

# Paul's Epistle to the Philippians

© 2021 Mark Murdock

"Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, © Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation Used by permission." [www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org)

## Philippians 1:1-2

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul starts out his letter to the church in Philippi with his customary greeting, though he omits his title as an “apostle”, which he often includes in his greetings. In this letter he presents himself and Timothy as “bond-servants of Christ Jesus.” The word translated “bond-servants” is *doulos* – a slave. In Paul's case he was a willing slave of the One who had captured him on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9). He was a man whose sole purpose was to do the bidding of the Lord Jesus Christ. His life was not his own, but belonged to Jesus Christ. Paul was not self-serving, but Christ-serving.

He calls the people to whom he was writing “saints.” They are *hagiois* – holy, separated and consecrated. The Christian community is to be a holy community. We are to be distinct from the world because Christ lives in us and dwells among us. As we abide in Him and He abides in us we cannot help but be distinct and set apart from those who are in the world and are of the world. We belong to a holy kingdom and are a holy people. Peter writes, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

They are saints who are “in Christ Jesus.” It is Christ who makes us holy ones. When you have Christ in you, you have the Holy One living in you! The Holy Spirit takes up residence in you. Jesus said, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you (John 14:16-17). If you are “in Christ” and He is in you, you cannot help but be different from what you were. You are a “new creature” in Christ. The old things have passed away and new things have come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

As in all his epistles, Paul wishes them the grace and peace that come from the Father and the Son. We do not live without God's grace, His favor. He gives grace to the humble, but opposes the proud (James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5), so a wish for grace is also a wish for humility on our part, that we might humbly call upon the Lord and submit to Him and His will. Because we've been justified by faith in Christ we have peace with God (Romans 5:1). We also have the peace of God in Christ (John 14:27). Both grace and peace are gifts from our loving God and Lord.

## Philippians 1:3-11

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, 5 in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 *For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. 7 For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. 8 For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; 11 having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which *comes* through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Paul here reveals his feelings about them as he thinks of them and prays for them in verses 3 through 8, and then talks about the content of his prayers for them in verses 9 through 11. In verses 3 through 8 he says that he is thankful as he remembers them, is joyful as he prays for them, is confident of God's work in them, that he has them in his heart and longs for them with the affection of Christ. These feelings spring from the way that the believers in Philippi had consistently participated with him in the gospel from the first day. In verse 5 the Greek word translated "participation" is *koinōnia*. The NASB often translates this as "fellowship" (Acts 2:42, 1 Cor. 1:9, 2 Cor. 6:14, Gal. 2:9, 1 John 1:3, etc.). Sometimes it carries the idea of a contribution (Romans 15:26). In Hebrews 13:16 it is translated "sharing". The word has to do with sharing things in common, having a partnership in something with others. Paul says that whenever he remembers them and prays for them he thanks God and is filled with joy because they had shared with him in his work of spreading the gospel of Christ. He uses a related word in verse 7 where he says, "you are all *partakers* of grace with me." The word for "partakers" is *sugkoinōnos*, a "partner with" or "joint partner".

In chapter 4 Paul reveals more specifically how the Philippians had participated and shared with him. He says in 4:14-19, "Nevertheless, you have done well to share *with me* in my affliction. 15 You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; 16 for even in Thessalonica you sent *a gift* more than once for my needs. 17 Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. 18 But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God." One of the ways that they had participated with Paul in the gospel was by helping support him financially. They sent gifts to help cover his needs. Helping to support individuals and ministries in their work truly is an aspect of partnering with them in their ministry. We will consider this more when we get to chapter 4.

Paul has their participation in the gospel in view whenever he remembers them and prays for them, and because of it he is thankful. He thanks God for them because it is God who has worked in them. His prayers for them are joyful prayers because of this. His heart is not broken and grieving because of their waywardness, but he prays with joy because of their faithfulness. The fact that they participate with him is evidence that God is working in them. The Lord is the one who brings about the desire to be a support and a partner to those who are spreading the gospel. If God is working in our lives we will have a desire to share in this way with those who are brothers and sisters in Christ.

In his thankful memories and joyful prayers for them, Paul says he is confident that God will perfect the work He began in them. The word for confident means to be convinced or persuaded. By observing them Paul could tell that God was working in them. He could see that God had started a good work in them, and what God starts He finishes. God does not leave behind Him a string of unfinished projects, like I tend to do. What He begins He brings to completion. He started our faith and our salvation, and He will complete it. He will bring us to maturity and sanctification. Hebrews 12:2 exhorts us to fix our eyes on Jesus "the author and perfecter of faith". Jesus both begins our faith and shapes it and molds it and develops it to bring it to completion. Faith is not a perfected and finished thing when we get started believing. It has to be tested and tried and strengthened. We need to learn to keep believing even when things go wrong. We need to learn to keep trusting even when we don't have answers to hard questions. Faith gets stronger and grows with experience. When we wonder why God brings difficult things into our lives we need to reflect on the fact that He is working on us to develop our faith and to make us more like Christ. He will be doing this in us until Christ returns.

