us to provide the help we need to face all of our circumstances. He simply wants us to acknowledge His presence and to cooperate with Him by choosing to follow His leading.

The effect of God’s work within believers is that they gain both the desire and the power to think, choose, and behave in ways that please Him. At the end of this verse Paul stated the effect of God’s energizing work. It allows believers “**both to will and to work for His good pleasure.**” The word “**will**” (*thelō*) means to choose, desire, prefer, or be inclined toward something. This pictures the newfound sensitivity that a believer can have to the leading and insight which the Holy Spirit provides.

The word “**work**” (*energeō*) is the same word Paul had just used to describe the activity of God Himself in the believers’ lives, so this pictures their ability to work in tandem or in cooperation with what will please and honor God and align with His character and desire for their lives. This verse contains a profound truth which believers should understand and claim by faith, because it will give them newfound power to live for Christ in each situation they might encounter.

Phil 2:14 - Do all things without grumbling or disputing;

Because God Himself provides the desire and power to live in a way that pleases Him, believers can cooperate with Him by facing each situation without grumbling or disputing. These two negative responses to a believer’s circumstances are indicators or signs that the believer has not fully appropriated the help which the indwelling Holy Spirit can provide. Here Paul added to his more general command (“work out your salvation”) by giving a specific command which will help to fulfill the overall purpose. The word “**grumbling**” (*goggusmos*) pictures a person who is muttering or talking in hushed tones to complain or express sullen discontent. It is the outward expression of an inner attitude of selfish entitlement and unmet expectations.

The word “**disputing**” (*dialogismos*) is a form of the term from which we get the English word “dialogue.” If “grumbling” pictures a more subtle sense of self-centered discontent, then this word pictures a more outward, external, or public debate and argument. It is the direct spoken expression of selfish thinking with the attempt to triumph over others in a verbal wrestling match. Grumbling and disputing both describe behavior that is unbe-

coming to a Christian. They are both terms that help to define what Paul meant by “selfish ambition” (1:17), “selfishness” and “empty conceit” (2:3). Evidence of grumbling and disputing in the lives of believers is a sure sign that they are behaving in the manner which Paul condemned (1:15-17). These behaviors are contrary to the “work for His good pleasure” (2:13) which Paul encouraged.

Phil 2:15 - 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,

The words “**so that**” introduce a purpose clause in which Paul will explain the ultimate purpose or result of obedience to his previous command. The implication here is that selfish grumbling and disputing will bring blame and reproach upon believers, so that, far from gaining something or winning something, those who engage in such behaviors are only hurting themselves and the greater cause of Christ. The next time you are tempted to grumble or complain, think about the blemish it will bring to your testimony for Christ.

A more literal translation of the first phrase in this text is rendered by several Bible versions, “**that you may become**” (ASV, LSV, NIV, NKJV). By implication, a believer’s behavior will be witnessed by others and considered to be evidence of the power of God to change lives. Since God is holy and pure, His children should continually grow in their ability to reflect those same attributes. Paul used three terms to identify these characteristics: “**blameless**” (*amemptos*, “without defect”), “**innocent**” (*akeraios*, “unmixed with evil”), and “**above**

reproach" (*amōmos*, "without blemish or fault").

Even though we have no control over the perceptions of others, we should live in such a way that any reasonable onlooker would be forced to admit that a believer's character is reflecting that of Christ, and that it is certainly more pure than his own. God's children are living "**in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation**," so any differences in the direction of righteousness should become plainly obvious. Paul characterized the unbelieving world as "**crooked**" (*skolios*) and "**perverse**" (*dias-trepheō*). The first term pictures something that is twisted or deformed, while the second means bent, wicked, or morally corrupt. Together these terms express that the unsaved have turned away from the path of righteousness and have fully immersed themselves in unrighteousness.

Against this blackened background, believers are meant to shine like beacons of light in the darkness. The word "**appear**" is literally "to continually **shine**" (*phainō*, present tense). The phrase "**as lights in the world**" indicates that the believers' righteous behavior will stand out to be plainly seen by those in a sin-darkened world. Some believers may shine brighter than others, but they are all expected to shine for the glory of God.

Phil 2:16 - 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.

The activity of "**holding fast the word of life**" is included in the process of displaying God's righteousness to a fallen world which Paul had just discussed. To "**hold fast**" (*epechō*) is literally "to hold upon," which primarily means having a firm grasp on something. It is translated this way in most Bible versions (CSB, ESV, LSB, NASB,

NIV, NKJV, NLT). In classical Greek it also could mean to hold forth, offer, or present something, and it is translated that way in a few Bible versions (AMP, ASV, KJV, LSV). It seems best to understand it as expressing Paul's desire that they keep a firm grasp on the **"word of life"** which consists of the truths of God's Word.

If the Philippians were to accomplish that task, then it would result in Paul having a **"reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain"** during his ministry to them. Paul is thinking ahead to **"the day of Christ,"** which is a topic that he previously mentioned in 1:6 and 1:10. This will be that future moment when Paul stands before the judgment seat of Christ "so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10). His hope and prayer is that the Philippians will remain true to Christ, that as a consequence of their salvation he would receive praise for his faithful effort and toil to bring them to spiritual maturity. As one commentator has said, "When he faces the Lord from whom he received his commission on the Damascus road, he hopes that it will be sufficient for him to point to his converts and invite the Lord to assess the quality of his service by the quality of their lives." [Bruce, 86]

Phil 2:17 - But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.

Since Paul had just introduced himself into the discussion at the end of 2:16, here in this verse he will share a few more details about his own example of selfless service to the Philippians. He used an analogy or illustration derived from the Old Testament. Even before the Law of Moses was given, Jacob consecrated the place where God

had spoken with him by setting up a pillar and pouring out a drink offering on it (Gen 35:14). At a later time the Mosaic Law included drink offerings as part of the sacrificial system (Num 15:1-10). One scholar explains:

When a sacrifice, such as a burnt offering with its accompanying cereal offering, was presented in the temple at Jerusalem, a drink offering or libation of wine or olive oil might be poured over it or beside it. This was added last, and completed the sacrifice. ‘If I am being poured out like a drink offering,’ says Paul, let me be poured out as a libation ‘on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith.’...The life of the Philippian church is viewed as an offering to God: if one thing remains to make that offering perfectly acceptable, Paul is willing that the sacrifice of his own life should be that one thing – credited to their account, not to his. [Bruce, 88]

Pagan sacrifices also might be accompanied by libations of wine which were poured over the offerings. Paul was saying that even if his trial would result in his execution for the sake of the gospel, he will **“rejoice and share my joy with you all.”** As he considered his role in the Philippians’ faith and ministry, he was filled with joy. “He was its planter and nourisher, and thus their victories were his also. For this reason he could ‘rejoice with all of you.’” [Kent, 800] In the words of 2:16, Paul was pleased with the evidence in their lives that proved he “did not run in vain nor toil in vain.”

Phil 2:18 - You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.

Here Paul added that even if he were to be given the sentence of execution at his trial, even if he were “poured out as a drink offering” (2:17), he commanded the Philippians to continually **“rejoice”** (*chairō*, present imperative) the same way he was rejoicing. He wanted them to be **“rejoicers together”** (*sugchairō*), using a compound

word that consists of the verb “rejoice” (*chairō*) with a prefix that means “together or in union with” (*sun-*). With this joyful sentiment Paul concluded the sharing of his own personal example of selfless service on behalf of others.

Phil 2:19 - But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition.

In verses 19 through 24, Paul will mention another person who exemplified selfless service for others, and that is **Timothy**. Paul began by saying, “**I hope**” (*elpizō*, present tense) which could be phrased “I am right now continually hoping.” This is the same hope and “earnest expectation” that Paul expressed in 1:20-26. Paul had made a plan, but he always held his plans in an open hand so that the Lord would have full control to lead him in the best possible path for His glory. His plan was to send Timothy to Philippi “**shortly**,” and he will give a more specific idea of the timing of Timothy’s visit in 2:23.

Paul’s purpose for sending Timothy to them was “**so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition.**” Paul desired to “**be encouraged**” (*eupsucheō*), which is a compound word that literally means “of good soul” or in good spirits. Paul’s spirits would be lifted when he would “**learn**” something. This word (*ginōskō*, aorist tense) means “to gain definite knowledge” and this phrase is literally, “knowing the [things] concerning you.” There were several times when Paul wanted to know the true state of affairs regarding the spiritual health of a particular church, but because he himself could not go, he would send his trusted associate Timothy who would always give a faithful and accurate report (e.g., Acts 19:22; 1 Cor 4:17; 1 Thess 3:2). This is ex-

actly what Paul planned to have Timothy undertake on his visit to Philippi.

Phil 2:20 - For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.

Moving beyond his own goal for Timothy's visit, Paul will now provide a glowing testimonial for Timothy's character. He began by saying that he had **"no one else"** like Timothy. His specific combination of qualities and attributes was absolutely unique, and this made him extremely valuable to Paul. On his first missionary journey Paul shared the gospel with a small group of God-fearing people in the Galatian town of Lystra, and Timothy was a young man who heard Paul's message and trusted in Christ at that time. He immediately began to grow spiritually and to serve the small church in Lystra, earning a fine reputation among the believers there (Acts 16:2). Early in Paul's second missionary journey he recruited Timothy to be one of his ministry companions, and they had been almost inseparable for about ten years. In 2:22 Paul will describe their relationship as being like a father and son, not only because of their close personal ties but also because of their like-mindedness and singleness of purpose in their work. In this verse Paul used the term **"kindred spirit"** (*isopsuchos*), which is a rare word that literally means "equality of soul." Timothy's soul could be characterized as being almost the equal of Paul's own, and that was a rare quality indeed.

One of the things that made Timothy tremendously valuable in ministry was his natural capacity to be concerned for the welfare of others. Paul used the word **"genuinely"** (*gnēsios*), which originally identified a child as a father's natural born or legitimate offspring. Paul used a form of this word when he described Timothy as his "true

child” (1 Tim 1:2). This word was then applied to other things that were true, real, or sincere. Here it described Timothy’s genuine, legitimate, and sincere concern for what would be best for others. His “**concern**” (*merimnaō*) consisted of a heart-felt interest in others, bordering on anxiety or worry at times. His thoughts were occupied with providing for others’ needs rather than his own. Timothy’s unselfish focus on other people appears to be a God-given tendency that made him exceptionally effective in ministry.

Phil 2:21 - For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.

In this verse Paul began to compare Timothy to other believers in Rome who were available to undertake this mission to Philippi. We know that Paul’s present companions included Luke and Aristarchus (Col 4:10), both of whom had remained faithful to him throughout his years of ministry and imprisonment. But apparently none of Paul’s trusted companions except Timothy were available to travel from Rome to Philippi in order to achieve Paul’s objective for learning about the true spiritual status of the believers there. Beyond his inner circle of trusted ministry co-workers, Paul had to say that “**they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.**” Even Demas, who was currently with Paul in Rome to assist with ministry activities (Col 4:14), would later abandon him completely (2 Tim 4:9-12). But Timothy was a man who did nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regarded others as more important than himself (2:3). He was the only one whom Paul trusted to carry out his mission to Philippi.

Phil 2:22 - But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father.

In this verse Paul called upon the Philippians themselves to confirm Timothy's proven character. They **"know"** (*ginōskō*, present tense) Timothy because he had been present from the beginning when they first heard the gospel and trusted in Christ. He and Luke probably remained to minister to them after Paul and Silas left for Thessalonica on their second missionary journey. And Timothy had ministered to them several times afterward (e.g., Acts 19:22; 20:3). A literal translation of this phrase could be rendered, "the proof of him you continually know." The words **"proven worth"** (*dokimē*) are from a term that means to be approved only after rigorous testing and evaluation. It pictures the work of an assayer who crushes and heats metallic ore in order to determine its quality. Timothy had proven himself to be of high value as a result of the tests and trials of ministry spanning a period of almost a decade.

In the second part of this verse Paul explained that Timothy had faithfully **"served"** (*douleuō*) alongside or together with Paul in the ministry of the gospel. This term for service is related to the word Paul used in 1:1 where he said they were both "bond-servants of Christ Jesus." Timothy had a proven record of self-sacrificing service in ministry. And Paul added that he had behaved as a loyal son with his father, pursuing the same goals as they traversed the Roman world sharing the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Timothy was a perfect example of selfless service to others.

Phil 2:23-24 - Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly.

