



Scripture Studies in
**The Epistle to the
Philippians**

By Scott Sperling



*“Come now, let us reason together,”
says the Lord. . .” – Isaiah 1:18*

SCRIPTURE STUDIES
IN
THE EPISTLE TO THE
PHILIPPIANS

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“Oh, the depth of the riches
of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
‘Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?’
‘Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?’
For from him and through him
and for him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.”

– Romans 11:33-36

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1 - PHILIPPIANS 1:1-8

The Epistle to the Philippians

TO MANY, Paul's Epistle to the Philippians is one of the most beloved books of the Bible. Certainly, it contains many words of encouragement for the believer and many verses that are valuable to commit to memory:

...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Phil. 1:6)

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

I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:14)

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Phil. 3:20-21)

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Phil. 4:4)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends

all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6-7)

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things. (Phil. 4:8)

I can do everything through Him who gives me strength. (Phil. 4:13)

The main theme of this epistle is joy through suffering. Paul not only wrote on this theme, but demonstrated it. He wrote this letter, which is full of rejoicing, while in captivity under a Roman guard. Paul exhibited through his life that his joy was not dependent upon outward circumstances, but upon his relationship to Christ. Paul, in this epistle, is telling us that we too can have such an unshakable joy.

In addition to this main theme, there are other threads of thought that are present throughout the epistle. Paul speaks much on humility, unity with other believers, and salvation through faith alone (having no confidence in the flesh). Paul also refers implicitly and explicitly a number of times to the possibility of his own death. In addition, since this epistle is basically a thank-you note to the Philippians for their financial support, Paul alludes here and there to their generosity in sharing in his ministry.

May the Lord bless you as you study this letter and may this epistle be valuable as you apply what you learn to your own life.

Greetings to the Philippians

¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: ² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

— Philippians 1:1-2

PAUL BEGINS THE LETTER following the format of letters of that time. The letter is from **“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus”**, and to **“all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons.”**

Though the letter was undoubtedly written by Paul, he includes Timothy as co-sender of the letter. There are various reasons for this. First, Timothy was with Paul in Rome at the time, most likely attending to his needs. Also, the Philippians knew Timothy, for he visited them with Paul (see Acts 19:21,22; 20:3-6). Moreover, Paul planned to send Timothy to Philippi soon, presumably for the edification of the church there, and also so that Paul may receive news about how the church is doing (see Phil. 2:19,22).

Paul identifies himself and Timothy, not as apostles (as he does in other epistles, in which he emphasizes his authority to write to the recipients of his letters), but as **“servants of Christ Jesus.”** Of the two titles—servant and apostle—servant is by far the more important one. Indeed, one cannot be an apostle of Christ without being a servant of Christ. The word translated **“servant”** here could also be translated “slave”. This would be an appropriate translation, for (as Paul says elsewhere), we were **“bought at a price”**, we are not our own (see I Cor. 6:19-20). We have all been purchased by Christ; we belong to a loving

Master, whom we should gladly serve and be proud to be called His slave. To the world, servanthood is not an honorable thing. But here, Paul proudly takes the title of **“servant of Christ Jesus.”** This is a noble title for the Christian, for our greatness comes in our service and our humility.

Paul is writing **“to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi.”** The word **“saint”** denotes those who are set apart from this world for the service and worship of God. The Biblical usage of this word is different than the present common usage of it. Paul is not addressing his letter to all of the extraordinarily holy, canonized people in Philippi, but to all those who are committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul, by addressing them as **“saints”**, is identifying a trait that we should all have. We should all view ourselves as being set apart from this world for the service and worship of God. We should consider ourselves pilgrims in this world, not tangled up in it, but living in it lightly. John tells us: **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does— comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives for ever”** (1 John 2:15-17).

Paul is not speaking to just **“saints”**, but to **“saints in Christ Jesus.”** There are those who are set apart from this world, but not to Christ. In fact, the first person that Paul converted in Philippi, Lydia, was a **“saint”** (strictly speaking) before she met Paul, but she was not a saint **“in Christ Jesus.”** When Paul met her, she was worshipping God by the river outside Philippi, so certainly, physically and spiritually, she was set apart from those of the world; however, she was not, at that time, **“in Christ Jesus.”** The fact that this letter is written to

“saints in Christ Jesus” is important contextual information, for only **“saints in Christ Jesus”** are able to experience the joy in the midst of suffering of which Paul speaks. By the way, a good test of whether you are **“in Christ Jesus”** is that when others look at you, they see Christ, because you are **“in”** Christ.

More specifically, this letter was addressed to the saints **“at Philippi.”** Philippi at the time was a Roman colony in the province of Macedonia. The site of Philippi is modern day northeastern Greece (south of Bulgaria). Paul first visited there on his second missionary journey when, having been prevented by the Holy Spirit from going to Bithynia (Acts 16:7), he saw in a vision a man from Macedonia **“standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’”** (Acts 16:9). Paul, **“concluding that God had called [him] to preach the gospel”** in Macedonia (Acts 16:10), immediately set out to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Upon arriving in Philippi, Paul and his companions sought a place to pray outside the city on the Gangites River (which empties into the Strymon River in modern day Greece). They found some women who worshiped God (Acts 16:14) and, from them, brought a business woman (**“a dealer in purple cloth”**, Acts 16:14) named Lydia to a belief in Christ. After she was baptized, she welcomed the whole missionary team into her home. Later, a demon possessed fortune teller was hassling Paul. When Paul exorcised the spirit, the owner of the fortune teller (for she was a slave girl) brought Paul and Silas before the local magistrates for ruining their source of income. Paul and Silas were **“severely flogged”** (Acts 16:23) and thrown in prison. Rather than being dejected and wondering at the ways of God (who led them to Philippi), they sang praises through the night **“and the other prisoners were listening to them”** (Acts 16:25). Then, there was an earthquake that caused the prison doors to open and loosed the prisoner’s chains. The jailer, upon finding

the door open and assuming the prisoners had escaped, was about to commit suicide because he thought he would be held accountable for the escaping prisoners. The prisoners, however, chose not to escape. Paul stopped the jailer from committing suicide and brought him and his family to a belief in Christ. The next day, Paul and Silas were released from prison.

Paul, in his address that starts this epistle, includes a special mention of the **“overseers and deacons”** for the church at Philippi. They are probably mentioned specifically because of their role in leading the church in contributing to Paul’s ministry. The immediate reason that Paul is writing to Philippi is to thank them for their gift that Epaphroditus (a Philippian) brought to him (see Phil. 4:18).

After addressing the letter, Paul blesses the Philippians by saying: **“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”** (vs. 2). In this blessing, Paul combines the traditional Greek (**“grace”**) and Hebrew (**“peace”**) greetings. By doing so, Paul unites west and east, Gentile and Jew under the blessing of **“God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** **“Grace”** is God’s favor (undeserved by us) in our day to day lives; **“peace”** is the result of God’s grace: a feeling of contentment, satisfaction and fulfillment in one’s life as a consequence of being reconciled to the Lord of the universe.

Paul's Thanksgiving for the Philippians

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

— Philippians 1:3-8

PAUL PAYS quite a compliment to the Philippians with his kind words here about their support of his own ministry and their faithfulness to God. He first says, **“I thank my God every time I remember you”** (vs. 3). Implicit in this statement is Paul's spirit of prayer. We can envision Paul here sending up a prayer of thanks under his breath **“every time”** the Holy Spirit brought the Philippians into his remembrance. We should have the same spirit of prayer at all times, **“praying continually”** (I Thess. 5:17), sending prayers of praise and petition as the Holy Spirit brings people and situations into our remembrance.

Specifically, Paul prays with **“joy”** for the Philippians because of their **“partnership in the gospel from the first day until now”** (vs. 4). The Philippians supported Paul in his ministry literally from the **“first day”** of their knowing Christ. Lydia invited Paul's whole missionary team (probably including Timothy, Silas and Luke) into her home the first day she and

her family were baptized (see Acts 16:15). The Philippians demonstrated the truth of their commitment to the Gospel of Christ by their efforts to support the work of the Gospel **“from the first day.”**

Their support was seen as **“partnership”** in Paul’s work. What a privilege! To be a partner in the great work of Paul! Not all of us can go out and be on the front lines (so to speak) in the spiritual battle, as Paul was. However, those of us behind the lines can join in the active work of the ministry by support in prayer and finances. Never think of your giving to the ministry of the Gospel as just a tax write-off. You are a partner, standing alongside the saint who is planting churches in Mexico, or bringing Bibles into Russia, or praying with a hardened criminal in prison.

Implicit in Paul’s prayer is thanksgiving to God for the Philippians’ perseverance, for they were partners **“from the first day until now.”** It is a rare thing to be faithful from the beginning, and to persevere to the end. We are normally slow to begin, fickle in the middle, wavering and dying out at the end. Paul was well acquainted with those who did not persevere. In another “prison” epistle, he tells Timothy of **“Demas”** who **“loved this world”** and deserted him (II Tim. 4:10), and **“everyone in the province of Asia”** deserting him (II Tim. 1:15). We may go through spiritual highs and lows, but it is important that we not let our emotional feelings prevent us from persevering. When our will is flagging, it is time to get on our knees and ask the Lord, by His Spirit, to restore fervency to our hearts so that we, like the Philippians, may persevere.

Seeing the truth of their commitment and their perseverance, Paul is **“confident...that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus”** (vs. 6). At times, even those who persevere feel as if their work is going nowhere. We all at times

hit physical roadblocks and spiritual walls. The enemy demoralizes us by telling us that our service is useless and fruitless and so we get discouraged. We think of quitting, but we must remember that, for those who are committed to the service of God and who persevere, **“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”** We must remember that our service is God’s work: He **“began”** it; He guides and directs it; He chooses the path that it takes; He is the one who **“will carry it on to completion.”**

If we hit a road block, it is by God’s will. God often uses such road blocks; He works through us even when we do not realize it. If anyone could be seen to have hit a road block, Paul had. He was in prison when he wrote these words. Paul did not view his imprisonment as the end of his service, but rather as God carrying on His work to completion. And why would God not carry His **“good work”** in us on to completion? Does God get tired and give up? Are there obstacles that are too great for God to overcome? Does He change His mind? Of course not.

A key point here is that it was God Himself who **“began a good work”** in us. Paul had first-hand experience of this, as did the Philippians. God, of course, **“began a good work”** in Paul’s life. Paul was bent on destroying Christianity when God supernaturally intervened in his life and turned him into the greatest adherent of Christianity the world has ever known. God also **“began a good work”** in the lives of the Philippians. Paul was not even planning on going to Macedonia (the district that contains Philippi). He and his fellow missionaries tried to go to Bithynia, but, we are told, **“the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them”** (Acts 16:7). Then God sent Paul a vision **“of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’”** (Acts 16:9). We are told of the first convert in Philippi, Lydia, that **“the Lord opened her**

heart to respond to Paul's message" (Acts 16:14). We also see God beginning a good work in the conversion of the Philippian jailer. God sent an earthquake that opened the prison doors and shook loose the chains of the prisoners. Then God restrained the prisoners from fleeing. This intervention of God led the jailer to ask Paul and Silas: **"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"** (Acts 16:30).

Also, think of your own conversion. Think of the preparation of your heart and mind for it. Think of the events that led to your giving your life to Christ. Was it not also the work of God? So, if He **"began a good work in you"**, why would He not also **"carry it on to completion"**? We, like Paul, should be **"confident of this."** We must realize, as David did: **"The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me"** (Ps. 138:8). May this realization give you comfort as you serve Him, and cause you all the more to persevere.

And we are to persevere. Our work will not be done **"until the day of Christ Jesus."** There is no retirement on earth for us. Our work will not be completed until the day of Christ Jesus. And it is the **"day of Christ Jesus"** that we all look toward in our service. That is where our sights are, that is where our hearts are: His day, the day He will come to rule and reign.

Paul wanted the Philippians to know that his imprisonment was the work of God (indeed, it was **"God's grace"**!), and that his imprisonment was not a waste of the Philippian's gift. Paul tells the Philippians: **"For whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me"** (vs. 7). Paul's circumstance did not lessen their gift or God's grace to them due to their giving.

Our circumstances do not imply the absence of God's grace. Paul was in prison, but he was able to tell the Philippians that they **"share in God's grace"** with him. Paul had a painful **"thorn in [his] flesh"** (II Cor. 12:7), but the Lord told him:

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (II Cor. 12:9). No, troublesome circumstances do not imply the absence of God’s grace; on the contrary, the depth of one’s suffering is often an indicator that God will use the sufferer greatly, so that His power may be made perfect.

Indeed, the grace of God is demonstrated in a powerful way through those who suffer. The ability to be at peace (as Paul was), even in the direst circumstances, is a powerful testimony to the world of the grace of God. To be able to shout, **“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”** (Phil. 4:4) — to be able to shout this while in chains — displays concretely the power and truth of the gospel. Rather than being weakened, the words of Paul are strengthened by his adverse circumstance. We should all strive to have such an attitude in our suffering. God can use powerfully those who suffer, more powerfully than He can use those who live in comfort. Was not Stephen used more powerfully than Joseph of Arimathea? Were not the martyrs used more powerfully than the secret Christians on the sidelines? Are not the hands of an invalid whose body has been ravaged by disease—are not his hands raised in praise to God a more powerful testimony than even the most fervent worship of the healthy man?

And make no mistake: you will suffer. We will all find ourselves, at some point, in a prison of some sort, our faith being tested. We will all have the opportunity to test these words of Paul and to rejoice in midst of suffering. May we all live up to the task.

2 - PHILIPPIANS 1:9-18

Paul's Prayer

⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

— Philippians 1:9-11

TO CONCLUDE HIS INTRODUCTION to this epistle, Paul offers up a prayer for the Philippians. He prays first that their **“love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight”** (vs. 9). We can never have too much love; we all need more love, so Paul prays that their love would **“abound more and more.”** Love is a **“continuing debt”** (see Rom. 13:8) that we all bear, a debt to God that we can never fully pay off. Paul focusses his prayer on love because the growth of a Christian can be measured by the growth of his love.

Now, our love is not to be mindless, mere emotion. On the contrary, it is to **“abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight”** (vs. 9). True knowledge increases true love. Certainly, our love of God grows through increased knowledge of Him. Likewise, our love for others increases as we gain more knowledge concerning God's love for us. When we truly realize how much God loves us, in spite of our failings, we are better prepared to love others. Love that is based on feelings and

emotions will fade away, but love that is based in **“knowledge and depth of insight”** can **“abound more and more.”** Also, love that is based on knowledge is right love, loving the right things, for the right reasons, in the right way. So often, love that is based solely on our own feelings and emotions leads us to love the wrong things, for the wrong reasons, in a sinful, selfish way.

Paul points out that the growth of our love in knowledge leads to two attributes: discernment and holiness. First, our love is to grow so that we **“may be able to discern what is best.”** Discernment is ever our problem. We need this greatly. We need to learn how to make the right choices and how to use our time in the right ways. We need, through knowledge, to discern whose teaching to follow. We need to be able to discern how best to serve the Lord. True, knowledgeable love will enable us to **“discern what is best.”** We are constantly faced with decisions and so, in each decision, we need to be able to choose what would most please and honor God.

Second, the growth of our love will lead to holiness. The ultimate purpose of the growth of our love is that we **“may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ”** (vs. 10). This should be our goal: to be sanctified to holiness. Now, this will not happen all at once right away. On the contrary, we will spend the rest of our lives on earth being sanctified, improving with the help of the Spirit of God, becoming purer, more like Christ. Paul speaks on this later in this epistle: **“Not that I have already...been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”** (Phil. 3:12).