Because the Philippians were partakers of grace with him, Paul has them in his heart and it was right or just for him to feel as he did about them. In his imprisonment, in his defense of the gospel and in his confirmation of the gospel, they shared and partnered with him. They stood by him and received the same grace he received.

We get a little glimpse in verse 7 into how Paul viewed his ministry. His ministry had to do with the “defense and confirmation of the gospel”. This is what he was doing. He was defending and confirming the gospel, even in prison. The Greek term for “defense” is *apologia*, a “verbal defense, speech in defense; a reasoned statement or argument”<sup>1</sup>. In verse 16 Paul says that he is “appointed for the defense of the gospel.” The gospel, the message of God's grace in Christ that Paul preached, needed to be defended. It needed to be presented in a well reasoned and rational way. Paul was able to present not only the message, but also the reasons why the message was true and ought to be believed. Apologetics, the defense of the gospel and the word of God, is important. We need to know both what we believe and why we believe it. The gospel has a strong foundation in evidence and in historical fact, and we need to know how to defend it from attacks. Peter writes, “but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15).

There is an example of how Paul defended his ministry and preaching of Christ in Acts 22:1-21. His defense on this occasion before the Jews in Jerusalem consisted of Paul re-telling his story. He talked about how he used to think he had to persecute those who had believed in Jesus and about how he was heading for Damascus to arrest the followers of Christ. He mentioned that the high priest and Council of elders could testify about him themselves regarding how he persecuted the church. He told of how Jesus Himself confronted him in the midst of blinding bright light and revealed Himself to him. He talked about how Ananias met him in Damascus so that his sight might be restored and to brief him on his new direction in life, and to arrange for his baptism. When he returned to Jerusalem the Lord appeared to him and warned him to leave Jerusalem, and the Lord told him that He would send him far away to the Gentiles. At that point Paul's defense was cut short as the Jews would listen no more and demanded his death.

In defending his ministry and message Paul identified with his listeners. He pointed out that he used to be just like them and used to think as they thought. He pointed to objective facts that could be verified about his former life as a persecutor. He pointed to the total transformation of his life that took place as a result of his encounter with Jesus and how his life was completely turned around. Our story about what Christ has done in us and for us is a powerful defense of the truth of the gospel. When we tell of our experience with Jesus Christ and what He has done in us we share a story of grace that we have experienced. It is hard to dispute or deny someone's personal experience.

Paul was not only defending the gospel, but also confirming it as well. The word for “confirmation” is *bebaiōsis*, from the verb *bebaioō*, to confirm or secure. Strong's renders it “to stabilize” and Thayer says, “to make firm...make sure.” Recently I had a couple of old wood dining room chairs that had gotten loose in the joints and were unstable. We were afraid that they might fall apart. I took them apart and then re-glued and clamped the joints. Now they have been stabilized and made firm again. Now they are trustworthy chairs again and can be used. The idea here is not that the gospel is unstable and needs to be stabilized, or untrustworthy and needs to be revised and fixed. I think Paul's idea is that the gospel needs to be shown to be stable. People need to get over their skepticism and trust in the gospel. It needs to be confirmed as the truth in their minds. We need to show that the message of

1 Thayer's Greek Definitions

Jesus Christ is a message from God that is true and must be accepted with confidence.

It is the affection of Christ Jesus that moves Paul to long for the believers in Philippi (verse 8). He experiences the affection of Christ for them. The word for “affection” is *splagkh'-non* – bowels or intestines. The intestines were seen as the location of deep emotions. Thayer's Greek Definitions says, “the bowels were regarded as the seat of the more violent passions, such as anger and love; but by the Hebrews as the seat of the tenderer affections, especially kindness, benevolence, compassion; hence our heart (tender mercies, affections, etc.)” Paul genuinely cared for these people and longed to be with them. He yearned to spend time with them and to be in their company.

In verses 9 to 11 Paul tells them about how he prays for them. There is a progression to his prayers for them, one thing building upon and leading to another thing. At the top of his list is that “your love may abound still more and more.” This is the main request, that God would give them a love that was abundant and overflowing. That they, more than anything, would have such a great amount of love that it would be like an uncontainable flood. When you have an abundance of a thing you have plenty of it, more than you need, and then you have no hesitation about sharing it with others. We don't want to have a paucity of love, but we want to have far more than enough. We want to see overflowing love among those who follow Jesus. It is love that we must pursue and for which we must petition the Lord. Jesus said that the greatest two commandments had to do with loving God first and then loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40). He commanded His disciples to love one another as He had loved them (John 13:34-35) which would be the evidence that they were His disciples. After his great chapter about love in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul writes in verse 1 of chapter 14, “pursue love.” As followers of Jesus, love is the top virtue that we are to pursue.