Here Paul returned to discussing the mission on which he planned to send Timothy. Paul was “continually **hoping**” (*elpizō*, present tense), which corresponds to the hope that he had already expressed in 1:20 and 2:19. As he had mentioned previously (1:19-26), Paul was waiting to see how things would turn out for him as a result of the verdict in his legal case before the high court. He said, “**as soon as I see**” (*aphoraō*), using a word that means “to fix the eyes on something,” to discern or determine the outcome of something. After he received the final verdict in his case, then he intended to send Timothy to them. The word “**immediately**” (*exautēs*) means “from that hour” or right away, and it is emphasized as the final word appended to the end of this sentence in the Greek text. Instead of sending Timothy to deliver this letter, he will only send Timothy later when he knows the outcome of his case in Rome. Because Paul’s primary purpose for sending Timothy was to “learn of their condition,” this implies that Timothy was to return to Paul as soon as possible with his report. As one commentator explained:

Paul apparently expected Timothy not to remain at Philippi but to bring him word about the church immediately. Conceivably, they could have planned to meet at Ephesus after Paul’s release. At least, they seem to have met together at Ephesus subsequent to this time (1 Tim 1:3). This would require that before leaving for Philippi, Timothy knew with certainty the date of Paul’s release. Otherwise, Timothy would have been expected to return to Paul at Rome before he left the city....He would not be the bearer of the letter, however, because Paul wants to retain him until he has more definite information about the outcome of his case. This im-

plies that Paul thinks there will soon be some kind of legal decision regarding him. This letter will alert the Philippians to Timothy's coming and will also let them know the reason why he did not come with Epaphroditus. They will also know that when Timothy does come, he will be bringing word about the crucial developments in Paul's legal case." [Kent, 801]

In verse 24 Paul added that he “**trusts**” (*peithō*) or that he was convinced that he himself would also be able to visit them afterward. This is the same word he had used in 1:25, and it is consistent with the attitude about his circumstances that he mentioned previously. Even though the verdict had not yet been rendered, and even though it could go either way, Paul was still trusting in the Lord that he would be able to come to the Philippians “**shortly**” after hearing the outcome of his case.

Phil 2:25 - But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need;

Next, Paul will provide yet another example of someone who exemplified selfless service to others. This is the first time **Epaphroditus** has been named, but the circumstances surrounding his ministry to Paul were an important factor in writing this letter to the Philippians. Paul said that he “**thought**” (*hēgeomai*) it necessary to send him back to Philippi. This is the same word he had used previously when he said they were to “**regard**” one another as more important than yourselves.” As it did there, here it means to give the needs of others a leading place in one's thoughts. Paul's decision to return Epaphroditus to them was primarily out of concern for them and their needs.

In the second half of this verse Paul listed several items that identify Epaphroditus. First, he was a **“brother,”** which described the close relationship that existed between them because of their membership together in the family of God. Next, Epaphroditus was a **“fellow worker”** (*sunergos*), which is a compound word consisting of “work” (*ergon*) with a prefix that means “together or in union with” (*sun-*). Paul considered Epaphroditus to be a co-laborer and companion in ministry, rather than simply viewing him as a courier from Philippi. In addition, Epaphroditus was a **“fellow soldier”** (*sustratiōtēs*). This military term depicts a person who has fought side by side in labors, conflicts, or combat for the cause of Christ. The implication is that Epaphroditus was actively engaged with Paul in advancing the gospel during his time in Rome. Epaphroditus was also the Philippians’ **“messenger”** or courier who carried their gift of funds to Paul. He was trustworthy and he admirably fulfilled that mission. Finally, Paul praised Epaphroditus for being their **“minister”** to his needs. All of this tells us that Epaphroditus was a man whose attitudes and actions exemplified the unselfish desire to put others’ needs before his own.

Phil 2:26 - because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.

In this verse and the one that follows, Paul will share his reason for sending Epaphroditus home, as well as describing the circumstances and his own reaction to them. Here it might be helpful to review the chronology of events since Paul’s arrival in Rome.

- News of Paul’s transfer to Rome had reached Philippi.
- The Philippians sent Epaphroditus to Rome to deliver a gift to Paul (4:18).
- Epaphroditus became deathly ill and news reached Philippi that he was sick (2:26).
- News reached Rome of the Philippians’ anxiety about Epaphroditus (2:26).
- Both Paul and Epaphroditus were concerned, and Paul chose to send him home (2:25).
- Epaphroditus would leave Rome carrying Paul’s letter to the Philippians (2:28).
- As soon as the outcome of Paul’s case became known, Timothy would also travel to Philippi (2:19-23).
- Paul himself hoped to visit Philippi if he were acquitted and released (2:24).

This verse gave Epaphroditus’ reaction to news that the Philippians knew of his illness. He was “**longing**” (*epipotheō*) for all of them, which is an intensified form of the Greek word *potheō* that means to yearn for or desire greatly. Paul had used this same word to describe his own longing for the Philippians in 1:8. However, Epaphroditus was also “**distressed**” (*adēmoneō*), which means that he was troubled, depressed, full of sorrow, or in extreme anguish. Paul recognized that it would not be right to keep Epaphroditus with him in Rome, so he determined to send him back to the Philippians.

Phil 2:27 - For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow.

This verse implies that the Philippians may not have understood the full extent of Epaphroditus' illness. Here Paul clearly stated the situation: Epaphroditus had been **"sick to the point of death."** The phrase **"to the point of"** (*paraplēsios*) renders a single Greek word that means "directly alongside" or very near death. The text does not tell us, but this may have been a case when God providentially arranged for doctor Luke to be with Paul in Rome so that he could attend to Epaphroditus during his illness. One commentator explained, "The illness was so severe that Paul regarded his recovery as an intervention of God." [Kent, 802]

In the second part of this verse Paul shared his own personal reaction to Epaphroditus' illness. He was grateful that God in His mercy allowed him to recover, not only because it restored Epaphroditus to life and ministry, but also because it spared Paul from **"sorrow upon sorrow."** This phrase pictures wave upon wave of sorrow, which Paul may already have been experiencing. It was a blessing that the sorrow of losing a dear brother was not added to Paul's already overwhelming burden.

Phil 2:28 - Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you.

"Therefore," as a result of all these circumstances, Paul was sending Epaphroditus home. Paul used the phrase **"all the more eagerly,"** which is a translation of a single Greek word (*spoudaioterōs*) that usually means "more speedily" or sooner than otherwise planned. It could be translated diligently, earnestly, or eagerly, but given the situation Paul just described, its typical meaning fits the context nicely. The Philippians may have intended that Epaphroditus would remain to help Paul for a longer

period of time. They may have expressed disappointment in him for not completing his original assignment. But in this section of his letter, Paul took full responsibility for sending him home. “Now that Epaphroditus had recovered, he would willingly have remained in Rome and served Paul further, but Paul said no.” [Bruce, 97]

In this verse Paul shared two things that would result from Epaphroditus’ return. First, their reunion would cause the Philippians to “**rejoice**” (*chairō*). Second, as they rejoiced in seeing Epaphroditus again, it would relieve Paul’s own anxiety. The phrase “**less concerned**” (*alupoteros*) is from a compound word consisting of the negative “a-” (“not”) and a word that means pain, sorrow, or grief. It can be translated as “free from sorrow,” which corresponds to the mention of “sorrow” in 2:27. Returning Epaphroditus to them would result in one less concern that Paul would need to worry about.

Phil 2:29 - Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard;

After sharing his reason for returning Epaphroditus to them, Paul goes on to give the Philippians his command for how to welcome him. Because of his example of selfless service on their behalf, they were to joyfully “**receive**,” accept, and respect Epaphroditus in the Lord. To ensure that there would be no confusion about his meaning, Paul then commanded them, literally, “ones such as this in honor continually hold.” The phrase “**high regard**” is from a single Greek word (*entimos*) that means “honored, prized, precious, esteemed, or valued.” Paul wanted to ensure that Epaphroditus returned home with a glowing testimonial in writing from their beloved apostle.

Phil 2:30 - because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

This high regard is no more than was due for someone who was **“risking his life”** and **“came close to death for the work of Christ.”** One scholar provided further details: “The implication is that if he had not come to Rome, he would not have become sick. However, the next phrase implies that having become ill, he continued in his service to Paul to the point of endangering his life....In doing this he not only expressed his own devotion but overexerted himself, as Paul said, ‘to supply your lack of service toward me.’ Paul was not implying that the Philippians had failed, but rather, because they were not present, Epaphroditus as their representative stepped in the gap and did what they would have done.” [Walvoord, 73] Since the believers in Philippi could not be in Rome, Epaphroditus was doing work that they could not do themselves. This is the meaning that Paul communicated using the word **“deficient”** (*husterēma*), from the Greek term that literally means “what is left behind” or what remains to be done. The dedication of Epaphroditus to the ministry was certainly a cause for high regard and praise. He provided yet another example of someone who regarded others as more important than himself (2:3).

Summary

In this section of his letter Paul began by acknowledging the Philippians’ consistent history of obedience in carrying out the commands of God that are contained in His Word. This gave him confidence to include another command, that they “work out” their salvation, which they have the ability to accomplish because God Himself is “at

work” within them. By faith, believers can cooperate with the indwelling Holy Spirit as He works to help them be conformed to the character of Christ. Believers are to do this with the awareness that not only God but others around them see their behavior, and that their lives can shine brightly for Jesus if they are growing spiritually.

Paul then illustrated this truth by presenting three additional examples of selfless service in living lives free from selfish ambition. He began by sharing the example of his own rejoicing even in his imprisonment for Christ. Then he gave a glowing testimonial for the selfless service of Timothy, whom the Philippians had known personally for almost a decade. His genuine concern for their welfare was one of the many qualities that perfectly illustrated the command to put the interests of others ahead of one’s own. Finally, Paul held up the example of Epaphroditus, their own messenger and minister, who risked his life for the work of Christ. All believers should seek to emulate these examples by regarding others as more important than themselves, knowing that those who humble themselves in serving others will ultimately be exalted in Christ Jesus.

Warning against false teachers

(Philippians 3:1-16)

So far in this letter Paul had shared about his own circumstances during his imprisonment in Rome, and he exhorted the Philippians to follow the examples of Jesus, Paul himself, Timothy, and Epaphroditus by living in selfless service to others. This would be pleasing to God, and it is in contrast to the way some believers in Rome were behaving. Paul had commanded the Philippians to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of Christ, “in no way alarmed by your opponents – which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God” (1:27-28). That was the first time Paul mentioned opponents which the Philippians might be facing. Here in this section of his letter, Paul will deal with one of the important issues that may have been a threat to the church in Philippi.

Phil 3:1 - Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.

“**Finally**” is the Greek word *loipos* which means “as for what remains.” Paul is simply saying that he will now continue with the next thing he wanted to tell them. He again addressed them as “**brethren**,” so these remarks are given in the context of a family letter to his beloved spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ. He commands them to “continually **rejoice**” (*chairō*, present impera-

tive) in the Lord. He did not tell them to rejoice in their circumstances, or in their socio-economic status, or in their position within the church. He commanded them to rejoice in spite of their external circumstances or conditions, which were constantly changing like the twists and turns on a raging river. No matter what circumstances believers may be enduring, they may still rejoice in the Lord, knowing that their earthly situation is only temporary.

Several times in this letter Paul gave them an example of rejoicing or commanded them to rejoice (1:18; 2:17-18, 28; 4:4), so here he stated that it was no trouble for him to repeat himself because it is a “**safeguard**” (*asphalēs*) for them. This word pictures something that is steady, immovable, secure, and something they can rely on in the future. Paul hoped that by sharing these thoughts in written form, his instructions might be preserved and circulated so that many other believers would also benefit from his godly insights.

Phil 3:2 - Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;

Here Paul began to warn the Philippians about a false teaching that may have been threatening their fellowship. In this verse he repeated a word of command three times. “**Beware**” (*blepō*, present imperative) could be translated as “keep on watching out, continually taking heed and guarding against” something. Paul identified this threat using three descriptive phrases. First, he called the false teachers “**the dogs**,” using a term that the Jews applied to Gentiles because dogs are unclean animals (Matt 15:26). But Paul turned the tables on the false teachers by labeling them as the dogs. Second, they were “**evil workers**,” literally, bad or wicked workmen. In his previous letter to the Corinthians, Paul had referred to these people

similarly as “deceitful workers” (2 Cor 11:13). Finally, he called them “**the false circumcision**” (*katatomē*). The Greek word for circumcision is *peritomē*, which literally means “cutting around,” but here Paul used the word *katatomē*, literally “cutting down” or cutting off. “Paul deliberately parodies the Judaizers’ insistence on circumcision by sarcastically calling it mutilation.” [Kent, 803] Taken together, these three descriptive phrases identify that Paul is referring to a well-known group called the **Judaizers**. One commentator explains:

These were nominal Christians who accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but as the Savior of Israel only. They insisted that Christ’s kingdom could be entered only through the gate of Judaism. Only circumcised converts were fully accepted by God. They appeared quite early in the history of the Church, and are those referred to in Act 15:1. Paul was the object of their special hatred and abuse. They challenged his birth, his authority, and his motives. [Vincent, 443]

From the earliest days of the church there was confusion about the relationship between the traditions of the Jews under the Mosaic covenant and the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles which now was made available through the substitutionary death of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah. The Judaizers continued to make salvation contingent on becoming a Jew by submitting to physical circumcision and the Law of Moses.