Paul’s prayer that the Philippians **“may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ”**, picks up from the word of encouragement that he gave them in verse 6, when he said that he was confident that **“He who began a good work in [them] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ**

Jesus.” So, in verse 6, Paul gave the Philippians a word of encouragement concerning perseverance; here, he follows up his word of encouragement with a prayer for their perseverance. It is good to lend a word of encouragement to others, but it is more important, and much more effective, to pray for them.

As we become **“pure and blameless”**, we will be **“filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ”** (vs. 11). Purity and blamelessness are internal, invisible traits which will result in the external, visible **“fruit of righteousness”** in our lives. Fruit is the visible result of the invisible work within us. In his Epistle to the Galatians, Paul enumerates the **“fruit of righteousness”**: **“[T]he fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”** (Gal. 5:22- 23). Christians must bear such fruit in their lives. Jesus said, **“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last”** (John 15:16). Also, Paul’s prayer for the Philippians was not that they just bear fruit, but that they be **“filled”** with the fruit — filled and overflowing, always bearing the fruit of the Spirit, showing the world what kind of tree you are, a tree in Christ, belonging to God.

Notice that the fruit **“comes through Jesus Christ”** (vs. 11). It is not fruit that comes as a result of our saintliness. Rather, it is fruit that comes as a result of the work that the Spirit of Christ does in our lives. Christ Himself pointed this out: **“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing”** (John 15:5).

Finally, the purpose of the fruit is not that others would see what good people we are, but rather the fruit is for the **“glory and praise of God”** (vs. 11). All that we do should be for the **“glory and praise of God.”** We often pray to God:

“Hallowed be Your name”, and so we should live our lives to honor Him, in everything that we do.

Effectiveness in Affliction

¹² Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

— Philippians 1:12-14

HAVING FINISHED THE INTRODUCTION to his epistle, Paul now speaks of his own circumstance. Paul’s object in this section is to reassure the Philippians that, even though he is in prison, their contributions to his ministry are still effective. He says: **“Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel”** (vs. 12).

When we see a servant of God undergoing affliction, we must be careful not to jump to false conclusions. We might think, “He can’t be in the will of God, since he is undergoing a major trial.” This logic is often wrong. In Paul’s case, his imprisonment **“served to advance the gospel”**. God often chooses to work through adverse circumstances: Paul in prison, Christ on the cross. **“What had happened”** to Paul was within God’s will.

The persecution of the saints many times ends up in furthering God’s work. Joseph realized this when he said to his brothers, who persecuted him, **“You intended to harm me,**

but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen. 50:20). Also, the persecution of the early church in Jerusalem (ironically headed by Paul, before He came to Christ) served to spread the gospel throughout the whole region: **“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria... Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went”** (Acts 8:1,4). When we see the church facing persecution, or Christians being attacked, we think: “Oh poor God, He’s losing again.” Silly us. God is in control. We mistake our affliction for God’s defeat. Again, we must remember that God chooses to be victorious, at times, through our affliction. “Storms cannot shipwreck the Gospel; they waft it forward” [Meyer, pg. 42]. Ironically, Paul’s adversaries had him put into prison to stifle him and his preaching of the gospel. However, his imprisonment only served to **“advance the gospel.”**

Paul cites two examples that the gospel had been advanced by his imprisonment. First, Paul states: **“[I]t has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to every one else that I am in chains for Christ”** (vs. 13). Of course, the reason **“it had become clear throughout the whole palace guard”** was that Paul preached the gospel to **“the whole palace guard”** (at least, those he came into contact with). Paul, at the time, was under arrest in Rome **“with a soldier to guard him”** (Acts 28:16). And so, Paul was able to preach the gospel to his guards, thereby reaching people who had previously been unreachable by those preaching the gospel. Many of us who serve the Lord are waiting for the time when God will call us into full time service in the church; however, in our secular jobs, we can reach many people who are unreachable by pastors and

full-time evangelists. We must, as Paul, make the most of such opportunities.

Paul was successful in preaching the gospel to his guards. In fact, at the end of this epistle, Paul sends greetings to the Philippians from **“those who belong to Caesar’s household”** (Phil. 4:22), presumably referring to the guards whom Paul brought to Christ. Indeed, Paul must have been a pleasant prisoner to guard, one who did not complain, did not fight, did not spit, did not need discipline. The guard just had to be able to put up with his preaching! In fact, one could ask who the prisoner really was in such a situation. Paul certainly was doing what he wanted (which was to preach the gospel), and the guard was a captive audience, a prisoner of his own sins.

The second way that the gospel was advanced during Paul’s imprisonment was that the Roman Christians were emboldened to preach the gospel. Paul states: **“Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly”** (vs. 14). Note that Paul says, **“Because of my chains...”**, not **“in spite of my chains.”** His imprisonment was actually a catalyst for the local Christians to begin preaching more. This was a result of Paul’s joy and his Christ-like attitude in prison. The **“brothers in the Lord”** saw Paul’s joy in his affliction, and so realized that they too had nothing to be afraid of. Thus, they spoke **“the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.”** This is a testimony to the truth of the gospel. Only the truth could cause the timid to be strong, upon seeing the persecution of their brothers.

Interestingly, Paul always wanted to visit Rome and encourage the Christians there. He wrote in his epistle to the Romans: **“I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong”**

(Rom. 1:10-11). So, Paul desired to go to Rome, and little did he realize that he would go to Rome as a prisoner. He wanted to encourage them in their faith, and he did so, though not in a way he expected: he did so through his chains. God's purpose is often carried out in ways we least expect.

Both ways that the gospel was advanced through Paul's imprisonment were a direct result of his attitude in his affliction. The members of the palace guard were won over (I'm sure) by his joy and Christ-likeness as a prisoner. The local Christians were emboldened to preach the gospel **"fearlessly and courageously"** by his joy and Christ-likeness as a prisoner. Paul's attitude in chains was a fruit of his faith: faith that God had not abandoned him in prison; faith that God could still use him while he was in chains. The true test of our faith is its results when we experience affliction.

One more thought: if Paul can do so much to **"advance the gospel"** while he was in prison, cannot we who are free?

Right and Wrong Motives

¹⁵ It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸ But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

— Philipppians 1:15-18

PAUL HERE ADMITS that there are some drawbacks to the newfound boldness of the local Christians in preaching the

gospel. It seems that there are mixed motives for those who are evangelizing, for **“some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill”** (vs. 15). During times when the gospel is preached freely, there is always a drawback in that there is a prevalence of false teachers and teachers with wrong motives. This is an unfortunate fact, true then and now.

The true evangelists were preaching the gospel **“in love”**, love for God, love for those they were preaching to. The others were preaching **“out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble”** for Paul while he was in chains (vs. 17). Interestingly, both were spurred on to preach the gospel, but for entirely different reasons. Apparently, many, seeing that Paul was in prison, had the ambition of taking his place as the premier apostle, thus they were spurred on to preach for this reason. Despite these false motives, however, the gospel *was* being preached. Surprisingly, concerning this situation, Paul says: **“But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached”** (vs. 18).

It is an amazing thing that the work of God was still advanced, even through those who had the wrong motives. And certainly, if you think about it, things are no different now than they were in Rome at the time Paul wrote this letter. Many preach Christ for the wrong motives—some for money, some for power, some for prestige, some to display their oratorical skills, some to “make points” with God—and yet, somehow God’s work gets done anyway. Fortunately, those who listen to the preachers do not see the motives of those who are preaching, and so they respond to the work of the Spirit of God and the call of the gospel.

Paul realizes this, and so, to his credit, he is able to rejoice in the work of God, even though it is being carried out in a way that is a detriment to his physical safety. Paul cares less about

how his circumstances affect him, than how his circumstances affect the preaching of the gospel. For Paul, the top priority is that the gospel be preached. Paul's excellent attitude is summed up in his response to the local situation: **“And because of this I rejoice”** (vs. 18). Paul rejoices in the progress of the gospel; he knows that God will judge the bad motives in His time.

This section brings up a truth that is worth noting: it is possible to do good, with bad motives. Because this is true, God judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart, as well as the external works. Thus, we must examine ourselves as we serve God, and make sure that we serve Him with pure motives. The ends do not justify the means nor the motives. It is a challenge to all of us to serve sincerely.

3 - PHILIPPIANS 1:19-30

To Live is Christ

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰ I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

— Philippians 1:19-21

PAUL ENDED THE PREVIOUS SECTION of Philippians with: **“And because of this I rejoice”** (vs. 18); he begins this one with: **“Yes, and I will continue to rejoice...”** His repetition is for emphasis: Paul was actually, sincerely rejoicing while he sat in Roman captivity. He goes on to enumerate three reasons for his joy: the prayer support of the Philippians, the **“help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ”**, and the hope he had for deliverance.

First, Paul rejoices because of the prayer support from the Philippians. He says, **“For I know that through your prayers...”** (vs. 19). Paul’s wording shows us that he fully expected the Philippians to pray for him. Also, his wording would have had the effect of encouraging those who were praying for him and convicting those who were not, so as to spur them on to also pray for him. Paul valued, and put much stock in, the prayers of his brothers. Paul often spoke of how he prayed for his brothers (see Rom. 1:9,10; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:9;

I Thess. 1:2; 3:10; II Thess. 1:11), and strongly encouraged others to pray for him (see Rom. 15:30; 6:18-19; I Thess. 5:25; II Thess. 3:1). Prayer for your brothers and sisters, especially those from whom you are separated, establishes a sort of cosmic fellowship, a comradeship from afar, a helping hand where hands cannot reach. “It is hardly possible to overestimate the value of prayer, when some kindred soul really unites itself with us, in our temptations, sorrows, and efforts in the service of Christ” [Meyer, pg. 48]. Indeed, it is clear here in the Epistle to the Philippians that Paul viewed his brother’s prayers as effective. He attributes them (as well as the Spirit of Christ) for his eventual deliverance.

Second, Paul rejoices because of the **“help given by the Spirit of Christ”** (vs. 19). Where would Paul be without the Spirit of Christ? He would be just another groaning prisoner in Rome. The Spirit of Christ was everything to Paul. It was not through his own strength that Paul was able to rejoice, it was through the Spirit of Christ. It was not through his own ability that Paul would be delivered—he was not in his own power to lead a daring rebellion to escape the chains of Rome—rather, it was through the Spirit of Christ that he would be delivered. Paul knew this; Paul banked on this; Paul could continue to rejoice in his chains because of this.

Third, Paul rejoices because of the hope that he had for his deliverance. Paul’s God is the God of salvation, and so he knew that deliverance would come. This shows Paul’s faith. Even in his situation, he had hope. With such faith, who could keep Paul down? Paul would say with Job: **“Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him”** (Job 13:15); Paul would say with David: **“The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”** (Ps. 118:6).

Most in Paul’s situation would be concerned about their own welfare. However, Paul’s immediate concern was not for

his own well-being, but that his behavior during his trial would exalt Christ. He says: **“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death”** (vs. 20). Make no mistake: Paul’s joyful attitude during affliction did not come easy. Paul had weaknesses, and so here he is expressing his desire that he would **“have sufficient courage”** in order that, even through his situation, Christ would be exalted. In fact, Paul himself felt **“ashamed”** when Christ was not exalted. That Christ would be exalted was Paul’s overriding concern. This is not the way of the world. The world seeks to minimize Christ. The world tries to say that Christ was just a good man, nothing else. The world, instead, exalts many others, much else besides Christ.

Paul desired that Christ be exalted **“in [his] body”**. Our bodies were purchased for this purpose: **“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body”** (I Cor. 6:19-20). There are many ways to exalt Christ in our bodies: through bodily worship, voices raised in song, hands lifted in praise; through service, shoulders bearing one another’s burdens, lending helping hands to those in need; through obedience, bodies consecrated to holiness, pure lips and clean hearts.

Paul here, though, is specifically speaking of exalting Christ in his body through his suffering. He is hoping for **“sufficient courage”** during this time of suffering, which could very well lead to his death. Christ can be exalted even through our suffering, as the world sees how we bear suffering. **“Nothing magnifies Christ like a Christian deathbed”** [Vaughan, pg. 49]. Paul shined in this, using his suffering body to exalt Christ. The letter to the Philippians is an example of this: a letter full of joy,

written in the midst of an adverse situation. We can attribute much of the growth of Christianity to the exalting of Christ in the bodies of the early martyrs through their deaths: through Stephen crying out in his death, **“Lord, do not hold this sin against them”** (speaking of his persecutors in Acts 7:60); through James, son of Zebedee, who’s very accuser, it is said, repented and was martyred with him [Fox’s Book of Martyrs, ch. 1]; through Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna during the fourth period of Roman persecution, who (when arrested) prayed with such fervency that his guards repented and when asked at the stake to reproach Christ, answered, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never once wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King, who hath saved me?” [Fox’s Book of Martyrs, ch. 2]; and so on through the ages.

Paul was certain to fulfill his hope of exalting Christ in his body, because of his attitude toward life and death, which is summed up in verse 21: **“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”** Paul’s life was Christ: united with Him, devoted to Him, obeying Him, worshiping Him, waiting on His plan, serving Him. Christ was the essence of his life, the model of his life, the aim of his life, the reward of his life [Meyer, pg. 56].

Despite the suffering and depravity of the world, Christ makes life worth living. “Life is not worth the trouble of living for any other object” [Monod, cited in Moule, pg. 72]. Life for life’s sake is nothing, for Christ’s sake everything. Through Christ, our life can have meaning, joy and fulfillment. Unfortunately, most (even Christians) live for themselves, paying minimal heed to the call of God, seeking to find life for themselves. But, as Christ Himself told us: **“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it”** (Matt. 10:39). Despite this, very few will lose their lives for Christ; very few are able to say, as Paul can, **“To live is Christ.”** We all must examine ourselves in this light. Can you

say of your life, **“To live is Christ”**? Is Christ your life? Are you even living your life differently than if Christ had not lived and died for you? What do you live for? Is your quest for worldly riches ever satisfied? Is your thirst for worldly power ever quenched?

When life is Christ, to die is gain. One leads to the other. Right living makes for right dying. Christ gives life meaning, thus fulfillment; Christ gives death hope, thus joy. We must all consider this in light of the fact that we will not live forever on this earth. Life and death are very close neighbors; we must plan for the eventuality of death. Death is something that many people try to ignore as they are wrapped up in living. The irony is that, if they would stop living for themselves and live for Christ, they would no longer have to worry about death, for through Christ and Christ alone, **“to die is gain.”**

Paul's Dilemma

²² **If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!** ²³**I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.**

— Philippians 1:22-26

PAUL'S ATTITUDE, **“to live is Christ, to die is gain”**, presents him with a dilemma: **“If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me...I desire to**

depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.” Oh, that we would have the same attitude toward life and death: to desire to live to serve Christ to the fullest, to desire to die to be with Christ forever. Fortunately for Paul in his dilemma, he did not have to make the decision of whether he was to live or die. His fate, he knew, was in God's hands.

We see in these verses what Paul meant by **“deliverance”** back in verse 19. By hoping for his **“deliverance”**, Paul was expecting either to be released in order to have more freedom to serve Christ, or to be released through death into the presence of Christ. We should not mourn too greatly the death of Christians. Through death, they enter the presence of God into an existence free from the cares and suffering of this world. We should mourn our remaining more than their departing! For the worldly, death is destruction; for the Christian, it is to be set free.

On the other hand, to live is a good thing. Life is our only chance to serve Christ on earth, to a dying world; thus Paul's dilemma concerning life and death. Paul preferred to be with Christ, but he also desired to serve Him on earth as long as he is able. He writes: **“If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me”** and **“I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.”** Since Paul foresaw that there was still valuable work for him to do on earth in service of Christ, he was convinced that he would remain to complete it. This supports what Paul said earlier: **“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion”** (Phil. 1:6).