This abundant love we need also needs boundaries. A.T. Robertson, in his Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament, mentions this idea that this overflowing, perpetual flood of love needs “necessary limitations (river banks) 'in knowledge and in all discernment'”. Our love must be knowledgeable and discerning. It must be perceptive. John makes an interesting observation about Jesus in John 2:23-25, “Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. 24 But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, 25 and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.” We can say with certainty that Jesus loves everyone, but note here that it does not mean that He trusts everyone. His love is tempered and guided by His knowledge. He is knowledgeable and discerning in His love. He knows all people and He knows what is in us. He knows those who can be invited into His inner circle and those who cannot be trusted there. He knows who is sincere and who isn't. He knows who is really committed to Him and who is only pretending. He knows whether we really love Him and want to know Him or just want to use Him as a means to our own ends. Like Jesus, we need love that is guided by knowledge and discernment.

In verse 10 Paul continues to explain why our love needs to abound in knowledge and discernment. It is “so that you may approve the things that are excellent.” Knowledge and discernment are necessary in order to tell what is good from what is bad, what is just so-so from what is really excellent. Hebrews 5:14 says, “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.” A spiritually mature person has had their senses trained by practice to discern between good and evil. Discernment is the ability to test things and tell what is good and what is not.

We recently were watching a cooking competition program on Food Network called “Chopped” which pits four chefs against each other. The chefs have to cook an appetizer, entree and desert in three rounds, and one competitor is “chopped” in each round. The one

chef left after the dessert round is the winner. There are three judges who evaluate the food the chefs prepare, and in this particular program one of the judges was Scott Conant, one of the top Italian food chefs in the country and an expert on pasta. One of the competing chefs made pasta as part of her entree, and when it came time to judge her dish, Scott said that her pasta was cooked well, but was unacceptable because she hadn't salted the water. Because he was knowledgeable and discerning about pasta, he was able to correctly disapprove of the pasta and point to the specific problem with it. This is how we must be with moral and spiritual issues. Our love needs the knowledge and discernment to judge between good and bad, right and wrong, truth and falsehood, and to explain the reasons behind our evaluation.

Abundant love, operating within the boundaries of knowledge and discernment, gives us the ability to test and approve things that are excellent, which in turn also enables us to be sincere and blameless. Being sincere and blameless until the day of Christ is the goal. Sincerity and blamelessness are built on the foundation of love, knowledge and discernment.

We first want to be sincere. This word translates the Greek term *eilikrinēs*, from *heilē* – the sun's ray or the heat of the sun, and *krinō* – to judge or decide or distinguish. AT Robertson says it is an “Old word of uncertain origin from *krinō*, to judge, by *heilē* (sunlight) or to sift by rapid rolling (*eilos*). At any rate it means pure, unsullied.”<sup>2</sup> The “sincere” person is the person who has tested and tried his own motives and behavior and can say that they are unsullied, not mixed with any impurity. He or she has no hidden agenda or ulterior motive.

Our second aim is to be blameless. The word is *aproskopos*, not causing to stumble or not stumbling<sup>3</sup> (depending on whether it is active or passive). Paul may have both ideas in mind here. Obviously if you don't stumble in any way you are without blame. Love in the context of knowledge and discernment is the thing that will help keep us from stumbling or causing others to stumble. Love does no wrong to a neighbor and is therefore the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:10). There seems to be an emphasis today among conservative Christians on the fact that we stumble and that we are flawed and that we can't always be expected to be otherwise. There is a lot of truth in this, as James says, “we all stumble in many ways” (James 3:2). However, we also need an emphasis on this aspect of our walk with the Lord. We are aiming at blamelessness. Our goal is to be those who do not stumble nor cause others to stumble. As we grow in love, in knowledge and discernment and the ability to approve what is excellent, we should also see less stumbling in our lives. There should be less and less in our character and behavior that needs to be rebuked and corrected. We should reflect the character of Christ more as we grow.

A person who is sincere and blameless is one who has been “filled with the fruit of righteousness” (verse 11). The word “fruit” is singular, as it is when Paul writes of the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22. I like Thayer's definition of righteousness, “in a broad sense: state of him who is as he ought to be, righteousness, the condition acceptable to God.”<sup>4</sup> The righteous person is the upright person, the one who is just before God, in whom God finds nothing to condemn. As Paul has taught elsewhere and again touches on here, this righteousness comes through Jesus Christ. He is the righteous One, and it is through faith in Him that righteousness is imputed to us (see Romans 3 and 4). Sincerity, blamelessness and righteousness are the things we must pursue. Jesus promised that if we would “hunger and thirst for righteousness” we would be satisfied (Matthew 5:6). Righteousness is not something that we in our flesh can manufacture or accomplish. Righteousness is a gracious gift of God given through Jesus Christ. Christ is the conduit of all of the Father's blessings to us.

The ultimate aim of all of this is not our own honor, but is the glory and praise of God. If

2 Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament, AT Robertson

3 New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance

4 Thayer's Greek Definitions

we are sincere and blameless and filled with the fruit of righteousness, it is not in order that we might be praised and honored, but that God might be praised and honored and that His glory might be seen among men. It is so that people will see what God can do in a person's life in order to transform them and make them new. If our love abounds, if we are sincere, blameless and filled with the fruit of righteousness it is all because of the grace of God and the work of God in our lives. These are not fleshly achievements, but are evidences of the grace of God in us, of the work that He began and is perfecting (verse 6).