After the apostle Peter had shared the gospel and witnessed the salvation of Gentiles in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10), the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem “took issue with him” (Acts 11). They interpreted the words of Jesus, “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22), to mean that in order to be saved a person must submit to all the traditions of Judaism. But a growing number of Gentiles continued to respond eagerly to the gospel, especially in the

church at Antioch in Syria, and the sheer number of Gentile believers raised the issue to even greater prominence. After the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas to the Gentile region of southern Galatia, the conflict came to a boiling point. Paul immediately responded to the Judaizers with a blistering counterstrike against their teaching in his epistle to the Galatians. He wrote, “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified” (Gal 2:16).

But at the church in Antioch, “some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’” Paul and Barnabas “had great dissension and debate with them.” The brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others “should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue” (Acts 15:1-2). After intense discussion, the Jerusalem Council determined that Gentile converts would **not** be required to submit to the Law of Moses. Instead, they developed four behavioral guidelines for Gentile Christians which simply facilitated fellowship with their more scrupulous Jewish brethren (Acts 15). The Council produced a written statement of their decision which was to be circulated among all the churches in order to resolve the issue. Unfortunately, this did not completely solve the problem because there were groups of Judaizers who disagreed with the Council’s judgment.

Even though Paul did not use the term in this verse, he was addressing the crucial doctrine of “**salvation**” (*sōtēria*). As we saw in the last chapter there are three as-

pects or phases of salvation, and in 2:12-16 Paul had focused on the present aspect of the believers' sanctification. Here, however, he was dealing with the initial phase which involves the basis for justification and reconciliation with a holy God. One commentator explained that "the error which Paul is attacking is, first of all, the obscuring of the gospel of salvation by grace alone and substituting a works principle as a basis for standing before God." [Walvoord, 77] As we can see from Paul's brief description in this verse, what he will be discussing with the Philippians in this part of his letter is a serious issue, and one to which even the modern church is not immune.

Phil 3:3 - for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

Here Paul briefly described the true and accurate biblical doctrine. Physical circumcision and obedience to the Law of Moses were no longer required. "**True circumcision**" is "circumcision of the heart," which was a concept with clear precedent in the Old Testament (Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4). As one scholar explained, "The people against whom Gentile Christians needed to be put on their guard, and whom Paul elsewhere denounces in the same kind of unsparing terms as he uses here, are those who visited Gentile churches and insisted that circumcision was an indispensable condition of their being justified in God's sight....His basic objection was that the insistence on circumcision undermined the gospel that proclaimed that God in his grace justified Jews and Gentiles alike on the ground of faith in Christ, quite apart from circumcision or any other legal requirement." [Bruce,

The Judaizers chose to ignore the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the New Testament revelation regarding justification solely by grace through faith. As Paul had written in his earlier letter to the church in Rome, all Christians (Jewish and Gentile alike) are dead to the Law and have been released from the Law (Rom 7:1, 4). “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom 8:3). When he continued by expressing his deep affection for the Jewish people, Paul wrote “they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom 10:2-4). The only circumcision that matters now is circumcision of the heart, which is “a circumcision made without hands” (Col 2:9-15).

Rather than attempting to approach God by keeping the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Law (as well as all of the traditions added by the rabbis), believers can now **“worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus.”** This is exactly what Jesus Himself meant when He said, “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:23). Their salvation is found in a relationship with Christ Jesus by grace through faith, rather than being based on a set of external rites and rituals. No one is able to attain righteousness by human effort through works of the flesh. Paul was upholding the truths of God’s Word as well as the official edict of the ruling elders in Jerusalem, so he was on solid ground. In the following verses, Paul will go on to demonstrate how fleshly confi-

dence is useless for gaining a right standing before a holy God.

Phil 3:4 - although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:

Since it is futile to put confidence in works of the flesh (3:3), Paul will use himself as an example of fleshly pride as well as an example of why confidence in the flesh is worthless. The Judaizers may have questioned Paul's heritage, his qualifications, or his authority, but by any of their standards he would have been well qualified to put confidence in his fleshly accomplishments. In fact he stated here that **"if anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more."** Every aspect of Paul's life provided evidence that he not only met but exceeded all of the highest standards of Judaism. Now he will go on to list several aspects of his heritage and achievements.

Phil 3:5 - circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;

His parents followed the strict timetable of Leviticus 12:3 and circumcised Paul on the eighth day as required. He traced his lineage by narrowing it from the general (**"of the nation of Israel"**) to the specific (**"of the tribe of Benjamin"**). He was a **Hebrew** "out of" (*ek*) **Hebrews**, meaning that he was of pure Jewish descent and that his family had lived according to orthodox Jewish culture, which distinguished them from the Hellenistic Jews. At the end of this verse he mentioned that he had joined the strictest Jewish sect as a **"Pharisee,"** and we are told elsewhere that he studied under their most cele-

brated teacher of the Law, a rabbi named Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). As he stood before the Sanhedrin, Paul had declared himself to be the “son of Pharisees” (Acts 23:6), so it seems that he descended from a long line of family members who lived according to the most rigorous Jewish standards.

Phil 3:6 - as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

In this verse Paul began by discussing his spirit of “**zeal**” (*zēlos*), using a word that comes from a term meaning “heat.” Figuratively it was used to express extreme passion and intensity of spirit, so in this case it depicted his fierce loyalty to the principles of Judaism. Paul was saying that he demonstrated the highest possible degree of zeal in defending the Jewish religion from those he viewed as heretics. He had gone so far as to persecute Christians when he began “ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison” (Acts 8:3).

Next he discussed his level of righteousness, which a pious Jew expected to obtain through adherence to the Mosaic Law. Paul had been meticulous in this area of his life, and he had maintained moral uprightness according to the demanding standards of the Jewish traditions. His behavior gave no one an opportunity to accuse him of any violation of the Mosaic code, so that he could legitimately describe himself as being “**blameless**” (*amemptos*) regarding external obedience to the commands demanded of him as a Pharisee. The picture presented so far in these three verses (3:4-6) is of a young man who led a strictly moral and upright life, and who was zealously devoted to the religion of his forefathers. “Paul had natural pride in

his Jewish attainments. He was the star of hope for Gamaliel and the Sanhedrin.” [Robertson, 453] But God turned the most zealous enemy of the gospel into its greatest champion. One commentator shared this insight on Paul’s former life:

If any, therefore, could hope for salvation on the ground of extraordinary devotedness to religion, he said that he could....We are left to the fair presumption that, if any man could be saved by his own works, he was that man. This fact should be allowed to make its proper impression on those who are seeking salvation in the same way; and they should be willing to inquire whether they may not be deceived in the matter, as he was, and whether they are not in as much real danger in depending on their own righteousness, as was this most upright and zealous young man. [Barnes, 193-194]

Phil 3:7 - But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

“**But**” (*alla*) something changed the direction and priorities of Paul’s life. Everything he had listed in the previous verses were things he formerly viewed as “**gain**” (*kerdos*), being of great value and advantage for attaining a right standing before a holy God and others. But Paul had come to understand that “all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment” (Isa 64:6), and that there is no act of fleshly human achievement which is able to gain any merit in the sight of God. Paul had discovered that there is only one act which God considers to be meritorious, and that is the substitutionary death of Christ which paid the full penalty for the sin of humanity. The only work which will gain favor with God is the work that Christ already accomplished on our behalf, and He offers to apply His gain or profit to our account, free of charge, if we will simply put our faith in Him and what He did for us.

Paul came to realize that his exclusive focus on obedience to a legal code had actually been an obstacle to his salvation. His reliance on outward conformity to legalistic rules and rituals had kept him from seeing and accepting the salvation that Christ provides as a gift of His grace to those who simply trust Him. After coming to this realization, Paul determined to renounce his own efforts for attaining righteousness before God. He expressed his resolve by saying, **“those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.”**

Phil 3:8 - More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

“More than that,” beyond “those things” which Paul had just listed (3:5-6), he considered everything else that he might attempt to contribute toward his salvation (**“all things”**) to be in the same category of **“loss”** when compared with the **“surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”** After realizing there was nothing he could do to earn merit with God, he rejected all of the things he previously regarded as valuable. He considered all of his so-called advantages and benefits to be useless **“rubbish”** (*skubalon*). That term paints a powerful picture because it appears to be a contraction from *“es kunas ballō,”* which means “what is thrown to dogs.” That word is especially meaningful in light of Paul’s reference to the Judaizers as **“dogs”** (3:2). Paul was taking all of his previous legalistic attempts to attain righteousness and throwing them out, leaving all of it to the dogs. If Paul had not come to this realization, then he might actually have become one of the Judaizers.

Instead of his previous life of selfish ambition and self-effort, Paul now focused purely on “**knowing Christ**” in order to “**gain**” (*kerdainō*) the true righteousness that Christ alone can provide. Knowing Christ is the only thing of “**surpassing value**” (*huperechō*), which literally means “to have in excess over and above.” Paul’s view of what is “gain” had completely changed.

Phil 3:9 - and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

Paul realized that salvation, in the sense of justification before a holy God, can only be found “**in Him**.” The Lord Jesus Christ already did all of the work required to procure our salvation, and He was the only One who could possibly have accomplished it. Obtaining “**a righteousness of my own derived from the Law**,” a righteousness earned by fulfilling the requirements of the Law through human self-effort, is an impossible task. There is no way for a person to merit a right standing before God on the basis of his own work. How then can a person obtain righteousness and be justified in the sight of a holy God?

Here Paul clearly stated that salvation can come only “**through faith in Christ**.” This crucial concept of “**faith**” (*pistis*) involves coming to know the facts about who Christ is and what He accomplished for us, agreeing that those facts are true, and relying or trusting solely in Christ for gaining salvation. Righteousness, or a right standing before God, is not something that a person can earn or gain through self-effort. It is an undeserved gift of God’s grace that is received through faith. As one com-

mentator wrote, “Faith is the opposite of human works; it is the reception of God’s work by those who admit the futility of their own efforts to attain righteousness.” [Kent, 805]

Righteousness **“comes from God on the basis of faith.”** This means that righteousness is something that only God can provide by imputing it to a person who is simply trusting Christ. To use an illustration from accounting, the “surpassing value” of Christ’s own righteousness is credited to the believer’s account (Rom 4:3-5). To use a different analogy, God will “clothe” the believer in Christ (Gal 3:27), so that when He looks upon a believer all God sees is the righteousness of Christ which covers him. This is why Paul desired to be **“found in Him.”** By putting his faith in Christ, he will be “found in Him” before the gaze of a holy God.

Some have viewed faith itself as a “work” – something a person must do in order to merit or contribute to their salvation. Some say that fallen human beings in their state of rebellion against God are incapable of having faith, so faith itself must be generated by God in the life of a person in order for that person to believe. But faith is not a “work” or the exercise of a human ability. It is the simple realization and admission of one’s human inability. Saving faith is the abandonment of all human effort to earn the favor of God. As one scholar said, “Faith means not doing something but receiving something; it means not the earning of a reward but the acceptance of a gift. A man can never be said to obtain a thing for himself if he obtains it by faith; indeed to say that he obtains it by faith is only another way of saying that he does not obtain it for himself but permits another to obtain it for him.” [Machen, 195] Faith is the open hand that receives God’s gift of righteousness solely on the basis of what Christ has done.

Phil 3:10-11 - that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

As Paul had said previously, he laid aside all of his previous self-effort in order to “know Christ” (3:8), to be “found in Him” (3:9), and then here to “**know Him**” during his ongoing life as a Christian. Paul moved beyond the basis of his initial salvation, justification, and reconciliation to God. As one commentator said, “That initial saving knowledge of Christ became the basis of Paul’s lifelong pursuit of an ever deeper knowledge of His Savior.” [MacArthur, 238] As the goal of his new life in Christ, he desired to know several things more intimately.