From a worldly point of view, Paul's attitude toward life and death is unusual. To desire death is unnatural, and is found in two differing situations. Desire for death is found either in the misery of life (as Shakespeare's Hamlet had), or in the hope

of heaven (as Paul had). There are some in the world who also view the choice between life and death as a dilemma, but they see despair in both. They have the same dilemma as Paul, but for different reasons. They hate life and fear death. Paul on the contrary does not despair of either. He is eager for life and eager for death; fervent for service in life, having a fervent hope for what death will bring.

The Epistle of Philippians

²⁷ **Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel** ²⁸ **without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved-- and that by God.** ²⁹ **For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,** ³⁰ **since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.**

— Philippians 1:27-30

HERE, PAUL SWITCHES from focusing on his own situation to that of the Philippians. Paul exhorts: **“Whatever happens”** (that is, whether Paul lives or dies) **“conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”** In other words, Paul does not want his departing to have an effect upon their holiness, or the godliness of their church. Paul is pleading that they would present a consistent witness to the world, regardless of where he is. Many times, when the leader of a successful church departs, there is a fear that the church will fall apart. If

the church is truly successful in the eyes of God, this should not be a concern because a truly successful church is under the leadership of Christ, in the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

To **“conduct [oneself] in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”** entails that one's behavior, speech, attitudes, expressions, values and activities be Christlike. The **“gospel of Christ”**--the “good news” that Christ died for our sins and reconciled us to God--is extremely valuable, and so, our lives should reflect that we understand and appreciate what Christ has done for us.

Paul gives guidelines as to how a church would know that they are **“conducting [themselves] in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”** If they were, they would **“stand firm in one spirit,” “contend as one man for the faith of the gospel”**, and **“[not be] frightened in any way by those who oppose [them].”** These three characteristics describe the unity of a battling army, waging war for a cause that all the soldiers believe in. Many differences and petty quarrels are ignored, overlooked, and quickly forgiven when fighting under the same flag against a common enemy. Unity is crucial to the church, which is in the midst of a spiritual war. Dissension does great harm to church fellowships: ripping them apart, ruining their testimony. Unity is a crucial element to testify to the world that Christ is the Son of God. Christ Himself prayed to the Father: **“[May] all [believers] be one, Father, just as You are in me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent me.”** (John 17:21). Paul emphasizes unity to the Philippians because, it seems, there were quarrels within their church (see Phil. 4:2).

To **“stand firm”** means to hold one's ground in the battle, without allowing the enemy to push back. This takes effort. For some reason, in our spiritual battles, it is difficult to keep from going backwards, losing ground; it is difficult to make

consistent progress. “It is good to begin, but it is better to keep on steadily to the end.” [Meyer, 66] To **“contend as one man”** means to take up your brother's battles as if they were yours. Pray fervently for their spiritual struggles, mourn over their setbacks, stand with them in the battle, lending any aid that you can. This is all to be done **“without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.”** To be frightened is to demonstrate a lack of faith in the cause of the battle, the strength of the army, and the wisdom of the general. Fear betrays a lack of faith. On the other hand, faith casts out fear. We in Christ, in the strength of Christ, and under His guidance, have nothing to fear from our enemies. If Paul was not frightened in his battles, why should we be? Indeed, what can our enemies do? Take our lives, at most, but **“to die is gain.”**

Our courage, in the midst of opposition, is a great testimony to the world that our faith is true. As Paul goes on to say: **“This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God”** (vs. 28). Our courage is proof of their condemnation, proof that they are allied against the True and Living God. It is also proof that **“[we] will be saved—and that by God.”** Our courage is a sign to the enemies of God that our salvation is truly from God, and not a cleverly devised fable.

We need the faith to be fearless because, as Paul says, **“it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him.”** We, the children of God in this wicked world, will suffer. This is not a secret. God has made this very clear in His Word. Christ Himself said: **“If they persecuted me, they will persecute you”** (John 15:20); and Paul reminds us: **“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”** (II Tim. 3:12). Paul here points out that our suffering (as well as our faith) is something that has been

“granted” to us by God. So, suffering here is depicted, not as an unfortunate by-product of our faith, but as a manifestation of God's grace, a privilege. This being the case, we should rejoice in our sufferings. Paul tells us elsewhere: **“[W]e also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope”** (Romans 5:3-4). And Peter says: **“[R]ejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed”** (I Pet. 4:13). Peter practiced what he preached when, after being flogged by the Sanhedrin, he and other apostles **“left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name [of Christ]”** (Acts 5:41). This is a difficult thing to do: rejoice through suffering; but, through faith, we can. Given that our suffering is ordained by God, who does only what is best for us, we can find a way, through faith, to rejoice in the midst of it.

4 - PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

Unity Through Humility

¹ If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being likeminded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

— Philippians 2:1-4

PAUL CONTINUES a subject that he touched on at the end of chapter one, that of unity. Paul said that if the Philippians conducted themselves **“in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”**, he would know that they **“stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel”** (1:27). Paul brings up the subject of unity in three different passages in this letter (in the passage above, as well as in 1:27 and 4:2), which suggests that, while the Philippians are commended for their faith and giving, there was a lack of unity and a certain amount of strife within the Philippian church. Paul wanted to head this off in the young church, and so he exhorts them to unity. Unity for the Philippian church would be crucial to withstanding the persecution that they were and would be experiencing.

Paul says: **“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any**

fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being likeminded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose” (vs. 1-2). Paul first appeals to the Philippians based on what God has done for them, as he gives four impetuses for them to strive for unity. First, **“if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ...”** Christ has graciously chosen to be **“united”** with us, why can't we be united with our brothers? We have received great benefits from being **“united with Christ”**. Paul reminds us of the **“encouragement”** we have received by knowing that God is on our side: **“If God be for us, who can be against us?”** (Rom. 8:31). Second, **“if any comfort from His love...”** Who of us has not experienced the peace and comfort of the love of Christ, knowing of His love for us through His great sacrifice? Third, **“if any fellowship with Spirit...”** Those who serve the Lord know the fellowship of the Spirit, have experienced the work of the Spirit in their lives. We have felt the partnership of the Spirit, standing alongside us as we serve. We have been filled with the Spirit and have been given gifts, knowledge and wisdom from the Spirit of God. Fourth, **“if any tenderness and compassion...”** When we give or are the recipients of **“tenderness and compassion”**, it is the love of God. As John tells us: **“Anyone who does what is good is from God”** (3 John 1:11). So, these great blessings of God should be great incentives for us to be unified within the church.

Certainly, we have all experienced these (and many more) blessings of God many, many times in our lives as Christians. Since we have, we are to reciprocate by **“being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose”** (vs. 2). It would be difficult to construct a better definition of unity than what Paul has given here, expressing three aspects of unity. We are to be **“like-minded”**, thinking the things of Christ. As

Paul says later in Philippians: “[W]hatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things” (Phil. 4:8). We are also to have “**the same love**”, love one another, even love our enemies, with the love of Christ. We are to be “**one in spirit and purpose**”. Our purpose should be solely to do the will of God, in obedience to Him. Our spirit and attitude should reflect this purpose. With such an attitude, unity will result.

Granted, given that the church is so diverse in cultures, nationalities, social status, education and environment, unity is difficult. But we do have lots of common ground: a common Savior, a common Spirit, a common Father, His common Word.

The unity of the Philippian church concerned Paul very much. In fact, their unity would “**make [Paul’s] joy complete**” (vs. 2). Paul was more concerned with the unity of the Philippian church than his own personal safety. About himself he said: “**To live is Christ and to die is gain**” (Phil. 1:21). It was not his distressing situation in the hands of the Romans that was keeping him from complete joy, but it was the strife and disunity in the Philippian church that was keeping him from “**complete joy**”. Paul had little concern for himself as long as the body of Christ was healthy.

Next, Paul speaks of the greatest hindrances to unity, which are selfishness and the lack of humility. He exhorts: “**Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others**” (vs. 3-4). For the most part, dissension is caused, not by legitimate differences of opinion, but by selfishness. It is hard for us to shake off our worldly attitude of “looking out for number one.” But Paul tells us that we are to

“do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.” In other words, absolutely **“nothing”** we do when dealing with others is to be done selfishly. We are always to **“in humility consider others better than [our]selves.”** We all have this “I’m-better-than-you” attitude, and so (in our own eyes) we believe that we ourselves deserve the best. In order for the church to be unified, we must get rid of this attitude, and instead, **“look to the interests of others.”**

Humility is the key to unity. If we could just objectively look at ourselves and realize what wretches we are, realize how much we really need Christ, and realize what a privilege it is to be able to serve the God of the universe, unity in the church would progress a long way. We have an example of the humility that leads to unity, and Paul vividly describes this example in the next section. As always, the remedy for error is to look to the example of Christ.

Our Example for Humility

⁵ **Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:**

⁶ **Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God
something to be grasped,**

⁷ **But made Himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.**

⁸ **And being found in appearance as a man,
He humbled himself
and became obedient to death —
even death on a cross!**

⁹ **Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place
and gave Him the name
that is above every name,**

¹⁰ **That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,**

¹¹ **And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.**

— Philippians 2:5-11

THIS PASSAGE is quite possibly my favorite passage in the Bible, because of its literary merit, its theological content, and its applicational value. In other words, this passage has everything. Many, in their remembrance of this passage, start with verse 6, but verse 5 is very important to the meaning of the passage: **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”** This clearly expresses the main purpose of this passage: to show Christ as an example of the humble attitude

that we should have. As we will see, the attitude of humility that we should have is one of total submission to the will of God.

In verses 6 to 11, Paul's account of Christ's example describes seven steps from majesty to humility, then seven steps from humility to exaltation as a result of His humility. We see Christ's dual nature, as God and man, king and servant, from the highest high to the lowest low for our sakes.

To begin, Paul establishes that Christ was **"in very nature God"** (vs. 6). We must understand this fact, and not water it down. Christ was not just a man. His essence, His **"nature"** is God. He was God, is God, and forever will be God.

Having established this, Paul gives us the seven steps to Christ's humility. First, He **"did not consider equality with God something to be grasped"** (vs. 6). Christ's first step in humility was to make the decision to be humble. He decided, because of His love for us, to step down from His exalted position to save us. He, in love, felt that humbling Himself for our sakes was worth more than clinging to **"equality with God"**. This is in great contrast to Satan who, in rebellion against God, said: **"I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High"** (Isa. 14:13-14). Christ, unlike Satan, had every right to cling to His deity, **"being in very nature God."** However, He chose not to. He did not let His deity get in the way of submitting to the Father's plan of salvation for mankind.

Second, Christ **"made Himself nothing"** (vs. 7), nothing, that is, in comparison to the **"everything"** that He was. He emptied Himself, in effect, and (when He came to earth as a man) chose to be confined to a human body. Christ gave up all to become man and obey the Father. Christ's majesty, in

general, was concealed here on earth, and shown only in a few instances (e.g., on the Mount of Transfiguration).

Third, He took **“the very nature of a servant”** (vs. 7). Christ could have “wowed” the world with His power, but He chose to humbly be a servant, and to live a servant’s life. Christ’s life on earth was spent ministering to everyone He met. His life exemplifies a “minister’s” life of service.

Fourth, He was **“made in human likeness”** (vs. 7). In order to best relate to man and communicate to man, Christ became a man. None of us can understand what it felt like for Christ, the Son of God, to dwell in a human body.

Fifth, **“being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself”** (vs. 8). Even in man’s terms, Christ lived a humble life. Christ began His life most humbly, born in a stable (hardly the birth of a king). He lived most humbly, as a carpenter and then a wandering teacher. As He Himself said: **“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head”** (Matthew 8:20).

Sixth, He **“became obedient to death”**. Christ’s obedience was complete: even to death. His humility was absolute, showing no compromise. His love for us was unsurpassed, for **“greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends”** (John 15:13).

Seventh, **“even death on a cross”**. Even His death was the most humble. In humility, He died the lowest form of death, affirmed as such (prophetically) in the Old Testament, for **“anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse”** (Deut. 21:23). Crucifixion was considered by the Romans the most degrading death. Paul’s audience (the Philippians), being Roman citizens, would never under any circumstances be sentenced to crucifixion, because Rome did not allow its citizens such a degrading death (Roman citizens were usually

beheaded when sentenced to death). But Christ, to show the depths of His humility, was crucified.

As mentioned, these seven steps to humility are an example of the attitude that we should have. Christ had every right to remain exalted, **“being in very nature God”** (vs. 6). We should remember this every time we say, “Well, I’ve got a right to do such and such.” There are many things that we “have a right to do”—even things that are technically “legal” according to God’s law—yet, that God (and through Him, our conscience) would not have us do. Rather than say “I’ve got a right”, humble yourself as Christ did. Give up your “right” for the sake of humility and obedience.

Paul next gives us seven steps by which God brought Christ from humility back to exaltation. First, **“therefore God exalted Him”** (vs. 9). Paul says **“therefore”** to tie Christ’s exaltation to His humility. He was exalted precisely because He humbled Himself.

Second, Christ was exalted **“to the highest place”** (vs. 9). Christ is above all. He is not merely exalted as a king, but as the King of Kings; not merely as a lord, but as the Lord of Lords.

Third, God **“gave Him the name that is above every name”** (vs. 9). Christ’s name is above Buddha, above Confucius, above Mohammed, etc. There is absolutely no one whose name is higher. The power of the name of Jesus can be seen even in our day to day lives. One can carry on a comfortable conversation with secular people concerning Buddha, or Confucius, or Mohammed, but try mentioning the name of Jesus, and see how uncomfortable people get (in general). They immediately try to change the subject. They are tongue-tied. You can easily ask them: “What do you think of Buddha?”, but try asking them “What do you think of Christ?” and they get nervous. Why? Because Christ’s name is above every other name. The name of Jesus is powerful not only

because of the character of Christ, but also because the meaning of the name “Jesus” expresses His mission: Jesus means “the Lord saves”.

Fourth, **“at the name of Jesus every knee should bow”** (vs. 10). All will eventually bow in homage to Christ. Many do here on earth. All will see Christ’s glory after their lives on earth, and will bow in awe. It is God’s will that we worship Christ, thus **“every knee should bow”**. Many people pray to Christ, far too few worship Him.

Fifth, **“every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth”** (vs. 10). Worship of Christ will be, not just international, but truly universal, in all aspects of the physical and spiritual realm. Angels **“in heaven”** do worship Him (cf. Heb. 1:6; I Pet. 3:22; Rev. 5:11-12). Many of us here **“on earth”** worship Him. And those **“under the earth”** (presumably Satan’s followers) will, in fear not reverence, eventually bend their knee to Him.

Sixth, **“and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”** (vs. 11). All will acknowledge who Christ is. All will eventually realize who Christ is. It is best to acknowledge that **“Jesus Christ is Lord”** here on earth, for **“if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”** (Romans 10:9).

Seventh, (and very importantly) **“to the glory of God the Father”** (vs. 11). Christ’s humility and His exaltation would have been worthless if they were not **“to the glory of God the Father”**. The highest place of exaltation that we could ever attain would be to do all that we do in the service and glory of God.

Just as this passage shows Christ as our example of humility, so also it shows that our humility will bring exaltation. As James tells us: **“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and**

He will lift you up” (James 4:10). Humility, though seen as undesirable by the world, leads to glory. To live humbly is opposite to the world’s belief in survival of the fittest. The true survivors in mankind are not those who are the strongest, but those who, through humility, please God.

5 - PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18

The Epistle of Philippians

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.

— Philippians 2:12-13

HAVING JUST GIVEN, in verses 6 through 11, a vivid example of humility and obedience, the example of Christ, Paul again specifically exhorts the Philippians to obedience: **“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling”** (vs. 12). He ties this exhortation directly to the preceding example by beginning: **“Therefore...”** The example of Christ should have a great effect upon our behavior. His example is the model upon which our lives should be molded. Therefore, it is very important that we study the Gospels in detail, so that we thoroughly know how Christ lived.