#### Philippians 1:12-20

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, 13 so that my imprisonment in *the cause of Christ* has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, 14 and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. 15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; 16 the latter *do it* out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; 17 the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, 19 for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 20 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but *that* with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

Paul wants to reassure the Philippian believers about something. The progress of the gospel has not been hindered by his imprisonment. This is his second mention of his imprisonment, the first being in verse 7. This was his circumstance. He was imprisoned when he wrote this letter. He mentions the "whole praetorian guard" in verse 13. The literal expression in verse 13 is "the whole praetorium", by which he may be referring to the praetorian guard, the imperial guard, or to the emperor's court which consisted of twenty assessors chosen from the senators.<sup>5</sup> The imprisonment mentioned is probably the situation Paul was in at the end of the book of Acts.

Rather than hindering the progress of the gospel, Paul's imprisonment had actually advanced the gospel. He personally had the opportunity to share the gospel with people he never would have had any contact with otherwise. He had shared with his guards and with the men of the emperor's court. All of these people knew that Paul was on trial because of his commitment to the gospel of Christ. He had probably told his story of faith in Christ many times and explained the issues that caused the Jews to oppose him. Not only this, but his imprisonment encouraged others to speak the word of God. As others saw how Paul was able to endure his sufferings, it helped them to trust the Lord more themselves and gave them courage to speak up and preach the gospel.

It takes trust in the Lord and courage to speak the word of God. The more opposition we face, the more courage and boldness we need. When Peter and John were taken into custody after they had healed a disabled man at the temple (see Acts 3 and 4), the Jewish Sanhedrin threatened them and ordered them to stop speaking about Jesus. In reply, they said, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the

judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). Peter and John then went back among the other disciples and reported what had happened and they had a prayer meeting. At the end of their prayer they said, "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." And then it says, "And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:29-31). They realized that what they needed in the face of opposition was confidence and boldness (the same Greek word is here translated "confidence" and "boldness"). From the Holy Spirit they received what they had asked and were given the power to speak the word of God with boldness.

It seems counter-intuitive that the imprisonment of Paul would give courage and boldness others to preach the word of God. You would think that it would have the opposite effect. But boldness begets boldness and courage begets courage. As the believers saw how Paul handled his imprisonment and how he faced it with faith and courage, and how it gave him more opportunities to share the message, they gained courage as well. They also saw that he was not immediately put to death, but was given due process as a Roman citizen.

In verses 15 through 18 Paul addresses the varying motives of those who are preaching Christ. He says there are some who are "preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will." Those who preach from envy and strife, Paul says, were also motivated by selfish ambition and were thinking that they would cause Paul distress in his imprisonment. These people were evidently envious of Paul and of the success and influence he had in his preaching of the gospel. AT Robertson comments, "It is petty and personal jealousy of Paul's power and prowess by the Judaizers in Rome whom Paul has routed in the east, but who now exult at the opportunity of annoying their great antagonist by their interpretation of Christ. Jealousy is always against those of one's own class or profession as preachers with preachers, doctors with doctors."<sup>6</sup> It's true that I don't find myself being envious of those who skilled at doing something I don't do, but that I can be envious of those who have greater success than I at things I can do. Paul had gained greater notoriety and had a greater impact through his preaching than others had, and now that he was in prison they saw it as an opportunity to exalt themselves and cause him distress.

Others were preaching Christ out of good will and love, in the knowledge that Paul had been appointed for the defense of the gospel. Delivering the gospel message was Paul's whole purpose, and some, seeing that he was imprisoned, took up the responsibility to preach and defend the gospel in sincerity and love themselves. The gospel thus continued to spread despite Paul's imprisonment.

Despite the fact that some are preaching Christ out of envy and strife and think that they will cause Paul distress, Paul rejoices that Christ is proclaimed. Yes, some were preaching Christ insincerely, pretending to have a true devotion to Him, but this did not have the intended result of provoking Paul, but rather caused him to rejoice. He was just glad that Christ was being proclaimed.

There's an important point here that we should reflect upon a bit. The message proclaimed by Paul and by the church is a message about Christ. We preach Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:22-24 Paul writes, "For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." We preach Christ and emphasize His crucifixion, which was a



stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. The idea that the Messiah, God's Anointed, should be executed on a Roman cross was a big problem for the Jews because they did not understand their own scriptures which clearly foretold it. The idea that a divine being should be executed on a cross was crazy talk to the Gentiles. But Christ is the power and the wisdom of God. In 2 Corinthians 4:5 Paul says, "For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake." We don't preach ourselves, we don't preach our church, we don't preach our millennial view, we don't proclaim our righteousness or goodness; we preach Jesus Christ as Lord. Paul says in Ephesians 3:8, "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ." In Christ are all the riches that God has for us, and as we preach Him we preach the riches that are in Him. Galatians 1:15-16 says, "But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood..." The purpose for which God chose Paul and set Him apart was in order that he might preach His Son among the Gentiles. Paul was a proclaimer of Christ, and so are we who follow Him. Too often we spend too much time talking about lesser things and lesser issues. Christ is to be the one we represent and the one of whom we speak.