“**the power of His resurrection**” - The English word “dynamite” comes from this word for “**power**” (*dunamis*). The same power that raised Christ from the dead is available to believers as they live their daily lives. Paul’s statement here is similar to what he prayed for the Ephesians, that they would know “the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe...in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:18-20). God can provide this kind of power to assist living believers through the indwelling Holy Spirit, as well as to guarantee their ultimate resurrection when Christ comes for His saints (1 Cor 6:14).

“**the fellowship of His sufferings**” - This is similar to what Paul already discussed in 1:29. In suffering for Christ, there is a “**fellowship**” (*koinōnia*) or sharing in common, both with other Christians and with Christ

Himself. Christ's resurrection, mentioned first in the list, puts suffering and death in their proper perspective. Paul had written in his earlier letter to the Romans, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom 8:18).

"conformed to His death" - Paul placed special significance on being conformed to the death of Christ. In the battle to live in victory over the flesh, Paul exhorted believers to consider themselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ (Rom 6:11). He shared this word picture which formed the basis for this mindset: "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4).

"attain to the resurrection from the dead" - The verb **"attain"** (*katantaō*) means to come to or arrive at something. Here the typical word for **"resurrection"** (*anastasis*) has been intensified with the prefix *ex-* so that it literally means "resurrection *out from* the dead ones." This phrase points to a special resurrection of believers, which Paul revealed in his early epistle to the Thessalonians. This event will occur when Christ comes in the clouds to take church-age saints to the place He has prepared for them in the Father's house (John 14:3; 1 Thess 4:13-18). One scholar explained Paul's choice of words in 3:11. "At this point he still hoped to be living at the time of the rapture of the church, and therefore his hope that he 'might attain' unto the event means in effect that he would still be alive rather than be resurrected with those who had died....The only question was whether he would still be living when the rapture occurred....His endurance of suf-

ferings, therefore, would become a means to the end that he might live until that glad day.” [Walvoord, 88]

Phil 3:12 - Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Part of Paul’s personal example of rejecting self-effort for obtaining a righteous standing before God involved an open attitude of humility as he reviewed his life of ministry for the Lord. He clearly saw that he had not attained the high standard of behavior that he desired. He began this verse with the declaration, “**Not that I have already obtained**” all the things mentioned in 3:11. The word translated “**obtained**” (*lambanō*, “to take”) is used in the sense of gaining or attaining a goal. A form of this root word is used three times in this verse alone. Paul further explained what he intended by adding, “**or have already become perfect**” (*teleioō*), using a verb in the perfect tense and passive voice. This could be translated, “having already been made perfect,” and this word carries the idea of something that has been brought to completion or to its finished state or goal.

In the second part of this verse Paul revealed his attitude and perspective on how he will live, both presently and into the future. He said, “**I press on**” (*diōkō*, present continuous action), using a term that means “to run swiftly; to pursue; to endeavor to acquire something.” He will be in constant forward motion so that he can “**lay hold**” (*katalambanō*) of the purpose or goal for which Christ “**laid hold**” (*katalambanō*) of him when he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus so many years earlier (Acts 9:1-18). Christ commissioned Paul “to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Is-

rael; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:15-16), and Paul would actively pursue that goal until his dying day. One commentator explained:

What Paul is teaching in this section is that absolute perfection, such as exists in heaven, or attainment of spiritual victory which makes defeat impossible, is never achieved in this life....The perfection he would have at the future resurrection was not yet attained, as he still had a sin nature, a sinful body, and was only too aware of the need for further spiritual progress....Paul is saying in effect..."I was not perfected in the past and still am not perfect, but it is a continual exercise of my life to pursue perfection in the hope that I may seize that for which I have been seized by Christ." [Walvoord, 89-91]

Phil 3:13-14 - Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul again addressed the Philippians as his beloved "**brethren.**" Here he rephrased his statement in order to affirm what he said in the previous verse: "**I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet,**" and he will also repeat the action he previously mentioned: "**I press on toward the goal.**" In this verse Paul specified that there was "**one thing**" he did, but that one thing consisted of two parts. He maintained a single-minded focus, like a runner in a foot race, first, by "**forgetting what lies behind,**" and second, "**reaching forward to what lies ahead.**" The word "**forgetting**" (*epilanthanomai*) means to disregard or put out of one's mind. Instead of rehashing his past actions, Paul wanted to put the lessons of the past into action by making better decisions in the

present with a focus on the future. The phrase “**reaching forward**” (*epekteinomai*) has the idea of stretching out or leaning toward something with a determination to reach it. One commentator has said, “Paul’s salvation experience had taken place about 30 years before he wrote to the Philippians. He had won many spiritual battles in that time. He had grown much in those years, but he candidly confessed he had not obtained all this, nor was he yet made perfect. He still had more spiritual heights to climb.” [Lightner, 661]

In 3:14 Paul explained what he was reaching for. His goal was the “**prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**” The word “**prize**” (*brabeion*) is a term from the public athletic games, which means a crown, wreath, garland, or award given to the winner who competed in the games. The “**upward call of God in Christ Jesus**” includes the high calling Paul had received from Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus (see 3:12). Paul had been given a mission, and He was passionate about carrying it forward for the glory of God. This phrase can also point to the ultimate “**upward call**” when Christ will come from heaven to a place above the earth and will call all church-age saints upward to meet Him in the clouds. As one scholar explains, “Paul is obviously projecting himself forward to the time of the resurrection of the dead and the rapture of the living church, a time when both living and dead will meet the Lord in the air and triumphantly proceed to heaven (1 Th 4:13-18). Until that day he will not have fully attained his goals.” [Walvoord, 92] Every believer has a calling to live in a way that pleases God, and ultimately to be called home to the place Jesus has prepared for him in heaven.

Phil 3:15 - Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;

In the last two verses we will include in this section, Paul delivered a brief admonition regarding how to think about what he had just said. He had shared his spiritual goals (3:10-11) and his attitude about his progress toward reaching those goals (3:12-14). He desired to grow in his knowledge of Christ and to keep pressing toward the finish line as he accomplished what Jesus had called him to do. He expressed his attitude this way: “I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet” (3:13). In his estimation he had not yet reached his final goal of knowing Christ in the way he desired to know Him, and he had not yet completed the tasks and gained the level of spiritual maturity that Christ had planned for him.

He said “**as many as are perfect**” (*teleios*), using a word that may be best translated as “spiritually mature” (ESV, NIV, NKJV, NLT, RSV). Those believers who have a more mature perspective based on their years of Christian experience will probably come to the same conclusion that Paul shared. Their “**attitude**” (*phroneō*), thinking, or mindset will coincide with the attitude that Paul expressed. They too will see that the Christian life is a journey which involves continual growth, to “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (3:14), and that there is always room for increasing spiritual growth. As one commentator said, “If any of his readers claimed to be perfect in a sense that could not be achieved short of the day of Christ, there may be a word of admonition for them: it was a mark of the mature to recognize that such perfection was unattainable during mor-

tal life.” [Bruce, 124]

At the end of this verse Paul stated that if anyone has a different attitude than this, **“God will reveal that also to you.”** There may be believers who do not think this way about their journey in life toward spiritual growth and effectiveness in ministry for Christ. Some of them may believe that they have already achieved their ultimate state of spiritual maturity, or they may be satisfied with their current level of spiritual growth. But Paul is leaving such people in the hands of God. Ultimately, God Himself will **“reveal”** (*apokaluptō*) or disclose to them the most accurate way to think and the best perspective to have about their lives. As one commentator said, “If they generally agree but still differ on some isolated point, Paul is confident that God will lead them to the truth.” [Kent, 806]

Phil 3:16 - however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.

There are only seven words in the original text of this verse and they could be translated literally as “Only, to what we attained, walk accordingly.” The primary action we are to take is expressed by the Greek verb *stoicheō*, which is a military term that means “to march in rank, keep in line, or walk in an orderly manner.” As one language scholar says, “Paul means simply this, that having come thus far, the thing to do is to go in the same path in which we have been travelling so far.” [Robertson, 456] In the words of Paul from 3:14, we are to “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Summary

In this portion of his letter Paul warned the Philippians about a specific false teaching which distorted the gospel of God's grace in salvation. Certain teachers were insisting that salvation could only be attained through Judaism. They were saying that anyone who desired to be saved must follow the legalistic code given to the Jews in order to gain a righteous standing before God. But the edict from the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), as well as Paul's epistles to the Galatians and Romans, had conclusively dealt with that issue by declaring the views of the Judaizing teachers to be false. Yet there are always those who either do not know or choose to ignore the truths of God's Word. Paul presented his own personal example to prove that it is futile to put confidence in the flesh for achieving merit before a holy God. Instead, believers are to put their complete confidence in Christ alone, while we "press on toward the upward call of God" (3:14).

Unity and joy in the fellowship

(Philippians 3:17-4:7)

Paul had previously given several godly examples which he desired that his readers imitate in their own lives. The ultimate example is, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ. Believers are to be continually conformed to the pattern of thinking and behavior of Jesus Himself (Rom 8:29). In chapter two Paul had briefly mentioned his own example before describing the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus in more detail. Then in the first part of chapter three Paul had shared more about his own former life in Judaism and how he came to realize that all of his human efforts to obtain righteousness were useless. Instead, his new goal was to know Christ Jesus and the power of His resurrection which was at work through the indwelling Holy Spirit to assist him in living in a way that pleases God (3:10-14). As one commentator said, “By setting forth his own goals and ambitions Paul gave the Philippians an example to follow.” [Lightner, 661]

Phil 3:17 - Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

Paul began this section of his letter as he had before by addressing the Philippians as his beloved “**brethren**” in the family of God. The phrase “**join in following my example**” (*summimētēs*) is the translation of a rare Greek compound word from *mimos* (“mimic”) with a pre-

fix of *sun-* (“together with”). In a single word Paul captured the idea of what he wanted his readers to become. He explained his meaning at the end of this verse using an imperative or command. They are to **“observe”** (*skopeō*) or, more literally, “scope out and mark” some of the others around them. They must pick out **“those who walk”** (*peripateō*), which is a Hebraism for living one’s life or regulating one’s conduct. The specific lifestyle they were to mark and mimic is found in those who live **“according to the pattern”** (*tupos*), model, or image of the examples that Paul previously shared.

When you find someone who is behaving like Christ Jesus, then pour yourself into that same mold so that you become more like them with the ultimate goal of becoming more like Christ. Paul ended this verse by further defining this pattern. It is **“the pattern you have in us”** which gives the Philippians several familiar examples of godly behavior that they can imitate immediately. If the example of the life of Jesus is too profound for them to grasp, then they can always begin by emulating the pattern of godliness they see in some of the people around them. Even though these human examples will never match the perfection seen in the life of Jesus, they can serve as a starting point for fashioning a lifestyle that is pleasing to God.

Phil 3:18 - For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,

In the first verse of this section Paul had given a positive command to observe or mark those whose lives reflect the godliness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now in this verse and the one that follows Paul will share the negative examples that must be avoided. This sentence begins with

“for” (*gar*) which indicates that Paul will give additional explanation for what he had just said. The word **“many”** (*polos*) could be translated as “a great number,” most, or almost all. Paul was saying that, as believers look around them for godly examples to follow, almost everyone they observe will be living in a way that is *not* according to the pattern seen in the life of Jesus. Paul had spoken (*legō*) to them about this many times while he was with them previously in Philippi. Now he was writing the same thing to them, and having to express these things to them in writing had brought him to the point of **“weeping”** (*klaīō*). This is the same word used to describe the bitter tears of the apostle Peter after he had denied Jesus three times, as well as the uncontrollable weeping of Mary Magdalene as she sat outside the tomb of Jesus. It portrays a deep level of pain, grief, or mourning over a situation or circumstance. In this case Paul was heartbroken over the fact that almost all of the people in the world are living in a way that is contrary to what God desires.

At the end of this verse, Paul said that those people are **“enemies of the cross of Christ.”** The word **“enemies”** (*echthros*) pictures open hostility rather than simple lack of concern or disinterest. This is the same word that Paul will use in his epistle to the Colossians where he will describe the believers’ former life apart from Christ: “you were formerly alienated and **hostile** in mind, engaged in evil deeds” (Col 1:21). The phrase “enemies of the cross of Christ” points to all of the many people who refuse to believe in what Jesus accomplished on the cross in order to procure their salvation. The vast majority of people will continue to go about their lives, living in order to please themselves rather than God. In the next verse Paul will give a more detailed description of their attitudes and their end.