Paul first commends the Philippians for their previous behavior, saying, **“as you have always obeyed”** (vs. 12). But then Paul warns them that things will now be different, since Paul will not be around them to encourage and exhort them. They will not have Paul to lean on much longer. In our growth as Christians, there comes a time when we do not need to depend upon our human mentors for an example of obedience, but we must come to a place where we can look to Christ alone

as our example, and be able to listen to the Spirit of God speaking to our hearts for exhortation. Certainly, our level of obedience should not depend upon the presence or absence of any mere human. We are not to be play-acting obedience for the audience of men. Our obedience to God should spring from a sincere desire to be holy, not from the desire to receive the accolades of men. And so, Paul instructs the Philippians: **“...now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling”** (vs. 12).

Many people have difficulty with the fact that Paul says **“work out your salvation.”** However, this difficulty disappears when we realize, in context, which **“salvation”** Paul is referring to here. Paul is certainly not speaking of the salvation for which Christ died—that is, the salvation that saves us from judgment for our sin and gives us eternal life—for Paul says elsewhere: **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith”** (Eph. 2:8). Now, if we **“have been saved”**, then there is no reason to **“continue to work out”** *that* salvation. No, Paul is not, here in Philippians, speaking of the same salvation that he was in Ephesians.

Paul here in Philippians is speaking of salvation from the power of sin as we live in this world. We are not entirely saved from the sin of this world. The sin of this world still has a great effect on our lives. We can all testify how we continually struggle against the power of sin. Our life on earth is lived “in a world of abounding temptation, of perpetual turmoil, of overflowing iniquity, of unrest therefore, of anxiety, yes, of risk” [Vaughan, 112]. It is salvation from this that we must **“continue to work out.”** The previous obedience of the Philippians that Paul mentions at the beginning of verse 12 was a **“working out”** of this salvation, and so Paul then exhorts them to **“continue”** working out this salvation.

To **“work out”** this salvation means to strive for full sanctification, to strive for supreme holiness and obedience, to strive to be conformed to the likeness of Christ, so as to follow the example of Christ that Paul just gave. To do so, indeed, requires **“work”**. We cannot be idle, for “religion is a living and trade. It must be maintained with continuance in labour, and working in a constant course of goodness all the days of our life” [Sibbes]. Moreover, the working out of our salvation from sin in this world should be done with **“fear and trembling.”** We should **“fear”** the consequences of sin, and **“tremble”** when we think of the harm that comes to us by our sin.

The overriding reason for us to **“continue to work out [our] salvation”** is that **“it is God who works in [us] to will and to act according to His good purpose”** (vs. 13). So, in our battle against sin, we are not on our own. God is **“working in”** us, as we **“work out”** our salvation; we **“work out”** what God **“works in”**. Paul here is expanding upon something that he said previously, in the key verse Philippians 1:6, that is, that **“He who began a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”** Our **“working out”** of our salvation consists primarily of yielding to God’s **“working in”** us. And what is God **“working in”** us?: **“To will and to act according to His good purpose.”** God is giving us the desire (**“to will”**) to battle against our sin, as well as the ability (**“to act”**) to be victorious over our sin.

God’s **“work in”** our lives can be subtle. Often, we do not realize that God has been working until we look back at how we used to be. We can detect God’s giving us the **“will”** to battle our sin by considering how our attitude has changed toward sin. We used to look forward to practicing our sin, now (though we still stumble) we despise our sin. This is God’s **“work in”** us. What a privilege that the Creator of the universe

would expend energy for us, would personally **“work in”** our lives!

And He does continually work in our lives, especially through our conscience. In fact, He is at work right now. “He may be working in you to confess to that fellow- Christian that you were unkind in your speech or act. Work it out. He may be working in you to give up that line of business about which you have been doubtful lately. Give it up. He may be working in you to be sweeter in your home, and gentler in your speech. Begin. He may be working in you to alter your relations with some with whom you have dealings that are not as they should be. Alter them” [Meyer, 110].

And so, we **“work out”**, God **“works in”**. We work, God works. “Man is, in different senses, entirely active and entirely passive: God producing all, and we acting all. It is not that God does some, and we the rest. God does all, and we do all. Thus the same things are represented as from God and from us. God makes a new heart, and we are commanded to make us a new heart; not merely because we must use the means in order to the effect, but the effect itself is our act and our duty” [JFB, 430].

Finally, the intent of God’s work in our lives is to fulfill His purpose, for He works in us **“according to His good purpose”** (vs. 13). Fulfilling God’s **“good purpose”** should be the primary goal of our lives. Everything—absolutely everything—that we do in life should take into consideration the fulfillment of God’s purpose, the furthering of His will. The extent to which we work towards God’s purpose is the extent to which our life is ultimately meaningful. We can garner riches, rise to power, achieve fame, and yet hopelessly fail in life, if we have not fulfilled God’s **“good purpose”**.

Proper Attitude in Service

¹⁴ Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe ¹⁶ as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. ¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸ So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

— Philippians 2:14-18

NOW PAUL addresses the attitude we should have as we go about fulfilling God's purpose: we are to be light to the world. Much of our ability to be light depends upon our attitude. So Paul says: **“Do everything without complaining or arguing”** (vs. 14). Note Paul says: **“...everything...”**; there are no exceptions (especially when doing God's work). **“Complaining”** is a horrible testimony to the world. It causes the world to say, “If God is so good, why is His ‘child’ complaining so much?” It is better to quit serving God, than to serve God while **“complaining”**.

“Complaining” and **“arguing”** come from selfishness and lack of humility. We complain because we (vainly) think that we deserve better treatment, or a better position, or more recognition, or more compensation. Do you think that you are doing God a “favor” by serving Him? Do you think He needs you and your service? Note this: God does not need our service;

rather, it is a great privilege that we would be called to serve the Creator of the universe, the Most High God.

“Complaining” and **“arguing”** are clearly contrary to the example of Christ that Paul portrayed in verses 6 through 11. Christ never **“complained”** in His service to His Father; rather, **“He humbled Himself and became obedient to death”** (vs. 7). **“Complaining”** and **“arguing”** are also inconsistent with the realization that **“it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose”** (vs. 13). To realize that God is in charge of our service will cause us to be content in our service.

Now, we cannot be sanctified if we have a **“complaining”** attitude; therefore, to refrain from **“complaining”** and **“arguing”** is necessary **“so that [we] may become blameless and pure”** (vs. 15). To be **“blameless”** is to be without fault in our outward, visible behavior; to be **“pure”** is to be without fault within our hearts. The world is concerned with our **“blamelessness”**; God is concerned with our **“purity”**. The Lord Himself told Samuel: **“The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart”** (I Sam. 16:7).

To be **“blameless”** and **“pure”** is to be **“children of God.”** God’s children, like natural children, take on the traits of their parents. God is pure and righteous, so His children should be pure and righteous, all the more so in order that we might **“shine like stars in the universe”** in the midst of a **“crooked and depraved generation.”** God chooses to make Himself known in the world through His children, and so it is important that each of us is a light that **“shines like stars in the universe.”** Christ of course told us: **“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they**

put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:14-16).

Now, **“stars in the universe”** shine consistently, even when we do not see them. On gloomy days, the stars are shining (hidden though they may be by the clouds). On the brightest days, the stars are still shining (though they are drowned out by the light of the sun). Similarly, consistency in being a light that shines is necessary in the service of God.

Our attitude, our (hopefully) lack of **“complaining”** and **“arguing”**, is to a great extent our light that shines. Through our attitude, we must show the **“crooked and depraved generation”** character traits that they lack, such as joy, peace, and contentedness. Such an attitude makes more appealing **“the word of life”** that we are to **“hold out”** as we shine.

Indeed, we are not to **“shine”** just for **“shining”** sake, but we are to **“hold out the word of life”** as we shine (vs. 16). Our shining is worthless unless we also further the Gospel of Christ through it. Likewise, our **“holding out the word of life”** is rendered useless unless we support it by **“shining like stars in the universe.”** **“All the world cannot persuade a man contrary to that they see”** [Sibbes, 29].

Paul takes pride in the work of his disciples, and so, one reason that he would have them **“shine like stars in the universe”** is so that he **“may boast on the day of Christ that [he] did not run or labor for nothing”** (vs. 16). Interestingly, our humility in service of God here on earth will lead to our boasting in heaven! Paul does not fear his situation as he sits imprisoned, waiting (possibly) to be executed; rather, he fears that he may have **“run...for nothing”**, that he was not productive in his service for God. May we have the same fear, and may this fear lead us into greater service for God.

Examine your life. Are you **“running for nothing”**, laboring for that which will perish? “Men labour, sweat, take pains and travail, spare no cost; and all this to go to hell, to heap up wrath against the day of wrath. The devil has more servants in his barren and fruitless service than God gets with all his promises and good things that he liberally gives” [Sibbes, 11].

Again, Paul did not view his success as being tied to his physical well-being, so he tells the Philipians: **“But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you”** (vs. 17). The Philipians financially supported Paul’s ministry, and now he is in prison. Paul did not want them to be discouraged by this. As long as it is God’s will that he **“be poured out like a drink offering”**, there is reason to **“rejoice”**. And so, Paul tells them that they **“too should be glad and rejoice”** with him, even if he dies a martyr as an indirect result of their financial support. The measure of a ministry’s success is not its material growth or expansion, but whether its work is fulfilling God’s purpose. For this reason, we should go to the prayer closet, not to the balance sheet, when deciding which ministries to support.

6 - PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30

IN THE BIBLE, we are given, not only pictures from the highest realms of theology, but also pictures of real life, individual struggles, personal relationships. At the beginning of this chapter, we had the former in the description of Christ's incarnation and glorification (vss. 6-11); here, we have the latter in Paul's description of his relationship with two of his fellow servants of Christ. "In some of Paul's writings the Apostle predominates; in others the man." [Vaughan, 139] The many instances in the Bible where personal concerns and relationships are highlighted reflect the fact that God cares for us personally and desires that we have close relationships with each other. Paul's relationships proved valuable to him. In the midst of his captivity, Paul was surrounded by the love of his brothers.

Timothy

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. ²⁰ I have no-one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. ²³ I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. ²⁴ And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

— Philippians 2:19-24

FIRST, PAUL SPEAKS of his long-time friend Timothy. An indication of the importance that Timothy played in Paul's ministry is that Timothy is mentioned in eleven out of thirteen of Paul's epistles. Timothy was dear to Paul. Here he describes their relationship like **"a son with his father"** (vs. 22). Nevertheless, Paul unselfishly says: **"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you"** (vs. 19). Paul seeks the will of the Lord first in everything he does (thus, he says **"I hope in the Lord Jesus"**), so even though Timothy is like a son to him, and undoubtedly attending very well to his needs in captivity, Paul is willing (if the Lord is) to send him to Philippi. This shows Paul's love for the Philippians: he was willing to send the best he had.

Presumably, Timothy was being sent to minister to the Philippians during their time of persecution (see Phil. 1:29- 30). They would need someone strong in the faith to be with them during this time. Even the expectation of Timothy's coming would help them. "[Paul] promises that Timothy will come, so that, by expecting him, they may bear up more courageously. . . For, as in war, an expectation of reinforcements heartens soldiers and stops them from giving way, so this consideration, too, would encourage the Philippians greatly" [Calvin, 260].

Paul trusted Timothy to carry out such an important mission. He says: **"I have no-one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare"** (vs. 20). Paul discerned that Timothy truly cared about the Philippians, not because he was constrained to care for them (being the disciple of the primary apostle to the Gentiles), but because he truly cared for them. Peter encourages such an attitude in an exhortation to elders: **"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but**

because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve” (1 Peter 5:2). We are not to love others because we have to, but because we want to. This is important. True love cannot come from the mind, but must come from the heart. But, how does one cultivate such love? Pray for it. Pure love can only come from God, by His Spirit working in you.

Sadly, too few have such love. Paul notes: **“For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ”** (vs. 21). Such love is even difficult to find among Christians. Unselfishness should be a trademark of Christianity. If it were, the Christian religion would have a much better reputation than it now carries in the world. Timothy’s unselfishness was not merely theoretical, but proven: **“Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel”** (vs. 22).

Epaphroditus

²⁵ But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow-worker and fellow-soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. ²⁶ For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. ²⁹ Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, ³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

— Philippians 2:25-30

PAUL NOW SPEAKS OF Epaphroditus, who was sent by the Philippians **“to take care of [Paul’s] needs”** (vs. 25). It seems that things did not quite work out for Epaphroditus’ goal of serving the Lord by aiding Paul. Epaphroditus had the best of intentions. Paul flatteringly calls him a **“fellow-worker and fellow-soldier.”** These are worthy titles for a Christian. We, as servants of Christ, should be **“fellow-workers”** for Christ, not being lax or lazy in our work for the Kingdom. As the Lord says through Jeremiah: **“A curse on him who is lax in doing the Lord’s work!”** (Jer. 48:10). We should all have an agenda full of the Lord’s work to do, and we should carry out His work energetically, not lazily.

We should also all realize that war has been declared upon us, and thus be **“fellow-soldiers”** in Christ’s army. Paul says elsewhere: **“Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in**

civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer” (II Tim. 2:3,4). Also, to prepare as a soldier, Paul tells us to **“put on the full armor of God”** (Eph. 6:13), the armor of God being truth, righteousness, readiness, faith, salvation, the Word of God, and prayer (cf. Eph. 6:14-18).

Despite the fact that Epaphroditus was a **“fellow-worker and fellow-soldier”** of Paul, Paul was forced to send him back to the Philippians, because things were not working out in his service for Paul. First, **“he was ill, and almost died.”** Then, he got homesick of sorts: **“For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill.”** And so, though Epaphroditus had the best of intentions, he had to return to Philippi. I believe that the Lord Himself, for His own reasons, did not want Epaphroditus to serve with Paul. Most certainly, the Lord had something more valuable, and more suited to his abilities, lined up for Epaphroditus to do in Philippi. Sometimes, our plans to serve the Lord do not agree with what the Lord has planned for us. We set out with the best of intentions, but encounter unsurpassable obstacles, sent by God Himself. Often, God has to go to great lengths to get us back on His path. To Epaphroditus, He sent a life-threatening illness. Given that Epaphroditus was a **“soldier”** for Christ, he probably would have persevered through anything less. The illness was serious enough to force Epaphroditus to long for home, though; and so, Paul sent him back to the Philippians.

Paul, however, definitely did not want the Philippians to think any less of Epaphroditus for being sent back. He exhorts them: **“Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me”** (vs. 30). If the path upon which we set out to serve the Lord turns out not to be the correct path, we should in no way be ashamed. We should rather praise the Lord that

He cares enough to lead us onto the correct path. Nor should we disparage others when they feel that the Lord is leading them from one place of service into another; rather, we should encourage them greatly to follow the leading of the Lord. Epaphroditus' (so-called) failure with Paul was cause for **“great joy”** and **“honor”**; for, whatever the result, he set out to do what he considered to be the **“work of Christ”**, and was most certainly returning to do the true work that Christ had prepared for him to do.

7 - PHILIPPIANS 3:1-6

True and False Teaching

¹ Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!

It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. ² Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. ³ For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

— Philippians 3:1-6

PAUL BEGINS: **“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!”** Despite his being in captivity, despite the sufferings he had spoken of previously, Paul could **“rejoice”**, and exhort others to do the same. Joy, joy, joy, at every turn in this letter: was Paul really writing this in chains? Paul speaks of joy and gladness no less than 15 times in this epistle (1:4; 1:18 (twice); 1:25; 2:2; 2:17; 2:18; 2:19; 2:28; 2:29; 3:1; 4:1; 4:4 (twice); 4:10). But Paul well knows that the exhortation to **“Rejoice”** is well worth repeating, for at least two reasons. First, so few of us, even Christians, exude joy. We need (for some reason) to be reminded to **“Rejoice”**. We shouldn't need this reminder so often, we have so much to **“rejoice in the Lord”** about: first

and foremost, our redemption through Christ, then also, peace in Christ, the love of Christ, our access to God through Christ, our inheritance in Christ, etc. The second reason that the exhortation to **“Rejoice”** is worth repeating is that joy is a great testimony to the world about the advantages of knowing Christ. Who can resist the opportunity for a life overflowing with joy? Joy is a magnet, drawing people to Christ. Joy is the best of contagious diseases.