Paul explains in verses 19 and 20 why he rejoices in the proclamation of Christ. He mentions three things that are the basis of his rejoicing. He says he knows he will be delivered, he expects and hopes that he will not be put to shame, and that Christ will be exalted in his body. First, he says that he knows that it will "turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." As others pray for him and as the Holy Spirit provides for him, Paul knows that things will turn out for his deliverance despite the opposition against him. Paul looked not at the opponents and obstacles, but at the things that transcended them. He kept his mind on the prayers that upheld him and the Spirit who provided for him. The word translated "deliverance" here is the Greek term *sōtēria*, which is often translated "salvation". The context seems to indicate that he is not talking about his spiritual salvation, but his deliverance from prison and the opportunity to return to Philippi again and minister to them (verses 24-26). The Philippian believers have the privilege of working alongside the Spirit of Jesus Christ to bring about Paul's deliverance. We pray and God works. We pray and the Holy Spirit provides. The connection between our prayers and the working of God is somewhat mysterious, and we don't fully understand it, but there is no denying that there is a connection. We ask and God acts, and He apparently does things He would not have done had we not asked! James reminds us, "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2b).

The confidence that he would be delivered was in accord with his "earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death" (verse 20). Looking to the future, Paul expected and hoped that he would not be put to shame. The word for "earnest expectation" is defined as "strained expectancy" and "anxious longing" in the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance. Paul was intense in expecting that he would not be put to shame. He anticipated this. He could not conceive that the Lord's purpose in his imprisonment was to have him put to shame. He was not ashamed of the gospel (Romans 1:16) and was not ashamed of his ministry or how he had carried it out. He was not ashamed, therefore, that he was in prison because of his ministry in the gospel, and he exhorted Timothy not to be afraid of carrying out his ministry. In 1 Timothy 1:6-12 he writes:

6 For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you

through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, 10 but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, 11 for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. 12 For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.

Because Paul was suffering for the gospel and for representing Jesus Christ, he was not ashamed of his chains, and he expected that he would not be put to shame in the future. He was not ashamed because he knew Christ, whom he had believed and because he was convinced of what Christ would do for him. Paul had entrusted himself and his future and the investment of his life and effort to the Lord and was convinced that Christ would guard it until the day of judgment. In that day he would not be proven to be a wrongdoer or unfaithful.

Instead of being put to shame, Paul expected that Christ would be exalted in his body. He expected to continue boldly speaking the truth of the gospel. Paul says that this would happen “now as always.” He could make the claim that Christ was always exalted in his body. The greatness of Jesus was always seen in his body, even in his weakness (see 2 Corinthians 12:1-10). The word translated “exalted” is *megalunō*, to make great or to magnify. We use a magnifying glass to make things look bigger and to give us a better view of them. When we magnify Christ in our bodies we give people a better view of Him and what He is like, we show forth His greatness and not our own. Even in prison and even in his suffering Christ was exalted in the body of Paul the apostle. Paul was confident that even if he were to die, Christ would still be exalted in him.

Probably few of us can speak this confidently of our performance in obedience to Christ. Most Christians would hesitate to say that Christ is always exalted in their bodies. Most of us would say that sometimes we exalt Christ, and sometimes we fail miserably and give in to our sinful desires. But this should be our aim. We should aim to know with confidence that we consistently walk by the Spirit and honor the Lord in our lives. Incidents when we disobey and grieve the Lord should become more rare in our lives as we grow spiritually in fellowship with Him.

Paul does allow here for the possibility that he might die. If he does die, he still expects that Christ will be exalted in his body in his death. Death for him is not a defeat or a failure. It is not something that will negate the honor of the Lord in his life. He did not insist that the only way Christ could be exalted in him was through his deliverance. Often the way that Christ is honored in our lives is in the midst of our suffering and perhaps even in our death. The exaltation of the Lord in us does not depend on health, wealth and trouble-free days.

#### Philippians 1:21-26

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. 23 But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better; 24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that your proud confidence in me may

abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

How can Christ be exalted in Paul's death? Isn't death a defeat and a failure? He explains in this passage. For him, to live is Christ and to die is gain. The Greek text literally says "the living is Christ." I think this idea is clarified in Galatians 2:20, where Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." The life he lives in the flesh, his physical life, is no longer lived by himself and for himself. He has died with Christ, and Christ now lives in him and through him. Through the Holy Spirit in him, Christ lives through him, and the life and presence of Christ is manifested in him as he walks by the Spirit (see Romans 8 and Galatians 5). For Paul, death is gain; death is profit. Death is a departure to be with Christ, which is "very much better" (verse 23). Death for the one who follows Christ is not a loss, but is a gain. Paul's focus was not on what he would leave behind in his death, but on what was ahead that he would gain as he stepped into the presence of Christ.