Phil 3:19 - whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

Paul began by sharing the final outcome or destiny which will result from their refusal to be saved. He stated that their end is “**destruction**” (*apōleia*), using a word that means eternal ruin, misery, and the loss of everything that gives meaning to life. He continued by sharing three things that characterize these people. First, their “**god is their appetite**,” and the word “**appetite**” (*koilia*) literally means a hollow cavity, or more specifically the abdomen or inner organs like the stomach or the womb. This word designates any of the physical appetites and sensual pleasures that are the driving focus of most human beings. In his earlier epistle to the Corinthians, Paul used this word to represent the sensual gratification of sexual immorality which believers are to flee (1 Cor 6:12-20). Unfortunately, for the vast majority of people, these kinds of pleasures are what give them the most satisfaction or meaning in life. This is all they have, since they reject the ultimate meaning and existence provided by God to those who trust Him.

Second, Paul stated that their “**glory is in their shame**.” They are proud of and even boast about things of which they should be ashamed. What brings them meaning in life are things that God considers disgraceful. Their thinking and outlook have become distorted to the point that their values are in opposition to what is truly valuable and praiseworthy. In their way of thinking, good has become evil, and evil has become good. As Paul had previously written to the Romans, “they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ...Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their

hearts to impurity” (Rom 1:18-32).

Finally, Paul said that they “**set their minds on earthly things.**” The phrase “**set their minds**” is from the single Greek word *phroneō* which we have seen so often in this letter. Here it means that their thinking or mindset is focused purely on “**earthly things**” (*epigeios*). As mentioned before, to the vast majority of people in the world, earthly things are what give them the most satisfaction and meaning in life. Because they reject the life that is found in Christ, they are left with a pale imitation of the blessed existence that God provides for those who trust Him.

Unfortunately it is also possible for Christians to become focused on earthly things. One commentator of a previous generation has eloquently explained:

Their attention is directed to honor, gain, or pleasure, and their chief anxiety is that they may secure these objects. This is mentioned as one of the characteristics of enmity to the cross of Christ; and if this be so, how many are there in the church now who are the real enemies of the cross! How many professing Christians are there who regard little else than worldly things! How many who live only to acquire wealth, to gain honor, or to enjoy the pleasures of the world! How many are there who have no interest in a prayer meeting, in a Sunday school, in religious conversation, and in the advancement of true religion on the earth! These are the real enemies of the cross. It is not so much those who deny the doctrines of the cross, as it is those who oppose its influence on their hearts; not so much those who live to scoff and deride religion, as it is those who “mind earthly things,” that injure this holy cause in the world. [Barnes, 205]

Phil 3:20 - For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

Returning now to the positive example of those who believe, and in contrast to those who are earthly enemies of the cross of Christ, **“our citizenship is in heaven.”** The word **“citizenship”** (*politeuma*) is a form of the word that Paul had used in 1:27 to describe how the Philippian believers were to “behave as citizens” (*politeuomai*) of their new domain. As mentioned before, the citizens of Philippi would have immediately grasped the implications of this terminology. One scholar explains, “There may be an allusion here to the constitution of Philippi. Since Philippi was a colony of Rome, its *politeuma*, the register of its citizens, was kept in Rome, its mother city....As citizens of a Roman colony were expected to promote the interests of their mother city and maintain its dignity, so citizens of heaven in an earthly environment should represent the interests of their true homeland and lead lives worthy of their citizenship.” [Bruce, 133]

The discouraging picture of unbelievers presented in 3:18-19 is contrasted here with the hope that believers possess. First, as seen above, their real homeland is the perfection of heaven and their true citizenship is there. As one commentator said:

The Philippians...knew what it was to be citizens of a far-off city (even though most of them had probably never been to Rome), and they were proud of that status. On an immeasurably higher plane, believers belong to the city “whose architect and builder is God” (Heb 11:10) or to the “Jerusalem that is above” (Gal 4:26), and are themselves “aliens and strangers on earth” (Heb 11:13). As such, their eyes should be heavenward, anticipating the coming of their Savior, who is not a mere earthly emperor but the Lord Jesus Christ. An eager expectation of his return does much to protect believers from earthly, sensual enticements. [Kent, 807]

Second, believers who are now temporary sojourners on earth should be living in eager expectation of their returning Lord and Savior. The phrase “**eagerly wait**” (*apekdechomai*) is a rare double compound word which means to fully expect and intensely look ahead in order to receive or take hold of something. In this verse Paul is elaborating on something he mentioned previously when he referred to the future “**day of Christ**” (1:6, 10; 2:16). This is the important doctrine of the return of Christ to rescue church-age saints from the wrath to come upon an ungodly world (1 Thess 1:10). According to Jesus’ promise in John 14:2-3, He is now in heaven preparing a place for believers, and He will return at the proper time to take church-age believers to be with Him forever (1 Thess 4:17). It will be at that time that “He who began a good work in you will perfect it” (1:6). In other New Testament revelation we are told that after their transformation believers will each stand before the judgment seat of Christ to be rewarded for their faithfulness (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10), and at that time Paul hoped to “have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain” (2:16). In the next verse, Paul will provide additional details about the resurrection and transformation which church-age saints should be eagerly awaiting.

Phil 3:21 - who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

At the time of His coming, the Lord Jesus Christ will “**transform the body of our humble state.**” Paul did not go into great detail here about our “**humble**” (*tapeinōsis*) state, using a word that depicts the “lowliness” and “vile” condition of bodies that are sinful by na-

ture. Instead he encapsulated the doctrine of the total depravity of mankind in that single word. Our existing mortal flesh is not suitable for an eternal existence with God in heaven. As one scholar explained, “Our body needs to be changed by an act of God. This puts attaining perfection beyond the power of any Christian as long as he has his present body. Paul does not dwell here upon the sinfulness of the body, its mortality, or decay, but sums it all up as a body of humiliation suited for this life but not for glory. When the Lord comes, this body will be transformed into a body like the glorious body of Christ.” [Walvoord, 97]

This verse tells us that our transformed body will have properties similar to those of Jesus’ body at His resurrection – in **“conformity with the body of His glory.”** The New Testament shares some additional characteristics of believers’ resurrection bodies: imperishable, glorious, and powerful (1 Cor 15:42-49). The apostle John wrote, “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2). The apostle Paul also explained that at Christ’s coming for church-age believers, both living and previously deceased saints will rise to meet their Lord: “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor 15:51-53). In a parallel passage, Paul wrote that “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive

and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:16-17).

This amazing transformation will be achieved **“by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”** It is certainly not too much to think that our **“Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,”** the omnipotent King of the Universe, is capable of accomplishing this spectacular feat. After all, He is the One who created all things “in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible,” and Who holds all things together at this very moment (Col 1:15-17).

Phil 4:1 - Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

Paul started with the word **“Therefore,”** which means that what he will say here is closely connected to all that he just finished saying. Again he addressed the Philippians as his **“beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown.”** His great affection for them is clearly evident, and they represent the crowning achievement of his ministry for which he was commissioned by Christ. When he stands before the Lord on the “day of Christ” he hopes to be able to point to the Philippians who are there with him as proof of his faithfulness in fulfilling the mission given to him by Jesus on the Damascus road (Acts 9:15-16). At that time Paul hopes that the Lord will give him a **“crown”** (*stephanos*) as a symbol of achievement for his service in ministry. This word for “crown” was used to identify the garland or wreath which was presented to the winner in the public athletic games, and here Paul pictured the successful completion of his “race” for the sake of Christ (2 Tim 4:6-8).

The main action word in this sentence is a command or imperative in the present tense, which could be paraphrased as “continually be in the habit of standing firm in the way I just described.” One scholar has said, “A Christian is occupied with his coming Lord and his promised deliverance when he will receive a glorious body suited for the presence of the Lord....Eager expectation of the return of the Lord and of the fulfillment of promises for our glorification is the hallmark of Christians walking in fellowship with their Lord. It is then that our longing for perfection will be realized.” [Walvoord, 98] In this verse where Paul shared his admonition to believers for living in eager expectation of Christ’s return, he began and ended by declaring his deep and abiding love for his “**beloved**” Philippians. It is out of love that they should also seek to follow Paul’s example and to obey his exhortations.

Phil 4:2 - I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord.

Beginning in this verse, Paul will raise a specific issue that he became aware of in the church at Philippi. A spirit of disunity existed between two of the prominent women in the fellowship, and this suggests that their disagreement was becoming a threat to the unity of the church as a whole. This was a clear case where obedience to Paul’s previous admonitions could resolve the situation. The phrase “**to live in harmony**” is a translation of the single Greek word *phroneō* which we have seen so often in this letter. It is the same word that Paul used when he told the Philippians to “have this **attitude** in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus” (2:5) – an attitude of humility of mind.

Paul's exhortation could be expanded and paraphrased this way: "**Euodia** and **Syntyche**, be of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose; doing nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regarding one another as more important than yourselves. You are not merely to look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of each other" (2:2-4). Paul's way of handling this situation suggests that it involved a personality conflict rather than a doctrinal dispute, since Paul always dealt with doctrinal issues directly and uncompromisingly. One commentator has said, "Paul is careful not to take sides, and his exhortation points out that if they both have the mind of the Lord the disharmony will disappear....But too often human pride, the stubbornness of the flesh, and personal ambition for prominence get in the way. Paul's exhortation emphasizes that Christians who are really yielded to the Lord should be able to resolve their differences." [Walvoord, 102-103]

Phil 4:3 - Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

In the previous verse we met "**Euodia**" (whose name means "prosperous journey") and "**Syntyche**" (whose name means "happy chance"), with both words being feminine in gender. Here in this verse the name "**Syzygus**" ("yoked together", masculine gender) appears. Most Bible versions translate this word as "**companion**" (ESV, NASB, NIV, NKJV), "yokefellow" (ASV, KJV, RSV), or "partner" (CSB, NLT). However, "**Syzygus**" can also be considered a proper name [Kent, 808; MacArthur, 272]. One point

in favor of this view is that the context is concerned with listing individuals “whose **names** are in the book of life.”

The word “**ask**” (*erōtaō*) is the normal word for asking something of someone, and Paul was requesting that this person help Euodia and Syntyche to resolve their differences. Evidently they were important to Paul and to the Philippian church for a number of reasons, one of which was their record of faithful service alongside Paul “**in the cause of the gospel.**” This verse also gave the name of “**Clement**” before mentioning “**the rest**” (*loipos*) of Paul’s fellow workers as a collective group. The Philippian believers would have known all about the situation and exactly who Paul was referring to by name in these verses, even though we do not have any other information about them. They were all individuals who had contributed to the ministry of sharing the gospel and building up the body of Christ during their time on earth. All of them have now been gone for centuries, but when they passed they passed into eternity, and believers will see them again in due time. Having a more eternal outlook should put into proper perspective the petty earthly squabbles between members of the church.

The important point in listing all of these people was that their “**names are in the book of life.**” The idea of the “**book of life**” is that God keeps a record of all the righteous who have placed their faith and trust in Him. Paul is not saying that he had been given special knowledge of who was saved versus who was not, but he is expressing his hope and confidence of their salvation based on what he had witnessed in their words and works. His use of the phrase “*book of life*” is reminiscent of Jesus’ words to His disciples when they returned after announcing His presence to the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus said,

“Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven” (Luke 10:20).

Phil 4:4 - Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!

The fact that one’s name is recorded in God’s “*book of life*” should result in great rejoicing, and this is what Paul desired to communicate in this verse. Based on this fact alone, his beloved brethren in Christ have a constant cause for rejoicing – “Rejoice in the Lord **always**” (*pan-tote*), which is a word that literally means “every when.” Both instances of the word “**rejoice**” (*chairō*) in this verse are imperatives or commands in the present tense, which could be translated as “constantly be in the habit of rejoicing” in God’s grace and goodness which has provided for your life both now and throughout eternity. This kind of joy is not a feeling, but a decision. Here Paul is giving a command, but you cannot command a person to have a specific feeling. It requires mental discipline to obey a command like this, especially in the face of difficult experiences in life. But with the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit, believers can have a joy that is not conditioned on outward circumstances.