It seems that Paul was ready to end the letter at this point (for he says **“Finally...”**), but Paul found (through the Holy Spirit) that he had much more to say, after all. Apparently, he had written to the Philippians previously concerning the subject that he now gets into: **“It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.”** Fortunately for us, he does **“write the same things”** (vs. 1) in this letter, because we do not have the other letter. What Paul had to say was important, because there were false teachers about, who were leading some of the faithful astray: **“Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh”** (vs. 2). Paul was speaking of the so-called Judaizers, who taught that one had to become a Jew, and be circumcised, in order to be saved through Christ. In Acts 15, we are told of the Council at Jerusalem concerning this problem. Attending the Council were many of the leaders of the faith, among them James, Peter, Paul, and Barnabas. They concluded that one is saved **“through the grace of our Lord Jesus”** (Acts 15:11), and thus, it is not necessary to be circumcised. An open letter was sent to the Gentile believers stating the official church position on this matter, but apparently when Paul wrote to the Philippians, there were many teachers that still taught that circumcision was necessary. This teaching must have confused many believers, for at a human level, it made sense. It was well known that Christ was

a Jew, and so, it seemed reasonable that one had to become a Jew in order to be a follower of Christ.

Paul does not try to hide his contempt for these false teachers: **“Watch out for those dogs.”** He calls them **“mutilators of the flesh”**, for the circumcision that they required was not sanctioned by God, and thus, it was mutilation. Paul’s contempt for these false teachers was justified. They not only were literally **“mutilators of the flesh”**, but they cheapened the work of Christ on the cross. They, in effect, were saying that Christ’s sacrifice was not effective enough to save the uncircumcised. Such teaching is desecrating to Christ’s work, as is any teaching that requires the works of men for salvation. Christ did all, we cannot add to His work, nor do we need to.

One thing to note: throughout this epistle, Paul emphasizes unity within the church to the Philippians. This emphasis, however, does not prevent Paul from criticizing false teachers within the church. Unity, valuable as it is, should not come at the expense of truth.

Paul goes on to state: **“For it is we who are the circumcision”** (vs. 3), that is, the true circumcision, as opposed to the Judaizers, who were **“mutilators of the flesh”**. The Judaizers (and the Jews, for that matter) used to call themselves **“the circumcision”** (cf. Eph. 2:11). Paul contradicts them and says that it is true Christians, not those who perform the physical ritual, who are **“the [true] circumcision”**.

Paul then gives three characteristics of those who are the true circumcision: **“we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh”** (vs. 3). The first characteristic concerns how they worship: **“we who worship by the Spirit of God.”** Their worship is not directed by men, but **“by the Spirit of God”**;

their worship is not for the benefit and entertainment of men, but for the glory and honor of God; their worship does not spring from their own talents and abilities, but from the power of the Holy Spirit. The second characteristic concerns what they value: **“we...who glory in Christ Jesus.”** The greatest possession they have is Christ; the greatest thing that has happened to them is the work of grace through Christ. Thus, He is their glory. The third characteristic concerns their understanding of the grace of God: **“we...who put no confidence in the flesh.”** They do not depend on anything that they have done to contribute anything to their salvation. They understand that **“it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God”** (Eph. 2:8,9).

Paul expands on this last characteristic. The Judaizers, no doubt, made much of their own qualifications as Jews. They preached that, to gain God’s favor, one would have to be like them: become circumcised in the flesh, and keep the laws of the Pharisees. But Paul had worthy qualifications, as well. In fact, he was more qualified than they were to speak of the advantages of being a Jew. He states confidently: **“If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more”** (vs. 4). Paul then lists his qualifications. He does so in a progressive manner, each time stating a higher qualification. First, **“circumcised on the eighth day.”** Paul, who is railing against requiring circumcision, was himself circumcised. Second, Paul was **“of the people of Israel”**, so he was not a convert to Judaism, but a Jew by birth. Third, Paul was **“of the tribe of Benjamin.”** Benjamin was a noble tribe, being one of only two tribes from which kings of Israel sprang (King Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin). Also, Benjamin was a loyal tribe, the only tribe that remained faithful to Judah when Israel split into two nations (see I Kings 12:21). Note that

these first three qualifications of Paul were acquired by birth, while the next four were due to Paul's will and choice. Fourth, Paul was **“a Hebrew of Hebrews.”** In other words, he was not just a “cultural” Jew, but actively adhered to his religion. Fifth, Paul was, **“in regard to the law, a Pharisee.”** The Pharisees were the strictest sect in observing the law. Sixth, Paul was **“zeal[ous], persecuting the church.”** Paul was not passive in his defense of the religion. He actively sought to destroy the Christians, whom he considered (before he came to know Christ) as a threat to Judaism. Of course, Paul's zeal was misdirected when he persecuted the church, which goes to show that simple zeal in religion is worthless if it is not based on truth (see Rom. 10:1-4). Seventh, Paul was, concerning **“legalistic righteousness, faultless.”** In the eyes of the community, Paul led a blameless, Pharasaical life, meticulously careful in his outward observance of the law.

Paul did well to enumerate his qualifications, for his qualifications strengthen his argument against the Judaizers. Paul was not an ignorant Gentile railing against circumcision, but a righteous Jew, even a Pharisee, who formerly persecuted the church. This was God's great plan, to use Paul, **“a Hebrew of Hebrews”**, to be the strongest teacher concerning the grace of God. Someone who had great knowledge and zeal for the former things had credibility in putting away the former things, in favor of grace. All would agree that Paul's qualifications should by all logic bias him towards being a Judaizer himself. However, Paul sought and followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and taught the truth.

8 - PHILIPPIANS 3:7-9

Profit and Loss

⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him . . .

— Philippians 3:7-9a

“HERE ARE the sweet strains of a gospel spirit, letting out itself in expressing a dear love to, a high esteem of Christ, and Him alone; advancing Christ above all, giving Him the throne, and making all competitors His footstool” [Clarkson, v. I, 245]. In the previous passage, Paul just finished enumerating his qualifications (from a worldly point of view) to have confidence before God in his own works: **“If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless”** (Phil. 3:4-6). However, here in verses 7 through 9, Paul tells us how he views such works of the flesh now that he has come to know Christ. He begins: **“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ”** (vs. 7). Paul has changed. Saul has become Paul. Paul used to consider his qualifications of the flesh—his lineage, his inherited religion, his works of righteousness—as **“profit”**, now he considers them **“loss”**.

“Paul cast off the world, and the world cast off him; he disregarded the world, and the world disregarded him; he was dead to the world, and the world was dead to him. The world and Paul were well agreed; the world cared not a pin for Paul, and Paul cared not a straw for the world” [Brooks, v. II, 95].

We (properly) gain a different perspective when we come to Christ. As the hymn says, “The things of the world will grow strangely dim.” We count loss what the world counts gain; we count gain, what the world counts loss. The world values the material; we value the spiritual. The world strives for fame; we strive to serve God. The world seeks after monetary fortune; we seek to know Christ. Such a perspective is normal for the child of God, but abnormal for the world. “By this you may know the truth of your esteem, when Christ and other things which you have formerly valued come in competition, which of these gets the place? If you had rather displease Christ than cross your humours, rather dishonour him than decline your worldly interest, rather offend him than abate of your pleasures, rather hazard the loss of his favour than lose an outward advantage, oh your esteem of Christ is little or nothing; it is not such as will afford you assurance that Christ is come in. If he be in you, your esteem of other things will decrease, your esteem of Him will increase, it will overgrow, overshadow all; that which others reject will be head of the corner, elect and precious to you that believe” [Clarkson, v. II, 95].

So, concerning all the things that Paul used to boast in, he now says: **“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ”** (vs. 7). These things that Paul now **“consider[s] loss for the sake of Christ”** were not entirely intrinsically bad things. Of the attributes that Paul boasted in, which he listed in verses 5 and 6, all were commendable, except (of course) for persecuting the church. It is not that these things had lost their value; it is just that Paul had found something

much more valuable. “A worldly man looks upon all things below his earthly portion as contemptible; and so does a Christian look upon all things below his God as contemptible” [Brooks, v. II, 94]. As Paul puts it: **“What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things”** (vs. 8). When one finds gold, tin loses its lustre in one’s eyes.

To know Christ is **“surpassing greatness.”** Paul traded the things of the world for **“the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus [his] Lord”**, and certainly came out ahead on the deal. Moses did the same thing. **“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward”** (Heb. 11:24-26). What do you love more than Christ? What’s turning your thoughts away from Christ and to the world? What’s hindering you from the **“surpassing greatness”** of knowing Christ? Give it up. Whatever you lose will be to your profit. You will be on the advantage side of a great trade.

Paul considered **“everything”** that he gave up for Christ not only as useless, but as detrimental: a **“loss”**. The things of the world are a **“loss”** to us when they hinder us from coming to Christ, or from knowing Christ more fully. We must be careful, lest our blessings turn out to curse us. Many of us have heard stories about the lottery syndrome, when great financial blessing ruins lives, breaks up families, and entrenches the recipients into moral depravity. Paul here is specifically speaking of the **“loss”** that his confidence in the flesh caused. Paul’s commendable attributes—his circumcision, his ancestry,

his morality, his zeal, his legalistic righteousness (see vs. 5,6)—became detriments because they hindered him spiritually. Rather than these commendable attributes drawing him to God, they made him self-righteous, causing him to ignore his need for the salvation that comes from God. Those who are self-righteous feel that they do not need Christ for their salvation. Arrogance and self-sufficiency are sure signs of the absence of Christ in one's life. Those who know Christ, know that they need Him desperately.

Note that the surpassingly great knowledge that Paul is speaking of is not a mere passing knowledge or a mere intellectual acknowledgement (even demons have that, cf. James 2:19), but is **“knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”** It is first knowing **“Christ”**: the Messiah, the mediator sent by God. It is then knowing **“Jesus”**: God as man, coming into the world and dying for us as our Savior. And, it is also knowing **“my Lord”**: the recipient of our praise and worship, our Master, in whom we put all trust and obedience. Note also, it is **“my”** Lord, implying a personal knowledge and relationship, an appropriation to oneself of Christ as Lord. Such a knowledge necessarily affects one's life. Paul's knowledge of Christ was certainly not merely theoretical but also effectual: it gave him a contempt of all things as compared to Christ, **“for whose sake [he] lost all things.”** Paul did lose for the sake of Christ all that he previously valued: his standing as a Pharisee, the respect of his peers, even his freedom (he was in chains as he wrote these words). But, again, such a **“loss”** was not some noble self-sacrifice, for Paul gained the greatest prize, that of the **“surpassing greatness of know Christ Jesus [his] Lord.”**

And so Paul lost **“all things”**, but really nothing, for he says: **“I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him.”** **“All things”** is the greatest account that can be cast up, for it includeth all prizes, all sums; it taketh in

heaven, it taketh in the vast and huge globe and circle of the capacious world, and all excellencies, within its bosom. **'All things'** includes all nations, all angels, all gold, all jewels, all honours, all delights, and everything else besides; and yet the apostle looks upon all these things but as [**'rubbish'**,] 'dung', dogs' dung, as some interpret the word, ...coarse and contemptible, in comparison of dear Jesus" [Brooks, v. V, 209]. When a person comes to a deep knowledge of Christ, he discovers that the things he once so thirsted, are like rubbish to him. As Christ said: **"Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst"** (John 4:14).

Paul had two goals in giving up all things: that he may **"gain Christ"** and **"be found in Him"**. To **"gain Christ"**, is (first) to gain salvation through Christ, and then also to gain the fulfillment, satisfaction, purpose, peace, etc. that comes from knowing Christ. To **"be found in Him"** denotes two things. First, it denotes being found in Him spiritually: to be in His body, united to Him, with His desires being your desires. Second, it denotes being found in Him judicially, that is, found in Him on judgment day: justified, sanctified, clothed with His righteousness. Certainly, to be found in our own righteousness at God's throne on judgment day would be insufficient for salvation. Not only Paul, but God considers our own righteous works as **"rubbish"**, as far as contributing to our salvation. As Isaiah says: **"How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags"** (Isa. 64:5,6). God would as readily accept **"rubbish"** for salvation as He would our own righteous works. But we have Christ. Praise be for that!

9 - PHILIPPIANS 3:9-11

Justification, Sanctification, Glorification

⁹ ...and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

— Philippians 3:9-11

IN THIS SHORT PASSAGE, Paul speaks on the cornerstones of the Gospel: justification (vs. 9), sanctification (vs. 10), and glorification (vs. 11). We begin this study at the end of verse 9. In our previous Philippians' study, we looked at the beginning of verse 9. Paul there spoke of how he values above all things of the world his relationship with Christ: **“I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him”** (then Paul continues) **“not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith”** (vs. 9). So we see here, at the end of verse 9, Paul summarizes what to **“be found in Him”** means, that is, justification not by works of the law, but through faith in Christ.

Justification by faith is at the center of the Christian faith. Justification by faith, and faith alone, distinguishes Christianity from all other religions of the world. In fact, justification by faith in Christ defines the Christian religion; just as affirmation of the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ defines the

Christian. And so Paul states his desire to **“gain Christ and be found in Him”**, and then defines what being found in Him means: **“...not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith”** (vs. 9). To make himself clear, Paul first states how he is justified in a negative form, by saying what it is not: **“...not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law”**; and then in a positive form, by saying what it is: **“...but that which is through faith in Christ.”**

First, let us look at how we cannot be justified: **“...not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law.”** God is holy, infinitely holy: **“[His] eyes are too pure to look on evil; [He] cannot tolerate evil”** (Hab. 1:13). Thus, only the perfectly righteous may enter His presence, only the perfectly righteous may escape His judgment. But fallen man, each and every one, has sinned, as Paul points out: **“There is no one righteous, not even one”** (Rom. 3:10), and then **“[A]ll have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Rom. 3:23). Because of this, **“no one will be declared righteous by observing the law”** (Rom. 3:20). Make no mistake: righteousness is a good thing, and we should strive to observe God’s law, but our attempts at righteousness can never be enough to satisfy God’s perfect standard of conduct. Even if from this day forward we lived in perfect obedience to God, this is what is expected by God as the minimum standard of righteousness. And so, perfect righteousness from this day forward cannot make up for past sins, just as paying off today’s debts cannot cancel yesterday’s. Consequently, personal righteousness (as good as it is) can be dangerous, that is, if we rest in it. “Though personal righteousness, observance of the law, be necessary and useful in other respects, yet in point of confidence it must be renounced, it must in no case be relied

on; it is commendable and advantageous in its own place, when made use of for those ends, and in that way which God requires; but if it be relied on, it may prove dangerous, pernicious; it will be found a broken reed, deceive the soul that puts confidence in it. . . There is that in our best righteousness which exposes us to more severity, and makes us further obnoxious to justice; that which may provoke Him, instead of appeasing or satisfying” [Clarkson, v. I, 278-279]. Our personal righteousness exposes us to the severity of God when we think that it is enough to satisfy God; it provokes God to wrath, because resting in our own righteousness denies and despises the saving work of Christ on the cross.