When we think of death, we think too much of the loss involved in death. Our emphasis is on what we are leaving rather than where we are going, on the point of departure rather than the destination. I think this is because we are overly wrapped up in the things of this life and of this world and don't think much of eternity and the kingdom of God. His sufferings caused Paul to think much about the glory of departing to be with Christ. If we would learn to do as Jesus taught in the "Sermon on the Mount" and seek our reward from our Father in heaven and lay up our treasures in heaven rather than on earth (see Matthew 6), we would then have more of Paul's attitude toward death. We would begin to see death as a gain and as a departure to something better.

If death is gain for Paul, and "very much better" than living on in this life, then why should he want to remain on "in the flesh"? His answer is that living on in the flesh will mean "fruitful labor" for him. There is still work for him to do that could bear good fruit. In verse 24 he says that remaining on in the flesh is "more necessary" for the sake of the Philippians and others to whom he ministered. It is for the sake of others that he feels he will continue on in the flesh. His fruitful labor will contribute to their "progress and joy in the faith." Paul still feels he has much more to contribute to the lives of others and their growth in the faith. He feels that they need him and the contribution that he can make. This is a perspective we need to cultivate in our lives as well. We are here for others, to serve them and contribute to their faith and their growth and to help meet their needs. We are here to point people toward Christ and to help them know Him. We are here to contribute to the cause of the gospel and to help make disciples of all the nations. We must stop living for self and begin to see that we have a contribution that is needed by those around us and by the world. We must begin to focus on the fruitful labor that the Lord has for us to do.

We need to think some more about verses 22 and 23 before we move on. Paul expresses in verse 22 that he is facing a choice, a choice between living on in the flesh and death. He says "I do not know which to choose." If it were up to him to make the choice, he does not know which way to choose. He explains further in verse 23, "But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better..." He is experiencing pressure from two directions. On the one side is living on in the flesh and engaging in more fruitful labor which will benefit others. On the other side is departing to be with Christ. Which does he prefer? He says he has the desire to depart and be with Christ. The Greek term for "desire" is *epithumia*, which means a strong desire or longing. It is often translated "lust" in the New Testament. What Paul himself wants and longs for is to depart and to be with Christ. He says it is "very much better" to depart and be with

Christ. It's not just better or even much better, but it is very much better. This again overturns our view of death as a loss and as an undesirable thing, a thing to be avoided at all costs. Paul says he has a strong desire and preference to depart and be with Christ because he knows it is far better for him than continuing on in the flesh. As we grow in our faith and knowledge of Christ we should see our yearning to be with Him grow as well. We should see this kind of perspective in our thoughts about death.

Paul's teaching about death here has something to say about the "intermediate state", that is, the time between our physical death and the resurrection of our bodies. What happens to our souls during that time? Are we in some realm between heaven and hell? Are we in a sleeping state until our souls are re-united with our bodies? Paul says that if he departs his fleshly life he will be with Christ. In his discussion of death in 2 Corinthians 5, he says that to be absent from the body is to "be at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "today you will be with Me in paradise." When a follower of Christ dies, he departs to be with Jesus at that time and on that day. His body remains behind for a period, but his spirit and soul depart to be with the Lord in His presence immediately.

If Paul has the desire to depart and be with Christ because it is very much better than the alternative, then why would there be any pressure from the other side? Well, because he sees it is "more necessary" to remain on in the flesh for the sake of others. If he were only thinking of himself, he would choose to depart. But he must think of others. The necessity is for him to remain to preach and teach so that others might make progress. So in verse 25 he expresses confidence that he will "remain and continue" (*menō* and *paramenō* in the Greek, to remain and to remain beside) for their "progress and joy in the faith."

The first purpose he expresses here is that he might help others make progress in the faith. He will remain to help people move forward in their faith, in their belief in and trust in Christ. Faith should be a thing in which we grow and make progress. We are disciples, students, of Jesus and we should be progressing toward certain goals in our education and training in faith. We should be making progress in faith and trust itself. We should be making progress in righteousness and peace. We should be making progress in manifesting the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). We should be learning more and more to abide in Christ and walk by the Spirit so that we may bear good fruit and glorify the Father more and more (see John 15:1-8). It's not adequate that we say that we had faith and believed in Jesus many years ago, that we were born again, and are content to stay at that level. Babies are born, and it is a joy, but if they are still babies twenty years later there is something terribly wrong. Once we are born again in Christ we must begin to make progress in our faith. We must move toward the goal every day of becoming like Christ.

His second purpose is that he might help them with their "joy in the faith." There should be joy in our faith. Our trust in Christ and our walk with Him should produce joy. It is the second "fruit of the Spirit" mentioned in Galatians 5, right after love. The Christian faith is not a sour, gloomy thing, but a joyful thing. Jesus told us that we should even rejoice and be glad when we are persecuted for His sake. He said, "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12). Atheism is a joyless thing because there is no hope in it. Works-based religions are joyless because you can never be sure that you are performing well enough to measure up to the standards. But in the Christian faith there is real hope and real joy because Jesus has done it all for us. We have been given forgiveness and eternal life as a free, unearned, undeserved gift. We have just received it by faith. This gives real joy because we are freed from the imperfection of our fallen nature.