This type of rejoicing is the unique privilege of people who have put their faith and trust in Christ alone for salvation. Unbelievers may experience the fleeting human emotion of joy, but believers have the capacity to live with a mindset of joy that is independent of their circumstances. The key to this type of joyful existence is a deliberate focus on living “**in the Lord**.” One commentator explained:

Men everywhere have felt the need of a Saviour, and to us it should be a subject of unfeigned joy that one has been provided for us. When we think of our sins, we may now rejoice that there is one who can deliver us from them; when we think of the worth of the soul, we may rejoice that there is one who can save it from death; when we think of our danger, we can rejoice that there is one who can rescue us from all peril, and bring us to a world where we shall be forever safe....The principal joy of the true Christian should be in the Lord. He should find his happiness not in riches, or gaiety, or vanity, or ambition, or books, or in the world in any form, but in communion with the Lord Jesus, and in the hope of eternal life through him. In his friendship, and in his service, should be the highest of our joys, and in these we may always be happy. It is the privilege, therefore, of a Christian to rejoice. He has more sources of joy than any other man – sources which do not fail when all others fail. [Barnes, 189-190]

Phil 4:5 - Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

Paul followed the command to rejoice with another important command relating to their attitude and behavior. In their relationship with others, they are to demonstrate a **“gentle spirit”** (*epieikēs*). This term comes from a root word that means “to yield, give place, or submit.” It carries the idea of a meek or mild attitude which expresses humility of mind and regards others as more important than ourselves (2:3-4). This is the same attitude that Paul had been encouraging and illustrating throughout this letter.

No doubt there will be many times during a believer’s earthly life when it will be challenging to obey Paul’s command in this verse. Circumstances will arise in which our natural reaction will be to defend ourselves and to fuel the fires of dissension within the body of Christ. But it is during such times that demonstrating a gentle, mild, or gra-

cious spirit will have the effect of defusing an otherwise explosive situation.

At the end of this verse Paul included a simple statement of fact: **“The Lord is near.”** This is an important realization which can put into perspective what precedes it as well as what follows. The word **“near”** (*eggus*) can refer to nearness in place as well as nearness in time. For Christians the Lord is near in proximity since each believer is indwelt by the Spirit of Christ and has constant access to His aid in every circumstance of life. He is continually active in yielded believers, “both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (2:13). This means that Christians have His help in their efforts to display a gentle spirit in every situation.

In addition to His nearness in proximity, the “day of Christ” is approaching ever nearer in time. His return to gather church-age saints who will then appear before the judgment seat of Christ (Rom 14:10) should provide a great deal of motivation to live in a way that pleases Him. One scholar explained, “Our judgment of others is tempered by the fact that God will need to judge us, and consciousness of our own failures and limitations tends to make us more patient with others who fall short. Such an attitude will not only reveal a work of grace in the heart of the individual Christian, but will provide an atmosphere for harmonious relationships within the church.” [Walvoord, 106]

Phil 4:6 - Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

The fact that “**the Lord is near**” should also provide the needed motivation to obey Paul’s commands in this verse. Since the Lord is near, both in proximity and time, He is able to help believers to overcome anxiety and to live in peace. The implication in the first part of this verse is that there will be circumstances that arise in believers’ lives which will cause them to be “**anxious**” (*merimnaō*). This word can be used in both a positive and negative sense. It can mean to have a care, thought, or interest in something, which can even lead to promoting one’s own interests. But it can also mean to be troubled with cares and to worry about one’s circumstances.

Some language scholars classify the phrase “**Be anxious for nothing**” as an imperative of prohibition, which is a command that forbids something. Here Paul is forbidding both types of anxiety. It is as if he is saying, “Do not put your own concerns above those of others,” and “Do not be weighed down with cares about your situation which is only temporary.” In both cases, the believer would be putting *himself* at the center of his thinking, rather than focusing on his Lord and on the concerns of others around him. Paul is not forbidding believers to experience feelings of anxiety as they arise. Feelings cannot be commanded, but believers should use feelings as a signal that they need to sharpen their mental focus to center their thoughts on their Savior. Believers must remember that “the Lord is near.”

In the second part of this verse Paul described the most practical way to handle anxiety. Essentially, he will tell believers to refocus their thoughts on their Savior by communing and communicating directly with Him. The action word or verb in this phrase is “**to make known**” (*gnōrizō*) which means that believers are to address their

thoughts **“to God.”** This does not mean that God is unaware of our thoughts and circumstances until we tell Him about them. On the contrary, God knows that it is for our benefit rather than His that we deliberately focus on Him by sharing our concerns with Him. Paul specified that believers are to do this **“in everything,”** meaning in the midst of every circumstance. Paul also showed believers how to do this. We make known our requests to God **“by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.”** The word **“prayer”** (*proseuchē*) is the typical term for bringing one’s requests directly to God. The second term, **“supplication”** (*deēsis*), is a somewhat stronger word which conveys a sense of want, lack, or need as the basis for the request. All of this should be done with a mindset of **“thanksgiving”** which expresses the attitude of gratitude that believers should have as they think of who God is and what He has done. Thanksgiving is grounded in the character of God and acknowledges that, whatever God sends into our lives, it is for the best since it is consistent with His overall plan for us.

Phil 4:7 - And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This verse presents the consequence of focusing our thoughts on God and communing directly with Him. The antidote to “anxiety” is the **“peace of God.”** Some view this peace as representing harmony and unity within the Christian fellowship, which Paul was certainly encouraging. This definitely could be one of the byproducts of the peace mentioned here, but the peace Paul is talking about includes more than peaceful or harmonious relationships among people. It is a deep and abiding peace that results from being reconciled to God and having a personal rela-

tionship with Him. It is God's own peace that He bestows upon a believer who is fully trusting Him. The act of "prayer and supplication with thanksgiving" gives evidence of this trust, and God honors those who honor Him.

The remaining phrases in this verse confirm that what Paul discussed here is a supernatural peace – the peace of God Himself. The natural peacefulness that sometimes occurs in our lives ("peace and quiet") is not something that could be rightly described as surpassing all comprehension. But the peace which Paul mentioned here "**surpasses all comprehension**" in that it is beyond our understanding because it is unnatural in the normal experience of life. One commentator described it as "a peace which is nowhere else known. Nothing else will furnish it but God. No confidence that a man can have in his own powers; no reliance which he can repose on his own plans or on the promises or fidelity of his fellow-men, and no calculations which he can make on the course of events, can impart such peace to the soul as simple confidence in God." [Barnes, 215] The peace that God gives cannot be explained by natural human capabilities, and it is greater than anything that we might try to imagine.

One of the important functions of this kind of peace is that it prevents our mind, will, and emotions from getting out of control. In Paul's words, it "**will guard** your hearts and your minds." The word "**guard**" (*phroureō*) is a military term that carries the idea of watching over and protecting something from harm, as well as preserving or keeping a person safe so they can perform an important task. The "prayer and supplication with thanksgiving" which Paul urged (4:6) is an important activity which brings the "peace of God" as the antidote to anxiety, and this "peace of God" can in turn protect and preserve the

believer's heart and mind from anxiety-producing attacks.

Summary

Paul began this section by urging believers to follow the positive examples of godly living that he had shared with them. He also admitted that there are many negative examples in the world, but those examples of gratifying the desires of the flesh must be avoided. Believers have their citizenship in heaven and should live in a way that befits their high status. In fact, their Savior will soon return from heaven to transform their fallen, fleshly bodies and to take them to the place in heaven which He has been preparing for them (John 14:2-3). He will return at the proper time to take church-age saints to be with Him forever (1 Thess 4:17). In the meantime, believers are to stand firm in the faith until He arrives to perfect them in glory. The fact that believers' names are recorded in the "*book of life*" should be a cause for great rejoicing, both now and throughout eternity. Because the Lord is near, believers should display gentleness of spirit to those around them, as well as avoiding debilitating anxiety through communion with God in prayer. His peace, the supernatural peace of God Himself, will guard and protect believers in a way that is far beyond our own understanding.

Peace and contentment

(Philippians 4:8-23)

Throughout this letter the apostle Paul had encouraged believers to gain control of their thought life and to focus their mindset on the things of God (2:2, 5; 3:15; 4:2). This is one of the most important battles of the Christian life, and it is not as much a struggle against external forces as it is an internal conflict to gain mastery over a believer's own fleshly mind, will, emotions, and physical desires. In the first part of this final section, Paul will provide positive direction for the focus of a believer's thought life with its resulting peace.

Phil 4:8 - Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

As he did in 3:1, Paul began this section with the word “**finally**” (*loipos*), which means “as for what remains.” Paul will now continue with the next point he wanted to emphasize. He again addressed them as “**brethren**,” so these remarks are for those who have put their faith in Christ. In this verse Paul will list eight specific qualities that should be the focus for the thought life of every Christian. All of these things are important because he tells them to “**dwell** on these things.” The word “**dwell**” (*logizomai*, present imperative) is Paul's command that

carries the idea of continually or habitually taking these things into account, as well as deliberately focusing on and filling our thoughts with things that have these qualities.

“true” (*alēthēs*) - This term comes from a root word that literally means “nothing hidden.” It has the idea of being exactly what it appears to be, without pretense or deception, so it is real and genuine. Ultimately, the highest truth is found in God the Father (John 3:33), Jesus Christ (John 1:14), the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 15:26), and the Scriptures (John 17:17), so believers should make it their goal to fill their minds with all of these. By implication, believers are to avoid dwelling on whatever is false or deceptive.

“honorable” (*semnos*) - This word has the thought of what is reputable and worthy of respect for its quality or character. In his pastoral epistles Paul said that deacons, deaconesses, and older men are to be *honorable* (1 Tim 3:8, 11; Titus 2:2). A believer’s thinking should be focused on the high standards that God has for Christian character which is respectable and worthy of honor. By implication, believers are to avoid occupying their minds with things that are dishonorable or disreputable.

“right” (*dikaios*) - The most precise meaning of this word is “righteous.” It is an important term which carries the thought of upholding or keeping the commands of God. What is “right” should be “upright” or righteous in every aspect. By implication, Christians should avoid pondering unrighteousness or whatever is contrary to the will and Word of God.

“pure” (*hagnos*) - This word literally means “clean,” so it includes things that are blameless or innocent. It pictures whatever is pure from faults and stains. By implica-

tion, believers must avoid focusing their thoughts on whatever is filthy, gross, or disgusting.

“lovely” (*prospilēs*) - Literally, this term means “friendly toward,” so it has the idea of things that are pleasing, agreeable, uplifting, and positive in outlook. By implication, Christians must avoid filling their minds with things that are hateful, malicious, and disagreeable.

“of good repute” (*euphēmos*) - The meaning of this word centers on what others report about something. It includes things that are generally well spoken of, commendable, and reputable. By implication, believers should avoid spending time thinking about whatever is disreputable, disgraceful, or reprehensible.

“excellence” (*aretē*) - This term comes from a word that originally meant “manliness” in its highest sense. Therefore, anything that has high moral standing or valor in achievement should occupy believers’ thoughts. By implication, Christians should avoid focusing their thoughts on whatever is immoral, unethical, or wicked.

“worthy of praise” (*epainos*) - To be worthy of praise means that something is commendable, laudable, of the highest quality, and of the most benefit. By implication, believers should avoid contemplating whatever is despicable, deplorable, or scandalous.

Unfortunately, the fleshly mind has a morbid curiosity which seeks to investigate things that have a tinge of darkness. But “He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col 1:13), so believers should not be obsessed with things done in the shadows. As Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience

of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). Every believer is engaged in a struggle to control and direct their own thoughts in a way that will please the Lord. We are to continually and deliberately fill our thoughts with things that have the eight qualities given by Paul in this verse. As believers grow in their ability to do this, it will be of tremendous help in obeying the command Paul will share in the next verse.

Phil 4:9 - The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

In this verse Paul will give them another command to “**practice these things**” (*prassō*, present imperative). This word implies more than a single act of “doing.” Instead, it carries the idea of performing something repeatedly and habitually until it becomes a natural part of one’s lifestyle. The things Paul referred to here involve putting into practice the godly behaviors and character traits that believers have been exposed to in several different ways.

“**learned**” (*manthanō*) - This term is related to the word “disciple,” which means one who learns from another and becomes a devoted follower of that teacher or teaching. To truly “learn” something, one must come to understand it through experience and put it into practice so that it becomes a regular habit in one’s own life.

“**received**” (*paralambanō*) - This word literally means “to take to one’s side or to receive to oneself.” In order for something “learned” to become part of one’s life, it must be accepted as being true or acknowledged as being valuable. This requires effort and discipline to mentally sift through all of the things we are exposed to in order to make a value judgment about what is worth keeping and making part of our life.

“heard” (*akouō*) - Someone once said that the easiest way to avoid anguish is to learn from the mistakes of others without having to make them yourself. Even though this seems like the best approach, it is challenging because we most desire to learn through direct experience. But it is an important skill to be able to learn by “hearing,” whether it is through hearing the spoken instructions, admonitions, or life experiences of others.