Satan leads men to destruction in two ways: first, by provoking open disobedience and ungodliness so that men ignore God’s law; second, by provoking pride, self-confidence and self-righteousness so that men ignore God’s salvation. Of the two, self-righteousness may be the most damning, for “though this way be fairer than the other, yet ordinarily it proves more dangerous, because those that are entered into it are not so easily convinced of it, and brought out of it; publicans and sinners are more easily brought to Christ than Pharisees” [Clarkson, v. I, 280]. There are many ways that men rest in their self-righteousness, and thus, ignore the salvation of God. Some rest in their good nature; they are friendly to everyone, pals to all, and think that their good nature is enough to win God’s favor. Some rely on the following of religious rites; they observe Sacraments, attend church every week, and think that this is enough to win God’s favor. Some rely on comparative righteousness; they see themselves as better than the average guy on the street, and think that this is enough to win God’s favor. Some rely on morality; like the rich young man (see Matt. 19:16-22), they’ve never stolen, never beaten

their wives, never committed adultery and think that this is enough to win God's favor.

These ways of righteousness, though commendable ways of behavior, will not gain God's favor. Again, as Paul states, **“no one will be declared righteous by observing the law”** (Rom. 3:20). Rather, the righteousness that God accepts, is not man's fallen righteousness, but (as Paul here in Philippians gives the positive requirement for justification) **“that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith”** (vs. 9). The basis of our righteousness is our standing with Christ, our faith that His death on the cross satisfies the punishment that we deserve for our sins, our resting in His work on the cross, not on our own works of righteousness. It should be a comfort to us that our salvation does not depend on our own works, for we all miserably fail. God is gracious, and displays His great wisdom, in not tying our salvation to works of righteousness. If our salvation depended somehow on our partial obedience of the law, if there were some point system of some sort, whereby we were rated for our good works, then justification would be available only to the elite, who knew the fine points of the law, and who had the means (the time, the money) to do good works. But since justification is by faith, it is available to all in full measure, because our **“righteousness...comes from God and is by faith”** (vs. 9).

So, we are justified by faith, but the Christian life does not stop there. Paul, beyond resting in his justification, says: **“I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death”** (vs. 10). Since he was saved, Paul's greatest desire was to **“know Christ”**. Paul strived for, what he called earlier, **“the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord”** (Phil. 3:8). One might think that Paul—who

was obviously a mature believer, who was the man who wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else—knew Christ enough. And many of us, who have walked with Christ for a long time, may think that we know Christ enough. However, as well as we might know Christ, we all need to know Him better. This should be our overriding desire, our top priority, for to know Christ is more important than knowing anyone or anything else. C. H. Spurgeon tells a parable about why we should desire to know Christ:

“You have been captured by Roman soldiers and dragged from your native country; you have been sold for a slave, stripped, whipped, branded, imprisoned, and treated with shameful cruelty. At last you are appointed to die in the amphitheatre, to make holiday for a tyrant. The populace assemble with delight. There they are, tens of thousands of them, gazing down from the living sides of the capacious Colosseum. You stand alone, and naked, armed only with a single dagger—a poor defence against gigantic beasts. A ponderous door is drawn up by machinery, and forth there rushes the monarch of the forest—a huge lion; you must slay him or be torn to pieces. You are absolutely certain that the conflict is too stern for you and that the sure result must and will be that those terrible teeth will grind your bones and drip with your blood. You tremble; your joints are loosed; you are paralyzed with fear, like the timid deer when the lion has dashed it to the ground. But what is this? O wonder of mercy!—a deliverer appears. A great unknown leaps from among the gazing multitude, and confronts the savage monster. He quails not at the roaring of the devourer, but dashes upon him with terrible fury, till, like a whipped cur, the lion slinks towards his den, dragging himself along in pain and fear. The hero lifts you up, smiles into your bloodless face, whispers comfort in your

ear, and bids you be of good courage, for you are free. Do you think that there would arise at once in your heart a desire to know your deliverer? As the guards conducted you into the open street, and you breathed the cool, fresh air, would not the first question be, ‘Who was my deliverer, that I may fall at his feet and bless him?’ You are not, however, informed, but instead of it you are gently led away to a noble mansion house, where your many wounds are washed and healed with salve of rarest power. You are clothed in sumptuous apparel; you are made to sit down at a feast; you eat and are satisfied; you rest upon the softest down. The next morning you are attended by servants who guard you from evil and minister to your good. Day after day, week after week, your wants are supplied. You live like a courtier. There is nothing that you can ask which you do not receive. I am sure that your curiosity would grow more and more intense till it would ripen into an insatiable craving. You would scarcely neglect an opportunity of asking the servants, ‘Tell me, who does all this, who is my noble benefactor, for I must know him?’ ‘Well, but’, they would say, ‘is it not enough for you that you are delivered from the lion?’ ‘Nay,’ say you, ‘it is for that very reason that I pant to know him.’ ‘Your wants are richly supplied—why are you vexed by curiosity as to the hand which reaches you the boon? If your garment is worn out, there is another. Long before hunger oppresses you, the table is well loaded. What more do you want?’ But your reply is, ‘It is because I have no wants, that, therefore, my soul longs and yearns even to hungering and to thirsting, that I may know my generous loving friend’” [Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. XXXV, pg. 61-62].

And so, we should desire to know Christ, our Savior, our Deliverer, our Benefactor, our Lord, our Master.

Again, Paul desired a deep knowledge of Christ. He enumerates three aspects of knowledge of Christ that he falls short in: **“the power of His resurrection”**, **“the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings”**, and **“becoming like Him in His death.”** The enumeration of these three aspects of knowing Christ remind us how far we fall short of knowing Him. In fact, at first glance, it is difficult to understand what exactly Paul means by this. What does he mean? Let us look at each of these three aspects of knowing Christ:

- **“the power of His resurrection”** - Such power is known nowhere else. Where else is found the power to raise the dead? Paul wanted to know Christ through this power. This power can work through us, to purify us, to sanctify us, to raise us from the death of sin, transforming us so that, rather than living a futile life in service to the world and our fleshly lusts, we live a meaningful life in service to God. Calvin comments: “Christ therefore is rightly known, when we feel how powerful His death and resurrection are, and how efficacious they are in us. Now all things are there furnished to us: expiation and destruction of sin, freedom from guilt, satisfaction, victory over death, the attainment of righteousness and the hope of a blessed immortality” [Calvin, 275].
- **“the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings”** - We cannot experience the full **“power of His resurrection”** without the **“fellowship of sharing in His sufferings”**. Christ Himself said: **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow**

me” (Matt. 16:24); and what is **“the cross”** but the cross of suffering? To know Christ is to follow Him in His sufferings (to some extent), because a life lived in complete obedience to God (as Christ’s was) will necessarily bring suffering. Christ said also: **“In this world you will have trouble”** (John 16:33). This is a fact. And to know Christ is to experience this suffering, and to endure it as He did: with patience, with love, with obedience to God through it, accepting God’s will, not cursing it. How can we truly know Christ, and appreciate what He has done for us, unless we experience **“the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings”**? Besides, there are many things that can only come through suffering: strength for the future, appreciation for times of blessing, appreciation for the afterlife; appreciation for salvation; appreciation for God’s grace, empathy for the suffering of others, a stronger testimony for Christ.

- **“becoming like Him in His death”** - It seems that Paul had a spiritual gift of martyrdom: he would accept, indeed, he desired to live and die as Christ did, and share in His suffering. Paul literally became **“like Him in His death”**, for he died a martyr’s death for his faith. Very few of us these days are called to die a martyr’s death, but in another sense, we are to become **“like Him in His death.”** We should all say, as Paul did, **“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of**

God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). Paul further explains this: **“We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. . . For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. . . [C]ount yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus”** (from Rom. 6:1-11). Through Christ, we have died to this world, and we are living a new life in Him.

We all need to know Christ in such a way. We need to venture beyond our salvation into a deep knowledge of our Savior, dying to ourselves, suffering for Him, with His power working in us. We should all pray to know Christ in this way, but first, we should all pray for the desire to know Christ in this way.

Such knowledge leads to glory. Thus Paul continues: **“...and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead”** (vs. 11). By saying, **“somehow”**, Paul is not doubting his salvation, but rather, expressing awe for the greatness of eternal life. Paul is “not implying uncertainty of the issue, but the earnestness of the struggle” [JFB, Vol. III, pt. 3, 434]. “The phrase, [**‘somehow’**], does not indicate doubt, but expresses difficulty, to stimulate our earnest endeavor. For it is no light

contest, inasmuch as we must struggle against so many and such serious hindrances” [Calvin, 276]. “It is always important, in this connection, to distinguish between the firm, unmovable object of our hope and our subjective apprehension of it” [Silva, 192]. In and of ourselves, we deserve no resurrection from the dead. Yet, through the knowledge of Christ, God has blessed us also with the great gift of eternal life in His presence.

The Race

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

— Philippians 3:12-14

IN THE PREVIOUS VERSES, Paul expressed his desire to know Christ, to be conformed to Him, to be in full fellowship with His Lord: **“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead”** (Phil. 3:10- 11). Lest his audience think too highly of him, Paul states here: **“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me”** (vs. 12). It would be tempting for us to think of Paul as the **“perfect”** Christian. After all, he gave up his life for the work of the gospel, to the point of (as he wrote this epistle) sitting in chains for his faith, fully expecting to die for it. Had not he attained perfection in the Christian faith? Paul in this passage answers resoundingly, **“Not yet!”**

Despite the achievements of Paul's faith, he still had a long way to go. Paul still struggled with sin, still struggled with the desires of his flesh. In his letter to the Romans, Paul described this struggle: **"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. . . So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members"** (Rom. 7:15-19,21-23). Paul summed up his state: **"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"** (Rom. 7:24).

As Paul exemplifies, even the most mature Christian struggles with sin, struggles with desires of the flesh, struggles with temptations of the world, and is in constant warfare with the evil one. This struggle is and always will be with us in this world. If Paul had not yet been **"made perfect"**, we certainly have a long way to go. It is a sign of Christian maturity to recognize our imperfections in the sight of God. The mature Christian says with Paul: **"What a wretched man I am!"** Ironically, the recognition that Paul struggled as we do can be an encouragement to us: if Paul experienced the same struggles that we do, and yet served God so mightily, so can we also serve God mightily.

Paul did not rest in his imperfections, but used them as an impetus to strive for perfection. He said: **"I press on to take**

hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (vs. 12). This is the essence of the attitude that mature Christians should have: not satisfied with past achievements, ever striving to be sanctified, desiring ever more to continue to strive to do the will of God. The term, to **“press on”**, that Paul uses in this passage is used to describe the struggle of a runner in a race. The life and service of a Christian is often described in terms of a struggle of one sort or another. For instance, Christ said: **“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door”** (Luke 13:24); and **“Do not work for food that spoils, but [work] for that endures to eternal life”** (John 6:27); the writer of Hebrews exhorted: **“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure”** (Hebrews 6:11); and Paul earlier in this epistle said: **“Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling”** (Phil. 2:12). This is not to say that our labor and works of service save us, but we should labor as if they did!

As mentioned, Paul here compares our lives as Christians to a race, a race that does not end with our salvation, but rather begins with it. The Christian life is compared to a race a number of times in the New Testament. For example, the writer of Hebrews exhorted: **“[L]et us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us”** (Heb. 12:1); and Paul said elsewhere: **“Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize”** (1 Cor. 9:24-27). Paul, when making these comparisons, is not speaking of just any

race, but a race of champions. There are many ways that the Christian life is like such a race, and that we the participants are like the athletes that run the race:

- **Conditioning** - The successful athlete is well-conditioned. He has rid himself of unnecessary flab. He has rid himself of unnecessary flab. So too we should rid ourselves of unnecessary flab: the flab of the world that drags us down, worldly lusts, worldly desires, worldly diversions, worldly influences. Unnecessary flab makes the race much too difficult. It is a heavy burden.
- **Diet** - The successful athlete follows a special diet, eating what is best for his body, abstaining from what harms his body. So too we should build our diet on the foundation of the Word of God, and abstain from dieting on those things that are harmful. As Paul says later in this epistle: **“[W]hatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy— think about such things”** (Phil. 4:8).
- **Pacing** - Successful athletes must pace themselves according to the length of the race. And so too we. Most of us, just like inexperienced runners, got too fast a start in this race, and then started to flag. We need a second wind, a renewal by the Holy Spirit, so that we may finish the race as strong as we started.

- **Progress** - No racer would even think of turning around and backtracking. His eyes are ever forward, looking toward the goal. Why must we in our race find it so hard to keep from going backwards?
- **Energy** - The successful athlete expends a great amount of energy. So we too should expend a great amount of energy in our race, in our service to God. Many serve God lazily and apathetically. Does any successful athlete run his race half-heartedly?
- **Affliction** - Training for the race, and the race itself, can be extremely painful. World-class athletics is extremely punishing on the body. Despite this, world-class athletes do not complain about the pain they experience as they run, they do not quit the sport because of the toll in pain that it takes on their body. Rather, they endure the affliction bravely, and overcome the obstacles, in light of the glory before them. And so should we.
- **Staying on Course** - Quite obviously, the racers must stick to the course in order to win the race. So we too must stick to the course, the course that God has laid out for us. Wouldn't it be foolish for an athlete in a race to carelessly stray from the course? Why then do we so easily stray from the course laid out for us?
- **Forward-looking** - The best athletes don't look back; rather, they have their eyes on the goal: the

finish line. Each look back hinders their progress, disrupts their pace, causing them to lose ground. Paul exemplifies this in his race: **“But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus”** (vss. 13-14). There are two ways that looking back can hinder us as Christians. We can get discouraged by the past as we look back on our failures. Or, we can be hindered as we look back on and rest in our good deeds of the past. Paul says (in effect), “Don’t look back.” Paul says, **“Forget what is behind”** and **“strain towards what is ahead.”** No matter how we have failed in the past, or no matter how much we have achieved in the past, we must press on: our race is not finished!

- **Single-mindedness** - The best athletes train and run the race with one thing in mind: victory. Paul exemplifies similar singlemindedness. He says: **“One thing I do”** (vs. 13). If we read the history of Paul’s life, we can see this singlemindedness. David also had the same singlemindedness. He said: **“One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple”** (Psalms 27:4). Christ Himself commended Mary (Martha’s sister) for such singlemindedness: **“[O]nly one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her”** (Luke 10:42). Paul said,

“One thing I do”; David said, **“One thing I ask”**; Christ said, **“One thing is needed.”** What is your **“one thing”**? Is it to single-mindedly pursue the will of God? We are not called to be “jacks-of-all-trades”; we are called to a single purpose, to fulfill the will of God. This should be our **“one thing”**, the driving purpose of our lives. Seek this one thing; master this one thing, just as a champion athlete masters his event. If you do, your success in the eyes of God is assured.

As Paul points out elsewhere, the result of our successful race is much more valuable than that of even the best athletes: **“They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever”** (I Cor. 9:25). This reward is Paul’s impetus in the race: **“I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus”** (vs. 14). We all have a calling from God to do His will during the race, but we also have a calling **“to win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenwards in Christ Jesus.”** This prize is variously described throughout the New Testament. For instance, from Romans: **“For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified”** (Romans 8:29-30); from Thessalonians: **“. . . God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (II Thess. 2:13-14); from Paul’s letter to Timothy: **“Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of**

the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (I Tim. 6:12). Though the race be long and painful, there is an end to it; and at the end there is a great prize **“to which God has called us.”** May the Lord be praised!

Christian Maturity

¹⁵ All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained. ¹⁷ Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

— Philippians 3:15-17

IN THE PREVIOUS VERSES, Paul has been speaking about the great value he places on knowing Christ. He has expressed that he values knowing Christ more than anything else: **“What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ”** (Phil. 3:8). He has explained what he means by knowing Christ: **“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death”** (Phil. 3:10). He has admitted that he has fallen short in this knowledge, and has expressed his great desire to complete his knowledge of Christ: **“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the**

goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12-14).