Through his deliverance and because he will be (possibly) enabled to continue living on

in the flesh, he anticipated that he would come to them again (verse 26). Through his coming to them again their “proud confidence” in him might abound in Christ Jesus. The Greek term for “proud confidence” (*kauchēma*) is often translated “boast.” In his commentary on Philippians, Homer Kent Jr. says that this word means “ground for boasting or glorying” and that the emphasis is not on the action itself, but on the basis for it.<sup>7</sup> The basis of their boasting was found “in Christ Jesus.” If they boasted about or gloried in Paul, it was in the context of how he served Christ and how Christ had used him among them. Evidently the Philippians were proud to have been associated with Paul and boasted that they knew him and that he had ministered to them. This pride was in the context of Jesus Christ. It was a godly pride and a godly boasting.

#### Philippians 1:27-30

27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; 28 in no way alarmed by *your* opponents--which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that *too*, from God. 29 For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, 30 experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.

Paul is not absolutely sure that he will be able to come to see them again, so he gives some exhortation here that is to be applied whether he is able to come or remains absent from them. He tells them to “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” The verb here in the Greek is *politeuesthe*, an “old verb from *politēs*, citizen, and that from *polis*, city, to be a citizen, to manage a state’s affairs, to live as a citizen.”<sup>8</sup> The International Standard Version picks up this idea and translates this, “The only thing that matters is that you continue to live as good citizens in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” In Philippians 3:20 Paul points out, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” As citizens of heaven, the Philippian believers are told to behave as such. Philippi was a Roman colony and the people were proud of their Roman citizenship and of their association with Rome. In a similar way followers of Christ are citizens of a heavenly city and should behave in a worthy manner.

Since we are citizens of heaven, we are aliens in this world. We are expats living in a foreign land. Our true home is in heaven. Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:9-12:

9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

<sup>7</sup> Kent, Homer A. Jr., *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Zondervan, page 117

<sup>8</sup> Robertson's Word Pictures

Like Paul, Peter exhorts us to live a different kind of life in this world, since we are God's people, called out of the darkness into the light. We are no longer to live as if we still belonged to the world and the darkness of the world. We are no longer to be controlled by fleshly lusts. Our behavior is to be excellent and filled with good deeds which are observable to unbelievers.

In Philippians 1, Paul tells them what he expects in terms of their behavior and conduct. He wants to hear that they are "standing firm" and "striving together for the faith of the gospel." This depends on them having "one spirit" and "one mind" with each other. He wants them to have unity of spirit and of mind so that they will be heading in the same direction working together with the same purpose. Jesus prayed in John 17 that His followers would be unified as He and the Father are unified so that the world would know that He had been sent by the Father (John 17:20-23). The witness of the church to the world depends on unity with regards to the gospel and the truth about Jesus Christ. This is the thing that Satan wants to destroy so that the impact of God's people in the earth will also be destroyed, and he has had some success doing so.

He wants to hear that they are standing firm. We respect people who "take a stand" for their beliefs and convictions and are firm about them. In one spirit we who trust in Christ and proclaim Him must stand firm in our faith. We must not waver and be wishy-washy about what we believe. Paul emphasized the need to stand firm in his passage about putting on the full armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-17, where he uses the word "stand" three times. God's armor, truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, and the word of God, enables us to "stand firm against the schemes of the devil." Similarly he says in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us." To stand firm means to hold on to the traditions we were taught, the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are not to yield any ground to our enemy. We are not to be shaken or toppled from our confidence in the truth of the gospel.

He wants to hear also that they are striving together with one mind for the faith of the gospel. The word for "striving together" is *sunathleō*, meaning to strive or contend along with someone else, to "contend together" in an event or contest. Team members compete alongside their teammates to work together to win the game. A team needs unity and everyone needs to do their part for the team to be successful. Our efforts in the church for the faith of the gospel need to be unified and we need to work together to achieve our aim. The aim is to spread the gospel. We are to contend together to promote faith in the good news of Jesus Christ. We must stand firm in our belief and then work together in unity to bring others to belief in Jesus Christ.

As they stand firm and contend together in unity for the faith of the gospel, they will face opposition. They will have adversaries who stand up against them and against their message. They will suffer and experience the same conflict that Paul experienced. Paul says he doesn't want them to be alarmed in any way by the opposition. They should not be terrified or startled by it. Peter says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (1 Peter 4:12-14). When we suffer for representing Christ we are blessed. It shows that God's Spirit and glory rests on us, as when Stephen was stoned and radiated the glory of Christ (see Acts 6:15 and Acts 7). It seems to me that there is too much wringing of hands and fretting among many Christians these days over the opposition we are experiencing from the world. Jesus and the apostles made it plain that the world would hate us and oppose us (John 15:18-25). We seem to spend

too much time trying to convince the world that we are likable and that our message isn't really that offensive or controversial. In our attempts to be acceptable to the world, we often end up compromising the truth of the gospel of Christ. Yes, we should attempt to answer honest questions and deal with mistaken perceptions, distortions and misunderstandings about our faith. We don't want to be persecuted by someone because they have a distorted or false view of the Christian faith. But when we really represent Christ we will be opposed, reviled, persecuted and maybe even killed. In the midst of it we must not be alarmed or surprised in any way. Remember Jesus said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