“seen” (*horaō*) - One of the most straightforward ways to learn something is to follow the visible example of others who are living in the manner that you desire to emulate. Spoken words or stories “heard” can be quite effective, but “seeing” a living model with one’s own eyes is probably the most powerful learning approach. Having a godly example as a pattern for one’s behavior may be the best learning approach of all.

Making every effort to put these things into practice will result in the blessed experience of having **“the God of peace”** bring the “peace of God” (4:7) into one’s life. As one commentator explained, “The meaning here is, that Paul, by pursuing the course of life which he had led, and which he here counsels them to follow, had found that it had been attended with the blessing of the God of peace, and he felt the fullest assurance that the same blessing would rest on them if they imitated his example. The way to obtain the blessing of the God of peace, is to lead a holy life, and to perform with faithfulness all the duties which we owe to God and to our fellow-men.”

[Barnes, 217]

Phil 4:10 - But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.

The word translated “**But**” (*de*) is the same word that Paul often used to introduce a new topic during the course of his letters, and it is typically rendered “**Now**” (e.g., 1:12; 4:20). He is not so much stating a contrast here as he is simply introducing another topic. He began by sharing his own reaction in saying that he “**rejoiced in the Lord greatly**,” and this is the same word (*chairō*) that he used eight times throughout this letter (e.g., 1:18). Something had happened that gave Paul cause for “**greatly**” (*mega-lōs*) rejoicing. Here Paul will briefly identify this event, and then in the verses that follow he will explain his attitude toward his own material needs before returning to give more details about the event itself.

Paul described the occasion for his rejoicing by saying that the Philippians had “**revived your concern for me**.” The word “**revived**” (*anathallō*) pictures a flowering plant that grows or blooms again after having been deadheaded. It is preceded by two adverbs of time: “**now**” (*ēdē*, “at the present time”) and “**at last**” (*pote*, “at length or from time past”). The word “**concern**” is actually the Greek term *phroneō* (“to think, exercise the mind”) which Paul had used many times throughout this letter. The Philippians’ thoughts of Paul once again had brought forth blossoms. In this verse Paul did not specify how they had expressed their concern for him, but he will give more details in 4:15-19. Here he simply said that they had expressed their concern in a tangible way.

Paul did not want to give the impression that they had been unconcerned before this time, so in the last part of this verse he clearly stated that they “**were concerned before**” (*phroneō*). The imperfect tense describes an action that began in the past and had continued up to the present time. In the final phrase Paul gave the reason that

there had been a gap in their expressions of concern for him. He said, “**you lacked opportunity**” (*akaireomai*), which is from the root word “time” (*kairos*) and it means that there had not been an appropriate time or occasion for them to demonstrate their thoughts in a concrete way. Paul had spent several years in Roman custody, in Jerusalem, at Caesarea, and finally in Rome. His situation had changed, however, when he was allowed to live in his own rented house (Acts 28:30). This required him to pay his way without having the freedom to earn his living, so “**now at last**” the Philippians had the perfect opportunity to renew their concern for Paul’s needs.

Phil 4:11 - Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

Paul will insert a parenthesis here in order to share his valuable perspective on the things that believers need in life. First he explained that his previous comment about “rejoicing greatly” was not motivated by desperate “**want**” or poverty. His rejoicing did not result from relief at being rescued from physical need. Shortly he will explain his motivation for rejoicing (4:17-18).

One of the things that Paul himself had “**learned**” (see 4:9) was how to be “**content**” (*autarkēs*) no matter what his situation. This term comes from the root word *arkeō* which means to be satisfied, contented, or have the attitude that what one has is enough. It carries the thought of being independent of external circumstances. There were certainly times when Paul had experienced desperate need, but God had always been faithful to carry him through.

Earlier after describing his previous life in Judaism he said, “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ” (3:8). We understand from this statement that he considered all of his previous legalistic activities to be fruitless for gaining righteousness before a holy God. However, it is also quite possible that Paul lost his material possessions in addition to everything else. One scholar explained, “One could not be a citizen of Tarsus without possessing substantial means. But for the sake of Christ Paul had ‘lost all things,’ including (we may be sure) his material heritage; he learned henceforth to live on what he could earn by his part-time ‘tentmaking’ (cf. 1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8; Acts 18:3; 20:34).” [Bruce, 150] In the following verse Paul will provide additional information about his attitude of contentment.

Phil 4:12 - I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

In this verse Paul shared three sets of contrasting conditions. In the first case he stated, “**I know**” (*oida*) using a word that means to gain knowledge by personal experience. Literally, he wrote, “I know to be humbled, and I know to be abounding.” The phrase “**how to get along with humble means**” translates the single Greek word *tapeinoō* which is the same word Paul used in 2:8 when he said that Jesus “humbled” Himself. The central idea is one of being brought low to the point of having the bare minimum needed to exist. In his list of afflictions in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 there were several instances when

Paul was reduced to the point of dire need. In the second half of this comparison he declared that “**I also know how to live in prosperity.**” The phrase “**to live in prosperity**” translates the single Greek word *perisseuō* which pictures something increasing and overflowing to a greater extent than was expected. In this first comparison Paul has known both extremes of lowliness and abundance.

For the next two sets of contrasts he stated, “**I have learned the secret.**” This phrase translates the single Greek word *mueō* which is a term Paul borrowed from the pagan mystery religions in which a novice or newcomer was instructed in its secret rituals. “Paul used it here to suggest a kind of ‘initiation’ (by his experiences) into being content when either well fed or hungry, and either in plenty or in want.” [Lightner, 665] There is a way in which learning to live contentedly in extreme circumstances could be compared to learning a hidden mystery. It is not obvious or easy to learn how to smoothly alternate between a life of poverty and one of prosperity. This is certainly a secret that not many people have mastered. The next set of extremes involve “**being filled**” (*chortazō*) and “**going hungry**” (*peinaō*). The first term pictures the fodder provided to fatten a domestic animal that lives in relative luxury. The second term pictures the exact opposite condition of being famished for food and having to tighten one’s belt.

The final contrast is between “**having abundance**” (*perisseuō*) and “**suffering need**” (*hustereō*). The first term is the same word Paul had used earlier in this verse when he mentioned living in “prosperity.” The second term literally means “to come later or fall behind,” and it pictures running short of supplies or suffering from the

lack of or poor quality of provisions. Paul's life was being lived at the extremes, and this type of existence would require that he master the secret of contentment. He could obviously not claim to be self-sufficient, but he had learned through the entire range of experience to put his trust completely in God.

Phil 4:13 - I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

In this final verse of his parenthesis in which he has shared his valuable perspective on contentment in the Christian life, Paul will declare his total dependence on God. A literal translation of this short verse is, "all I do in Him empowering me." No matter what he is called upon to face in life, Paul said that he can "**do**" it. The English word "do" cannot capture the depth of this Greek term (*ischuō*) which carries the idea of exercising force, demonstrating strength, or exhibiting power in order to accomplish extraordinary deeds. The word "**through**" is the Greek preposition *en* which means "in, by, or with." "**Him**" is obviously referring to Christ Jesus. As long as Paul is "in Christ" he will be able to endure all circumstances because it is Christ who empowers him. The word "**strengthens**" (*endunamoō*, present tense) means to continually provide power to enable one to grow strong. Sometimes a believer needs power, not for *doing* something, but for *waiting* on something. Strength is required for both tasks.

Based on Paul's experience through the various challenges of life which he had mentioned previously, he came to the conclusion that "in Christ" he could handle anything. He could and did endure all of the trials detailed in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, including sickness, hunger, exhaustion, imprisonment, beatings, robbers, shipwreck,

and the threat of death itself. If anyone might offer himself as an example to others for maintaining a godly outlook while enduring various difficulties, it would be the apostle Paul. With these words expressing his grateful confidence in the Lord, Paul concluded his parenthesis regarding contentment despite circumstances.

Phil 4:14 - Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction.

In this verse and the ones that follow Paul will return to discussing the Philippians' renewed concern for his needs (4:10). Even though Paul had maintained an attitude of contentment and did not wish for more (4:11-13), the Philippians had taken this opportunity to express their love and concern for him during his Roman confinement. Here Paul commended them for sharing with him in his trials. The words **“share with”** (*sugkoinōneō*) are a form of the term Paul had used previously when he mentioned the Philippians' “participation” in the gospel (1:5) and the “fellowship” of the Spirit (2:1). Even though they were separated by a great distance, the Philippians were still concerned about Paul and desired to express their continued partnership with him in his ministry.

Paul did not want his previous remarks about contentment to be interpreted as meaning that he did not appreciate their gift. He was thrilled with their gift and “rejoiced greatly” over their concern for him (4:10). In order not to give the wrong impression, however, he clearly declared **“you have done well”** (*kalōs*), using a word that means excellently, nobly, or commendably. In addition to this direct declaration of his appreciation, Paul will go on in the following verses to elaborate on the Philippians' demonstrations of selfless generosity in order to support his ministry. In many ways, they had been his most

faithful ministry partners since Paul had first shared the gospel with them ten years earlier.

Phil 4:15 - You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone;

As Paul began this testimonial to their generosity, he called upon the Philippians themselves as eyewitnesses to the facts that he will present here. He said, **“You yourselves also know, Philippians,”** and the word **“know”** (*oida*) means to know by observation and direct experience. They know these things because they were present when they occurred. The next phrase could be translated literally as **“in the beginning of the gospel,”** and it refers to the time when Paul and his missionary companions traveled from Troas to Macedonia to begin sharing the good news of salvation by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 16). From the very beginning of Paul’s ministry in Macedonia, and even **“after I left Macedonia,”** the Philippian believers were faithful partners and supporters of Paul’s gospel mission. In fact, Paul went so far as to say that **“no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone.”** He used business or accounting terminology to describe their contributions. When he said, **“in the matter of giving and receiving”** he was using the illustration of a financial account with debits and credits on the balance sheet. The Philippians were unique in that they continued to keep track of Paul’s whereabouts so they could be aware of his needs and take steps to assist with them.

We know from Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church that the Philippians provided help to him even while he was ministering in Corinth. One scholar described the sit-

uation this way:

In 2 Corinthians 11:8-9 he says to the Corinthian Christians, “I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed.” There is probably a further reference to this help in Acts 18:5, where Silas (Silvanus) and Timothy return from Macedonia and join Paul in Corinth, enabling him to “devote himself exclusively to preaching,” instead of spending part of his time in tentmaking as he had done for the first few weeks after his arrival in Corinth. [Bruce, 152-153]

At the end of this verse he clearly stated that no other church came to his aid in this way, **“but you alone”** (*monos*). This word emphasized the singular distinctiveness of the Philippian church. They alone, they and no other, became a solitary beacon of support for Paul’s ministry. There is no record to indicate that even his home church in Antioch of Syria contributed anything but prayer to Paul’s work. The Philippians were a shining example of generosity which Paul appreciated and praised as an example to other churches (Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8:1-5).

Phil 4:16 - for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.

In this short verse Paul provided proof of his statement in 4:15 that the Philippians began helping him “from the beginning.” Here he said, **“for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift.”** Paul had begun his Macedonian ministry in Philippi, spending a short time there, from a few days to a week or two. When he left Philippi he journeyed immediately to Thessalonica, spending another short period of a few weeks there (Acts 17). But even during that brief interval the Philippians had sent funds to Paul. After leaving Thessalonica Paul ministered in Berea before

traveling to Athens and Corinth. It was during that time, shortly after having become Christians, that the Philippians continued to support Paul's ministry. One scholar explains that this verse can include all of those early instances of the generosity of the Philippians: "The sentence might be rendered: 'Both when I was in Thessalonica and more than once (in other places) you sent me something for my need.' This rendering would cover what he had received from them in Corinth as well as in Thessalonica." [Bruce, 153] By citing these specific cases, Paul clearly communicated that he had not ceased to be grateful for the Philippians' help throughout their long association from the beginning until that present moment.

Phil 4:17 - Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.

Here Paul continued his illustration from the world of business or accounting. Even though he did not seek the gift itself, he certainly appreciated it. The word "**seek**" (*epizēteō*) can convey the idea of intensely searching for, craving, demanding, or clamoring for something. In line with his attitude of contentment, Paul never behaved that way. And even though he did appreciate the gift itself, he viewed their generosity as evidence of the grace of God which was at work in their lives. He did not seek the gift, but he did "**seek**" (*epizēteō*) the profit that would accrue to their account. Here he pictured the believers' gift as a deposit to their account in the bank of heaven which grows with compound interest over time.