Now, in the current text, Paul states: **“All of us who are mature should take such a view of things”** (Phil. 3:15). We should all, as Christians, have the overriding desire to perfect our knowledge of Christ. Paul wrote the preceding verses, not just for the opportunity to describe his personal attitude and feelings, but that we might apply what he is saying to our lives. Paul, effectively, is saying in verse 15, “It is not only me who should have this attitude, who should strive to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, who should strive toward that for which we are called heavenward. It is all of us who **‘should take such a view of things.’**” We must all read the Holy Scriptures that we might apply them to our lives. As Thomas Brooks said: “If it be not strong upon thy heart to practice what thou redest, to what end dost thou read? To increase thy own condemnation?” [from *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*].

Paul continues: **“And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you”** (vs. 15). Paul here is pointing out that not all Christians have the same maturity level. This fact should be obvious, but it seems we forget it at times. We are quick to criticize younger Christians who, often through ignorance, show their weaknesses. Paul does not criticize those, who through lack of maturity, **“think differently”**; rather, he treats them with patience, and leaves their Christian growth up to the work of God. We should do the same thing. We must not be too quick to chastise, but rather be quick to teach. We who have been Christians for a long time must not display a “high and mighty” attitude, but rather humbly seek to correct our weaker brothers and sisters.

Throughout the Bible, spiritual growth is depicted as a gradual process. In Proverbs, we read: **“The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever**

brighter till the full light of day” (Prov. 4:18). Younger Christians are likened to infants, who need **“milk, not solid food”** (Heb. 5:12; see also I Cor. 3:1-3; I Cor. 14:20). Here in Philippians, Paul is speaking of those who, because of their spiritual immaturity, do not have an overwhelming desire to know Christ. They cannot yet say with Paul: **“I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ”** (Phil. 3:8). Mature, true Christianity is “all-out” Christianity. The words of advice, “All things in moderation”, do not apply to service of the Lord. Many think that we should not be fanatical about our faith, but this is not borne out in the Bible. The Bible encourages, even requires, such fanaticism. What is it but fanaticism to say: **“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”** (Gal. 2:20).

Not all of us have such “fanaticism”, so Paul says, **“And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you”** (vs. 15). Note again that Paul leaves up to the work of God the maturing of those **“who think differently”**, those who lack an overwhelming desire to know Christ. Yes, Paul could try to yell, scream and argue the younger Christians into maturity, but this would not be effective. Prayer is more effective than argument. Leave such work up to God. God cares about our spiritual growth (what a blessing!), and will, in time, bring us all into spiritual maturity. As Paul said earlier in this epistle, **“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus”** (Phil. 1:6).

Having conceded the fact that we are at different levels of spiritual maturity, Paul then exhorts us to continually progress

in our spiritual growth: **“Only let us live up to what we have already attained”** (vs. 16). There’s no turning back! (It’s a horrible feeling to slide backwards in our spiritual maturity). Continual spiritual growth can be had by adopting the same attitude that Paul had already expressed: **“Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus”** (Phil. 3:14).

Paul next offers before them an example to follow: **“Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you”** (vs. 17). This sounds arrogant of Paul, to recommend himself as an example to follow; however, Paul could objectively look at what he had become through the work of the Holy Spirit in his life, and rightly so, offer himself up as an example. There are few better examples. “For in the imitating of Paul all these virtues are included, pure zeal, fear of the Lord, modesty, self-renunciation, docility, love, and desire of accord” [Calvin, 280]. Of course, Paul was only a worthy example insofar as he followed our supreme example, that is, Christ. As Paul says elsewhere: **“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ”** (I Cor. 11:1).

Throughout the Bible, we are not only given commandments concerning how to live our lives, but also examples of saints living godly lives. Examples are a very powerful method of instruction, giving life to the commandment. “Precepts instruct us what things are our duty, but examples assure us that they are possible” [William Bates]. In the Bible, we can find godly examples for many situations, and many walks of life. “The prince [can find an example] in Josiah and Hezekiah (see II Kings 23 and II Kings 18ff); the counsellor in Hushai (see II Sam. 17); the rich man in Abraham (see Gen. 13,14 et. al.); the poor in the Shunamite (see II Kings

4); officers in court, in the eunuch of Candace (see Acts 8:26ff); the captive in Daniel and the three children (see Daniel 1-3); the afflicted in Job (see the Book of Job); the banished in Joseph (see Gen. 39-41); the soldier in Cornelius (see Acts 10); women in Sarah (see I Pet. 3:6); the magistrate in Moses and Joshua or Nehemiah; ministers in the apostles of Jesus Christ, a zealous, self-denying company, who left their all to promote the gospel. And then of all graces, Abraham for faith, David for devotion, Job for patience, Timothy for temperance, Paul for diligence and activity in the Lord's work" [Thomas Manton, "Sermons on Philippians 3"].

In general, insofar as they are Christ-like, we are to use other, mature brothers and sisters as examples. In fact, whether we like it or not, we as Christians are all examples: examples to our children, examples to younger Christians, even examples to non-believers who know of our faith. Unfortunately, when we stumble, we can be horrid examples, turning people away from the Christian faith.

The Epistle of Philippians

¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.

— Philippians 3:18-19

IN THE PREVIOUS VERSE, Paul offered up his own life as an example for Christians to follow: **“Join with others in following my example, brothers”** (Phil. 3:17). Here in vss. 18-21, Paul gives examples of those who should not be followed: **“For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ”** (vs. 18). It seems in context that Paul is speaking primarily of certain professing Christians who are **“enemies of the cross of Christ.”** Thus, Paul needs to warn the Philippians **“often”** not to be deceived by the false professors. False professors are a much greater danger to us than are open atheists. We are warned in the New Testament concerning false professors more than we are about those who are openly enemies of Christ. We see here that Paul warned the Philippians **“often”** concerning these **“enemies of the cross of Christ.”**

As he was languishing in imprisonment and expecting to be put to death as a martyr, Paul did not lament his own condition; but he did lament (giving his warning **“with tears”**) the fact that **“many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.”** It is not criminals, or adulterers, or even atheists who are

bringing Paul to tears; it is the Christians who are not living up to their professed Christian faith. Paul's tears demonstrate his care for the false Christians. They are tears of sadness, of pity on those professing Christians who are missing out on so much that God has to offer them. We likewise should not by any means delight in reproofing others for their lack of faith, or for their errors in doctrinal belief. Rather, we should, like Paul, do so **"with tears"**, with sadness that there is such error, praying that the Holy Spirit would work to correct such errors and bring all professing Christians into the true Body of Christ.

Paul's warning to the Philippians was all the more necessary because there were **"many"** who live as enemies of the cross of Christ: this was not an isolated problem. Where there is wheat, there are also tares. Where there are sheep, the wolves gather too. There were (and are) **"many"** who live as enemies to the cross of Christ, as compared to the paucity of those in Christ's **"little flock"** (see Luke 12:32). It is the tendency of many people to follow the **"many"**. We must be careful not to adopt the majority opinion just because it is the majority opinion.

Paul enumerates the ways in which the false professors are **"enemies of the cross of Christ"**:

- **"Their destiny is destruction"** - In other words, they are **"enemies of the cross of Christ"** by not accepting the salvation of God that can only be had through Christ. We all have sinned against God, and so, apart from the cross of Christ, our **"destiny is destruction"**. Without paying for our sin, we cannot live eternally with our Holy God. God has provided a way for us to pay for our sins through **"the cross of Christ"**. The **"enemies of the cross of Christ"** do not accept this gift of salvation, and so, rather than

living eternally in the presence of God, **“their destiny is destruction”**.

- **“Their god is their stomach”** - They are **“enemies of the cross of Christ”** because they are more concerned about satisfying the desires of the flesh than they are about what they really need: the salvation of God through **“the cross of Christ”**. They put the needs of their body ahead of the needs of their soul. In doing so, they make a **“god”** of their stomachs. Christ warned of this, and gave us a remedy: **“What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?”** (Matt. 16:26); **“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things”**—that is, the needs of your body—**“will be given to you as well”** (Matt. 6:33).
- **“Their glory is their shame”** - They are **“enemies of the cross of Christ”** because they see no need for God’s salvation. They sin wantonly, guiltlessly, even **“glory[ing] in their shame”**.
- **“Their mind is on earthly things”** - They are **“enemies of the cross of Christ”** because they are so preoccupied with the things of this world that they ignore God’s salvation. They don’t have time to consider Christ, to learn about His work on the cross, to cultivate a relationship with Him, to seek to serve Him.

Citizens of Heaven

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.

— Philippians 3:20-21

IN CONTRAST to those whose **“mind is on earthly things”** (vs. 19), Paul says: **“But our citizenship is in heaven”** (vs. 20). There is a great difference between the **“enemies of the cross of Christ”** and us, whose **“citizenship is in heaven”**. **“Their destiny is destruction”**, while our destiny is abundant life, eternally in the presence of God. **“Their god is their stomach”**, while our God is the True and Living God, the Creator of the universe. **“Their glory is in their shame”**, while our glory is in the obedience to and service of God. **“Their mind is on earthly things”**, while **“our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there”**. The differences between them and us are many and great, between theirs and our destiny, our allegiance, our mindset, our hope, our glory, our attitude, our values, the way we spend our time, the things that we meditate upon, etc.

The statement **“our citizenship is in heaven”** implies much. First, it implies that **“heaven”** is a real place, a real country (of sorts), of which we can be citizens. Next, it implies that we already are citizens of heaven. This should affect our behavior here in this foreign land. It is not unusual (especially in these days of world travel) for people to be aliens in a strange country. I live in Southern California and there are many here

who are citizens of other countries, or who consider their true home to be another country. One can easily tell that their home is another country: they speak the language of their home country, they eat the food of their home country, they practice the culture of their home country, many times they speak via telephone to friends and relatives in their home country, etc.

So we too, as citizens of heaven, should act as citizens of heaven, and consider ourselves aliens to this world. And it should be clear to those around us that we are citizens of heaven. We should speak the language of our home country, the language of love, the language of kindness, a good word to others at a seasonable time. We should feast on the food of our home country, which is the Word of God. We should practice the culture of our home country, living as Christ lived, living in obedience to God's Word, living for service to our Lord and King in heaven. Finally, we should keep in touch through prayer with our Father in heaven. Christ lived in such a way: "All the time He was amongst men, He was a citizen of that city. Therefore, He lay in a borrowed manger; His body was deposited in a borrowed grave; He had nowhere to lay His head; and when everyone went to his own home, He went to the Mount of Olives" [Meyer, 198].

Moreover, as citizens of heaven, we should yearn for the day when we will be brought home: **"And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body"** (vs. 20-21). What a privilege! The King of Heaven Himself will come down and rescue us from this place! True Christians **"eagerly await"** this coming. To **"eagerly await"** assumes the possession of faith, hope and patience. Christians who do not **"eagerly await"** the coming of Christ are (at best) careless Christians, (at worst) faithless,

false Christians. Such yearning for the day of Christ will necessarily affect our behavior here. We live, not as a slave to the flesh, but as a bride waiting for her spouse.

We are blessed. We can look forward to the return of Christ. For the **“enemies of the cross of Christ”**, His coming is **“destruction”**. For us, His coming is the redemption of our bodies, as Christ, **“by the power than enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body”** (vs. 21). His transforming power is the basis of our hope. The power He demonstrated in His own life on earth ensures that He can use that same power to transform us. He will **“bring everything under His control”**, conquering our sins, our addictions, our lusts, giving us a **“glorious body”** like His. While the **“enemies of the cross of Christ”** make a god out of their stomachs, out of their bodily desires, we long for the day when Christ will rid our **“lowly bodies”** of those tormenting desires. Oh, what a day that will be! To be **“transformed”** by Christ so that we have a **“glorious body”** like His! An immortal, incorruptible, unchanging, beautiful body like His! Praise be to God for the hope that we have!

13 - PHILIPPIANS 4:1-7

Standing Firm in the Lord

¹ Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends! ² I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

— Philippians 4:1-3

AS PAUL NEARS THE END of the epistle, he begins to sum it all up: **“Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!”** (Phil. 4:1). The word **“Therefore”** points to what has preceded it, and one can view the entire first three chapters of the epistle as being the object of the **“Therefore”**. In those chapters, Paul spoke of many ways to **“stand firm in the Lord”**. To do so, apparently, is not so easy. We have so much trouble just standing our ground in this spiritual war. Consistency in our faith is something we all must strive for. We would go far in **“standing firm”** by heeding Paul’s advice: by rejoicing through affliction (1:18); by being fearless through persecution (1:28); by being united in purpose (2:2); by serving graciously (2:14); by putting confidence not in oneself, but in Christ (3:3); by valuing knowledge of Christ above all things (3:8); by pressing on

toward fulfilling God's purpose (3:14); by keeping one's mind not on earthly things, but looking toward the glory in store for us (3:20-21).

To bring this advice home, Paul singles out an example of some faithful saints who were having problems **“standing firm in the Lord”**: **“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life”** (vss. 2-3). There was some contention in the house of God. And apparently, this was no isolated petty quarrel between troublemakers in an otherwise “perfect” church. No, the quarrel between Euodia and Syntyche must have seriously threatened the ability of the church at Philippi to serve the Lord effectively. The quarrel was serious enough for Paul to specifically point it out, and to **“plead”** for its resolution. Most probably, Euodia and Syntyche were leading figures in the Philippian church, for they **“contended at [Paul’s] side in the cause of the gospel”** (vs. 3). Recall that women were the first converts in Philippi (Acts 16:13ff). Being leading figures, their quarrel must have been dividing the whole church into two camps. Paul, earlier in this epistle, emphasized the importance of unity (see 1:27; 2:2), and here he speaks of a place to put his teaching into practice. Theoretical preaching must be brought home, and acted out.

Paul in these brief verses lays a groundwork for the resolution of the quarrel. First, he pleads that they agree with each other **“in the Lord”**. In their quarreling, Euodia and Syntyche were “in themselves”, not **“in the Lord”**. Second, Paul enlists the aid of another believer, his **“loyal yokefellow”**, to help resolve the quarrel. We do not know the name of Paul's **“loyal yokefellow”**, but this nickname reinforces the attitude

that the women needed to adopt to resolve their quarrel. We all need to be **“yokefellows”**: pulling side by side toward the same goal. Third, Paul reminds the women that they had a history of working together, for they **“contended at [Paul’s] side in the cause of the gospel”** (vs. 3). They were fellow soldiers, fighting side-by-side, allies in the spiritual war. The bonds of fellow soldiers are among the strongest: Surely, they can put aside their quarrels. Fourth, Paul reminds them of their common ground in the faith: their names are **“in the book of life”**. They will spend eternity together; they might as well start getting along together here on earth.

Rejoicing in the Lord

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

— Philippians 4:4-7

WE WOULD ALL DO WELL to set aside our petty quarrels and do as Paul says here: **“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”** (vs. 4). This is the antidote to the selfishness that leads to our quarrels. Note that this is a command: We as Christians are to rejoice, nay more than that, rejoice *always* in the Lord. Paul doesn’t want us to miss this point, so he **“say[s] it again: Rejoice!”** This was not rote praise on Paul’s part, but legitimate, overflowing joy from the heart. And if Paul could **“rejoice”**, certainly we can. Recall that

Paul was in chains as he wrote this, awaiting his execution in captivity. Also, the Philippians surely remembered that Paul demonstrated his ability to **“rejoice”** when he and Silas were **“praying and singing hymns”** at midnight in the Philippian jail (see Acts 16:25). Now you, why can’t you also **“rejoice”** and **“rejoice...always”**? The fact is that whatever our situation, we have much to **“rejoice”** in. **“In the Lord”** there is always much to **“rejoice”** in. Such rejoicing serves a great purpose. It is a great testimony to the world. It shows the world that we have much more than our outward circumstances would indicate. Rejoicing affects our whole being. In connection with his command to **“rejoice”**, Paul exhorts: **“Let your gentleness be evident to all”** (vs. 5).

Rejoicing will lead to such **“gentleness”**. One cannot be rude while rejoicing. Both rejoicing and gentleness demonstrate one’s valuation of the eternal over and above the temporal. **“Gentleness”** is the opposite of selfishness. Gentleness means, at times, losing arguments, giving up so-called rights, foregoing last words, letting others get their way. In making our **“gentleness...evident”**, we risk being perceived as weak. But, what of it? The world is wrong in this. **“Gentleness”** is not a weakness, but a victory: a victory over self.

The impetus for both our **“rejoicing”** and our **“gentleness”** is that **“the Lord is near”** (vs. 5). This can be taken in two ways: He is near in position, and near in approach. First, in position: we should all live our lives with the awareness of the Lord’s presence. He is with us, just as He said: **“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”** (Matt. 28:20). “True Christianity does not postpone the presence of Christ to the future, or recall it from the past, but lives in the sense that *He is*” [Meyer, 212]. Second, the Lord is near in approach: He is coming soon. We should all live our lives with the expectation of the Lord’s soon coming. “This

consciousness of the imminent advent was a mighty lever, by which to lift the whole state of thought and feeling in the early Church to those higher levels, the best and most glorious levels, which the Church of God has ever attained” [Meyer, 208]. So also should the Lord’s soon coming affect our lives. We must be always ready to be received into glory.

Knowing that **“the Lord is near”**, we can follow Paul’s next exhortation: **“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God”** (vs. 6). Oh, if we could all follow this exhortation: **“Do not be anxious about anything.”** Don’t forget this commandment! Commit it to memory! Anxiety is destructive to the work of God. Christ taught us in a parable that anxiety causes the receiving of the Word of God to be unproductive: **“The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful”** (Matt. 13:22). And then, Christ also taught us that we should not be anxious because our Father, who loves us, will surely take care of us:

⁴ **“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.**

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon

in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matt. 6:24-34).

Note the all-inclusiveness of Paul’s exhortation: **“Do not be anxious about *anything*.”** There is no room at all for anxiety.

Now, Paul does not leave it at that. He tells us not to **“anxious about anything”**, but he also gives us the method by which we may follow this exhortation: **“But in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God”** (vs. 6). The answer to anxiety is prayer. And prayer is the answer to every sort of anxiety because we can bring **“everything”** to God in prayer. God is good! He does not demand that we only bring the *big* things to Him, not bothering Him with the small things. No, we are told to bring **“everything”** to Him, not to hold anything back: nothing is too small, nothing too big. Note also the three parts of prayer that Paul enumerates: **“prayer”** (meaning worshipful praise), **“petitions”**, and **“thanksgiving”**. These three should be included in all our prayers.

The consequence of bringing **“everything”** to God in prayer is given next: **“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”** (vs. 7). Instead of anxiety, we

will have **“the peace of God”**. Everyone desires peace of mind, but so many look for peace in the wrong places. They look for peace in their possessions, their home, their retirement fund, their human friendships, their jobs, their family relationships, and while these things may be well and good, they are made of sand. Each of these things can crumble, and if they crumble, where then is your peace? **“The peace of God”**, however, is a rock, never to crumble. Many who have the perfect **“peace of God”** have none of these temporal things. They have a peace independent of worldly things. This is why Paul describes **“the peace of God”** as that which **“transcends all understanding”**. The world would look at the peace that Paul had in captivity in Rome, or the peace that Paul had in the jail at Philippi, and not understand. How could Paul be at peace in those situations? Christ said: **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives”** (John 14:27). The world does not understand the **“peace of God”**, because it is true peace. One cannot have true peace if he does not have peace with God.

Such peace is effective because it **“guards your hearts and guards your minds”** (vs. 7). Note that verb: **“guards”**. The peace of God is a soldier, guarding your heart and mind from anxiety. The peace of God is a sentry, protecting us from the ups and downs of the world. May the Lord be praised!

What to Think and What to Do

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

— Philippians 4:8-9

PAUL BEGINS HERE, “**Finally, brothers**”; and so here, we have the final exhortations to the Philippians of this letter. Appropriately, these final exhortations concern all aspects of life, the internal and the external, what we think and what we do. First, concerning what we think, Paul exhorts: “**Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things**” (vs 8). The mind is never idle. It is always occupied with something. Given this, it requires effort to constantly feed the mind with wholesome food. And though the amount of unwholesome food for the mind is rife, there is much wholesome food for thought to chew on as well. Paul lists the wholesome food for thought: “**Whatever is...**” that is, anything and everything that is “**true... noble... right... pure... lovely... admirable... excellent... praiseworthy...**” Let’s look at each of these:

- **“Whatever is true”** - Truth should be sought and thought upon first. Truth is so important. There is so much that is false in the world. May God be praised that we know and understand the truth of the gospel. May He be praised that we can seek truth and find it in the gospel. The scholar can pick up the Bible, tear it apart (analytically speaking), and come to the realization that it is the truth of God. All that is in the Bible is worthy of meditation. It is the truth of God.
- **“Whatever is noble”** - By **“noble”**, Paul is speaking of those persons and things that are worthy of veneration for reasons of character and honor. Oh, that we Christians would lead the way in venerating those who are **“noble”** in this way, rather than the ignoble, who are most often venerated these days by the world: the movie stars with twisted values, the rock stars with twisted minds, the English “nobility” with twisted lives, etc. Consider **“noble”** those who are truly honorable, and who have moral character. May they occupy your thoughts, and may they be your heroes.
- **“Whatever is right”** - David would **“meditate on [God’s law] all day long”** (Ps. 119:97); so should we. God’s law is a statement of all that is right, and worthy of constant meditation. The motive, of course, for meditation on **“whatever. . . is right”** is that it would overflow from our thoughts into our lives. “Our character takes on the complexion and hue of our inward thinking” [Meyer, 231].

- **“Whatever is pure”** - Purity is the previously mentioned **“right”**ness acted out in life. Thus, meditation upon what is **“pure”** is a continuation of meditation upon what is **“right”**. It is the meditation on how best to apply in one’s own life what is **“right”**.
- **“Whatever is lovely”** - There is much that is beautiful in this creation. Need I enumerate all the magnificent natural wonders? Need I describe the daily beauties of sunrises and sunsets, cloud formations, a night sky full of stars? Not to mention the beauty of the design of the natural laws of science and the design of the human body and its functions. There is much here to meditate upon.
- **“Whatever is admirable”** - Paul here is speaking of things and people who are (rightly) spoken well of. We personally come into contact of much that is worthy of meditation, but we also hear second-hand of much that is **“admirable”**. We must focus on that which is **“admirable”** when reading what others have experienced and written, and when listening to what others are saying. Stick to the **“admirable”**. Avoid gossip of every kind. We should apply this also to what we read in the newspaper, what we watch on TV, what we browse on the internet, what movies we see, etc. Stick to the **“admirable”**. Avoid the trash.
- **“If anything is excellent or praiseworthy”** - Paul, knowing that in his enumeration of things to think upon he was not close to being exhaustive, includes here a catch-all, so as not to exclude anything that is **“excellent or praiseworthy”**.

So, there is much that is approved by God with which to fill our minds. When you find your mind wandering into the trash of this world, turn to this verse, take it to heart, and fill your mind with the **“excellent”** and **“praiseworthy”**.

Having spoken of what to think, Paul turns to what to do: **“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice”** (vs. 9). Thinking right thoughts is one thing, doing right things is quite another. To meditate upon that which is **“excellent”** is important; to **“put it into practice”** is a necessary follow-up. To paraphrase Thomas Brooks: “If it be not strong upon thy heart to practise what thou [meditate on], to what end dost thou [meditate]? To increase thy own condemnation” [Brooks, *Precious Remedies*].

Paul put these things into practice. By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he holds himself up as an example to follow: **“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me —put it into practice.”** The most important trait of any teacher or preacher of the Word of God is to exemplify his own teaching. “The first thing in a preacher is that he should speak, not with his mouth only, but by his life, and procure authority for his doctrine by rectitude of life” [Calvin, 291]. Paul practiced what he preached, and so, held himself up as an example. Oh, that we too would be able to truly hold ourselves up as an example to be followed! Note also the different ways that the Philippians received their teaching from Paul: They **“have learned... received... heard... seen...”** Teaching need not be confined to preaching in a pulpit (**“heard”**). It can and should be **“learned”** through the study of the Bible; **“received”** by meditating upon and taking as one’s own what is **“learned”** and **“heard”**; **“seen”** by observing the example of others.

The result of all this is: **“And the God of peace will be with you”** (vs. 9). In verse 7, Paul told us that, through **“prayer**

and petition, with thanksgiving” the “peace of God will guard our hearts and minds.” Here, we learn, through meditation upon wholesome things, and putting sound teaching into practice, **“the God of peace will be with us.”** So we may have the shield to both our hearts and minds in the **“peace of God”**, and the joy of the presence in our lives of the **“God of peace”**. May the Lord be praised!

Thanks to the Philippians

¹⁰ I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.

¹⁴ Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. ¹⁵ Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

— Philippians 4:10-19

PAUL NOW TURNS to personal issues with the Philippians as he thanks them for their financial support; and yet, even when speaking of personal issues, Paul through inspiration of

the Holy Spirit injects great spiritual truths. Paul had greater things to say than just “Thanks”; he was writing for the ages.

He begins: **“I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me”** (vs. 10). By saying **“at last”**, Paul was not denigrating them for taking so long to give, but acknowledging to them that he knew how difficult it was for them to send a gift. Thus, he continues: **“Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it”** (vs. 10). Back then, giving financially was not as easy as just writing a check and putting it in the mail, or calling a toll-free number and giving out a credit card number. To support Paul, the Philippians had to send a trusted messenger with the gift. In this case, Epaphroditus was the messenger.

Paul throughout this section walks a fine line in giving his thanks. He does not want to seem overly enthusiastic and give the impression that he is asking for more. Yet, he does not want to seem unappreciative, and thus discourage the Philippians. He does not want to sound materialistic, as if his happiness depended upon his financial situation. Yet, he wants the Philippians to know that the gift was pleasing in God’s sight. So, as Paul walks this fine line, he says: **“I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me”** (vs. 10), but then he says: **“I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances”** (vs. 11). Paul did not want the Philippians to get the mistaken impression that his happiness was tied to his financial situation. Clearly, in this epistle, we have seen evidence of this. This epistle is full of joy, even though Paul was writing it in captivity. If anyone had the right to be despondent, Paul did. However, Paul’s joy came not from his physical situation, but from his spiritual standing in Christ. He knew that, despite his being in prison, God’s purpose was being accomplished in his life. This was, for him, most important. He

continues: **“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want”** (vs. 12). Oh, how we can all learn from Paul’s attitude! So many, even Christians, think that happiness comes from material possessions. We think that, with just a little more money, all of our problems would be solved. This is the lie of the world. Look around! Happiness is not tied to prosperity. Indeed, I dare say, happiness is rarer for the prosperous than for those who live a simple life.

Admittedly, Paul’s attitude comes from maturity and experience in the Christian walk. He has seen God’s grace and love through the ups and downs of his life, and so, he has learned **“the secret of being content in any and every situation”** (vs. 12). And what is this secret: **“I can do all things through Him who gives me strength”** (vs. 13). The strength of Christ can get us through all adversity. Through Him, we can accomplish the purpose of God in our lives, **“do all things”**, even in the severest financial straits.

Paul, however, does not want to minimize the value of the gift from Philippi. He continues: **“Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles”** (vs. 14). God does use the prosperity of His people to support the work of His ministers. And faithful, consistent givers such as the Philipians are the most valuable to the work of the Gospel. Paul describes: **“Moreover, as you Philipians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need”** (vs. 15-16). The consistent, faithful giving was alluded to early in this epistle, in Paul’s opening

prayer: **“In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now”** (Phil. 1:4-5). Though Paul tends to downplay it, their faithfulness in giving must have been very valuable to Paul’s work.

And then, continuing to walk the fine line, Paul adds: **“Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account”** (vs. 17). More than the financial help the Philippian’s aid provided, Paul valued **“what may be credited to [their] account.”** The aid they gave Paul, and the trouble they went through to provide it to him, demonstrated their love for God and their desire to further the purpose of God. Paul knew this would be **“credited to [their] account”**. This verse implies that, indeed, God keeps account! Christ Himself implies the same thing when He teaches: **“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 moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal”** (Matt. 6:19-20). What a good investment decision on the part of the Philippians! You can’t get better interest rates! The Philippians in their giving to Paul’s ministry were storing up treasures in heaven. And certainly, the treasures in heaven are worth much more than the lucre of the world. Most decidedly, in this respect, as Christ said, **“It is more blessed to give than to receive”** (Acts 20:35). And Christ promised: **“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap”** (Luke 6:38).

As for Paul, he was well satisfied with the gift of the Philippians: **“I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent”** (vs. 18). How I wish that

more ministries here on earth would be satisfied with the financial support that God provides them. We hear so often of “so-called” Christian ministries continually asking for more and more money, using every sort of device and manipulation to try and get more people to contribute to their coffers. Why can’t we ever hear them say, as Paul did, **“I am amply supplied”**? Or as Moses said, when he had enough to build the tabernacle: **“Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: ‘No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.’ And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work”** (Ex. 36:6-7).

Paul then gives the ultimate compliment concerning their gifts: **“They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God”** (vs. 18). This is the goal of all of our giving: that it be **“pleasing to God”**.

Paul concludes this section with one of the most beloved promises in all the Bible: **“And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus”** (Phil. 4:19). What could be better? Note that Paul says that God will meet **“all”** your needs. What have we to worry about? Certainly, God has the ability to meet **“all”** our needs, **“according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”** And why wouldn’t the Creator of the universe supply the needs of His children? Note though, Paul says that God will meet all our **“needs”**, not “desires”, not “wants”, not “lusts”, but **“needs”**. This is love. We so often desire what is detrimental.

Final Greetings

²⁰ **To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

²¹ **Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings.** ²² **All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.** ²³ **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.**

— Philippians 4:20-23

AND SO, PAUL brings this great epistle to a close. **“To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen”** (vs. 20). Well said. Glory belongs only to God. May this spontaneously flow out of our mouths, from time to time.

He ends the epistle with some personal greetings, most likely written in his own hand (the rest of the letter was most certainly copied down by a scribe, possibly even Epaphroditus in this case). He first says: **“Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus”** (vs. 21). The language he uses implies that he desires that each and every saint be greeted individually. Paul loved each and every one. He continues: **“The brothers who are with me send greetings”** (vs. 21). Though far away, and though many of them had never met the Philippians personally, they are brothers. Isn't it a blessing that we have brothers and sisters all over the world. I know that I am blessed greatly when I hear from my brothers and sisters all over the world who receive these studies: from all over the United States, from as far and wide as Canada, Finland, Malta, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Scotland, Madagascar, Brazil, and others. What a blessing! I, with Paul, send all of my brothers and sisters, the warmest greetings.

“All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household” (vs. 22). Many believe (including myself) that the phrase **“those who belong to Caesar’s household”** refers to those who worked for the emperor, and who were converted (directly or indirectly) through Paul’s witness and preaching. Certainly, Paul had ample opportunity to preach to various Roman guards (see Acts 28:16). He may even have been constantly chained to a Roman guard while he was in prison. Paul, of course, would have seen this as an opportunity: A captive audience to hear the gospel! This verse suggests that his preaching brought forth much fruit. Oh, that we could use our opportunities as Paul did! Most of us would have been moaning and despondent at being chained to a Roman guard. Paul undoubtedly saw it as an opportunity to bring a lost man to Christ.

Paul ends the epistle: **“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”** (vs. 23). The grace of the Lord: a great thought to end with. I will echo the thought: May the grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. May the Spirit of God fill you and bring forth fruit in your lives. May the Word of God dwell in you and transform your outlook on life, that you may look to Him and not to the world for contentment.

As we finish this study, please take some time to reread Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians and reflect on what you have studied, and refresh your mind with all the truth and beauty that this letter contains.

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