Paul's thinking here corresponds to the illustration given by Jesus when He said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor

rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:19-21). One commentator summarized by saying, “They meant Paul to be the gainer from their generosity, and so indeed he is; but on the spiritual plane the permanent gain will be theirs.” [Bruce, 154] This is a spiritual principle which every believer should keep in mind, since it puts their giving into the right perspective. Believers are not so much giving to a particular ministry or to meet a specific need as they are giving to the Lord who will credit the amount to their account. He will then distribute the funds to the places where they are needed. Christian giving puts the funds into the hands of the Lord, who then dispenses them as He pleases.

Phil 4:18 - But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

Paul will conclude his illustration from business by saying, “**I have received everything in full.**” This terminology was essentially Paul’s way of stamping **PAID IN FULL** on their receipt. He certified that he had received everything they sent, that he now had an abundance, and that this ample surplus would provide for his needs both now and into the future. Paul expressed his current state in terms of extremes. The word “**abundance**” (*perisseuō*) is the same one he had used when he said, “I also know how to live in *prosperity*” (4:12). In effect he was saying that the Philippians’ gift had put him into that state of prosperity, even during his confinement while he was awaiting his trial. The phrase “**amply supplied**” (*plēroō*) means to fill to the top so that nothing is

lacking for a full measure. Paul's cup was filled to the brim by their generosity.

In this verse Paul finally specified Epaphroditus' reason for coming to him in Rome. He had been sent as the Philippians' official courier carrying their gift to Paul. They had probably intended for Epaphroditus to stay and to minister with Paul after delivering the gift, but as we saw previously, he had fallen deathly ill and Paul was sending him back to Philippi (2:25-30).

At the end of this verse Paul will switch metaphors, and he will describe the Philippians' gift in terms reminiscent of the Old Testament sacrificial system. He said that their gift is like **"a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God."** Several passages depict the Old Testament burnt offerings as a fragrant or soothing aroma that was acceptable and well-pleasing to God (Gen 8:20-22; Exod 29:18; Lev 1:9, 13, 17; Num 15:2-3). Here Paul shared God's perspective on their generosity by picturing it as a sacrificial act of worship.

Phil 4:19 - And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

In his concluding thought about Christian generosity, Paul will explain one of the additional benefits of sacrificial giving. As one commentator explained the situation, "This assurance of the divine supply of the Philippians' needs implies that they had given so liberally that they actually left themselves in some real need. Those who share generously with others, especially to advance the work of the Lord, are promised a divine supply of anything they might lack because of their generosity (Pr 11:25; 19:17; Mt 5:7)." [Kent, 810-811]

Here Paul may be mirroring the words of Jesus regarding the reciprocal nature of generosity: “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return” (Luke 6:38). Generous giving becomes somewhat more natural for believers who realize that everything they have ultimately belongs to God anyway. The verb “**supply**” (*plēroō*) is the same one Paul had used in 4:18 to describe his state of abundance after receiving the Philippians’ gift. They had filled Paul’s cup to the brim, and here he says that God will fill their cup to the brim as well. Just as the Philippians had ministered to Paul’s need (4:16), God will meet their “**needs**” (*chreia*) too.

Paul could have ended this verse after sharing God’s promise to supply their needs, but he wanted them to understand something of the greatness of God’s riches through which their needs would be met. Paul said they would be supplied, not “out of” God’s riches, but “**ac-cording to**” His riches. Our fallen human reasoning thinks in terms of a “scarcity” mentality – that is, if I receive something from you it means that you now lack something and are less well off than before. But this is not how God’s economics work. The word “**riches**” (*ploutos*) depicts the inexhaustible wealth of our Creator. He is not reduced in means or impoverished after meeting our needs. If He desires that something exist, He is capable of creating it out of nothing, just as He did when He created the universe (Gen 1:1). He has an infinite supply of riches that He is able to allot as needed to sustain everything.

Phil 4:20 - Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

After mentioning God's inexhaustible riches and power, Paul breaks into spontaneous praise. There is actually no verb in this sentence, so it could be rendered, "to our God and Father, glory into the ages of the ages. Amen." When he reflected on all that he had said about God in this letter, as well as all of God's attributes which form the basis for His actions, Paul was overcome and poured forth his passion in worship to the sovereign God of the universe.

Phil 4:21 - Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you.

As he closed this letter Paul desired that his readers greet "**every saint**" by passing on Paul's personal best wishes and hearty thanks – especially for the generous gift to which each of them contributed. He then added that the well-known "**brethren**" who were with him in Rome also wished to pass along their greetings to all of the Philippians. Paul did not identify these co-workers by name here, but from other sources we are able to discover some of them. From this letter we know that Timothy and Epaphroditus were there (1:1; 2:19, 25; 4:18). Tychicus may also have been present before being sent to carry Paul's epistles to the Ephesians (Eph 6:21) and Colossians (Col 4:7). If Tychicus was present, then his traveling companion Onesimus also would have been there (Phm 10). Epaphras the Colossian may also have been present at that time (Col 4:12). Aristarchus and Luke were Paul's constant companions during his imprisonment (Acts 27:2), and Mark may also have been with Paul at that time (Col 4:10; Phm 24). Paul's other known companions in Rome included Jesus who is called Justus (Col 4:11) and Demas (Col 4:14; Phm 24).

Phil 4:22 - All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

In addition to Paul's co-workers in ministry who were mentioned in the previous verse, he added that all of the believers in Rome sent their greetings. Paul specifically included the saints who were members of the household of Caesar. Either directly or indirectly, Paul's ministry had been effective in winning to Christ many of the members of Caesar's vast household. The Philippians would have taken special note of this comment because Philippi was an official Roman colony with close ties to their mother city of Rome. It is possible that some of the Philippian believers may have been personally acquainted with members of Caesar's household, and they would have rejoiced greatly at hearing news of the salvation of many of them. One commentator has said:

Here without comment is introduced one of the reasons why the apostle was rejoicing in his circumstances, however difficult. It gave him, as it were, access to the inner circle of Rome, those who were at the very heart of the military and political life of the city and empire. It was a pulpit which he could not have achieved if he had sought it, but by circumstances he was given entrance to those who could be an important channel to many others in communicating the gospel. [Walvoord, 118-119]

Phil 4:23 - The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

As Paul began this letter with "grace" (1:2, 7), so here he concluded it with "**grace.**" This important term identifies the unmerited favor of God, and it encompasses all of His work on behalf of unworthy, sinful humanity. This is Paul's typical apostolic blessing which he included at the end of many of his epistles. As one commentator has said, "Believers are not only saved by grace, but also sustained

by grace. They are governed by grace, guided by grace, kept by grace, strengthened by grace, sanctified by grace, and enabled by grace. They are constantly dependent on the forgiveness, comfort, peace, joy, boldness, and instruction that come through God's grace." [MacArthur, 318]

Summary

In this final section of his letter to the Philippians, Paul began by sharing the importance of every believer's thought life. Maintaining a positive mental focus will result in having the peace of God, which is something that every Christian desires. It pleases the Lord when believers deliberately fill their minds with things that have the eight qualities listed by Paul in this section, and putting these things into practice results in having "the God of peace" bring the "peace of God" (4:7) into one's life.

After briefly mentioning the gift sent by the Philippians, Paul explained the importance of learning to be content in each of life's circumstances. The key to his secret of contentment was to do all things through Christ who strengthens him. Paul then gave a wonderful testimonial to the Philippians' generosity. They were unique in their attention to Paul's ministry needs and their sacrificial giving to assist him. Paul expressed his heartfelt gratitude for their gift and pictured it as a deposit to their account in the bank of heaven. He concluded by sharing God's promise to supply their needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. After giving his final greetings, Paul ended just as he had started by exalting the grace of God.

Conclusion

The church at Philippi was the first that Paul established on the continent of Europe during his second missionary journey. From the beginning Paul had a special relationship with the Philippians, and they also held him in the highest regard. Throughout the period of ten years before Paul wrote this epistle to them, the Philippians had consistently prayed for him, comforted him, sent helpers to share in his struggles, and supported his ministry financially. Their loyalty, kindness, affection, and generosity had been of great encouragement to Paul. He praised God for their faithfulness through the years. They were true ministry partners in his efforts to spread the gospel.

At the time of writing, Paul was under house arrest in Rome awaiting his trial before the high court. Five years earlier he had been at the center of controversy in Jerusalem when the unbelieving Jews attempted to put him to death for proclaiming the gospel. His custody under Roman authority had been prolonged due to political and administrative upheaval, until Paul finally appealed his case to Caesar. Now that he was allowed to live in his own rented quarters in Rome, the Philippians once again sent him aid. This prompted Paul to thank them for their generosity, and to share news of his situation in Rome.

Paul opened and closed this letter to these beloved saints by invoking the grace of God. He expressed his fond memories of their partnership in the gospel from the beginning, and his gratitude to God overflowed with rejoicing for their fellowship. He prayed that their unselfish sacrificial love would continue to grow and overflow to others, and he affirmed that the Holy Spirit is at work within to bring them to spiritual maturity until the day of Christ's return to glorify all church-age saints.

In Rome, news of Paul's incarceration had brought public attention, and this provided a platform for believers to boldly share the gospel with those who were looking to understand the reason for his unusual imprisonment. Most were proclaiming the gospel from pure motives, but some were preaching Christ out of envy or resentment of Paul. Their selfish ambition gave evidence of a party spirit in the church at Rome, similar to what Paul had dealt with in Corinth (1 Cor 1:10-12). But Paul rejoiced that the true gospel was being proclaimed, regardless of any hidden motives. The fact that Paul was guarded day and night by the elite Praetorian Guard gave him an opportunity to share the gospel, which they then spread to members of Caesar's own household.

As Paul reflected on the possible outcome of his trial in Rome, he provided rare insight into the attitude of a spiritually mature Christian toward his circumstances in life. It would have been natural in his situation to feel depressed or bitter, but Paul was grateful and joyful in the midst of his difficulties. He was ready to accept either outcome: to die and be with Christ, or to live and continue his ministry for the glory of Christ. Rather than focusing on his own circumstances, however, he was constantly concerned about what would be best for others.

After witnessing the partisan spirit in the church at Rome, Paul was keen to warn his beloved Philippians to avoid such selfish ambition. Instead, he exhorted them toward greater unity by sharing four examples of unselfish, sacrificial service which he urged them to imitate. Paul looked to Jesus as the prime illustration of humility, and it is noteworthy that the simple qualities of Christian humility and unity (2:3-4) are connected to some of the deepest and most profound theological truths (2:5-8). If Christ could forgo the glory of heaven to sacrifice Himself for us, then surely we should be able to avoid selfish ambition by considering the needs of others more important than our own.

Paul praised the Philippians' consistent obedience to God's commands, and he urged them to "work out" their salvation through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit who is "at work" to conform them to the character of Christ (2:12-13). Believers are to do this with the awareness that not only God but others around them see their behavior, and that they can shine brightly for Jesus if they are growing spiritually. He then presented three additional examples of selfless service: Paul himself, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. All believers should emulate godly examples in regarding others as more important than themselves, knowing that those who humble themselves in service to others will ultimately be exalted in Christ Jesus.

There was a persistent false teaching to which the Philippians may have been exposed, and Paul met it head on. The Judaizers were insisting that a right standing before God was only possible for those who submitted to the legalistic code given to the Jews. Paul presented his own personal example to prove that it is futile to put confidence in the flesh for achieving merit before a holy God.

Instead, believers are to put their complete confidence in Christ alone, standing firm in the faith until He returns to bring them into glory. The fact that believers' names are recorded in the *book of life* is a reason for great rejoicing, both now and throughout eternity. Because the Lord is near, believers should display a spirit of gentleness toward others, as well as avoiding debilitating anxiety through communion with God in prayer. His peace will guard and protect believers in a way that is far beyond our limited understanding.

Throughout this letter the apostle Paul had encouraged believers to gain control of their thought life and to focus their minds on the things of God (2:2, 5; 3:15; 4:7-8). This is one of the most important battles of the Christian life, and it is not as much a struggle against external forces as it is an internal conflict to gain mastery over our own fleshly mind, will, emotions, and physical desires. Maintaining a godly mental focus will result in "the God of peace" bringing the "peace of God" into one's life (4:7-9).

After expressing his thanks for the Philippians' gift, Paul explained the importance of learning to be content in all of life's circumstances. The secret of contentment is to do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Paul expressed his heartfelt gratitude for their gift and pictured it as a deposit to their account in the bank of heaven. He concluded by sharing God's promise to supply their needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. After giving his final greetings, Paul ended just as he had begun by exalting the grace of God. The apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians is perhaps the most intimate and warm-hearted epistle in the New Testament, and it is a tremendous blessing to those who read and practice its truths.