The fact that the gospel is opposed and that those who represent Christ are not alarmed by the opponents is a sign, an evidence of the fact that the opponents are headed to destruction but those who know Christ are saved. The suffering of those who follow Christ and the opposition to them and their message is evidence that they are indeed saved and do indeed belong to Christ and His kingdom. Paul explains in verses 29 and 30. He tells them that these things come from God and in fact their suffering is a gracious gift granted to them by Him. The word *charizomai* ("to you it has been granted") means "it *has been* granted as a favor," or "gift of grace."<sup>9</sup> Paul depicts suffering and persecution as a gracious gift from God. Faith in Christ is a gracious gift and suffering for His sake is as well. Peter says, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (1 Peter 4:14). To suffer for the name of Christ is to be blessed, because it shows that God's Spirit rests on us. It should be a cause of rejoicing if we are hated because we belong to Jesus Christ.

#### Philippians 2:1-11

1 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul continues his plea for the maintenance of unity among the Philippians in verses 1 and 2, and continues his discussion of how to live in a manner worthy of the gospel. In chapter 1 he had expressed the desire to hear that they were "standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (verse 27). Here he gives four conditional phrases in verse 1, conditions which are assumed to be true, and then gives the implication of them in verse 2. The first three conditions are certain facts, and the fourth

encompasses two emotions we should experience toward one another. The first condition is “if there is any encouragement in Christ.” The Greek word is *paraklēsis*, and could be translated “comfort”. The point being that there is encouragement and comfort in Christ. In Him we are comforted and encouraged.

The second condition is “if there is any consolation of love”. Do we find any consolation in the love of God and the love of Christ? Indeed we do! In fact, God's love is the ultimate consolation! We often reassure others who are suffering or struggling by telling them that God loves them. God assures us that He abounds in lovingkindness (Exodus 34:6-7). Over and over in the Old Testament we are told that God's lovingkindness is everlasting (1 Chron. 16:34; 2 Chron. 7:3; Ezra 3:11; Psalm 106:1, 107:1, etc.). Paul tells us in Romans 8 that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:38-39). The best consolation we have in times of distress and anguish is in the love of God and the love of others. Simply knowing that God does care about us and has demonstrated His love and revealed His love in Christ is a great source of comfort.

The third condition is “if there is any fellowship of the Spirit.” We have fellowship with the Holy Spirit because He lives in us, and we have the fellowship of the Holy Spirit with one another in the Body of Christ because He lives among us. John says in 1 John 1:3, “what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” Because of the gospel we have fellowship with the Father and the Son and with one another. Fellowship, a sharing with God and others, is built into our faith. It would be absurd to say there is no “fellowship of the Spirit.” If we are not in fellowship with the Lord and with other believers we are totally out of step with the will of God and the Spirit of God.

The fourth condition is “if any affection and compassion.” I think he's referring to the emotions that they feel as a result of who they are and what they have in Christ. We feel affection and compassion toward others because of what the Lord has done for us and because He lives in us. The fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22) and therefore those who have the Spirit ought to manifest that love toward others. We should feel that affection and compassion for others that comes from the Spirit of God as we walk by the Spirit.

The “then” part of this “if – then” section comes in verse 2. Paul says “if there are these things, if these things are true and real, then make my joy complete by doing four things.” All of these things relate to their unity. His joy will be complete if they are unified, but it takes some effort on their part to be unified.

First, he says “make my joy complete by being of the same mind.” Unity requires that we have the same way of thinking about things, that we have the same understanding about truth and about our purpose and mission. We need to “be on the same page” with each other in the church. Differing thoughts and opinions about what is true and what is important and what should be done will disrupt our unity. We need to agree on the most important things. This is why we can't walk in unity with atheists or Hindus or Muslims, because we don't think the same way about things. Those who try to pursue “unity” with incompatible religions and philosophies usually end up giving up on the truth in order to achieve this kind of “unity.” Real unity depends on same-mindedness.

Second, he says he wants them to maintain the same love. The word for “maintain” means to have or to hold or to possess. He wants them to hold on to the same love, the same *agape*. This is what Jesus commanded us, that we love one another as He loved us (John 13:34-35). This is the primary command for a follower of Jesus, that we love the other followers of Jesus. We must do what we can to hold to this love, maintain this love, cultivate this love and manifest this love. This love is seen in humble and sacrificial acts of service to one another, as modeled by Jesus when he washed the feet of the disciples in John 13.



Agape love is love that sees needs and does what it can to meet those needs. We see it not only in John 13 but also depicted in the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37 where the Samaritan not only saw the injured man's need, but also felt compassion and took care of the man. John exhorts us to this kind of love in 1 John 3:16-18, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."

The third thing is "united in spirit". This is one word in the Greek text, *sumpsuchos*, from *sun*, meaning "with" (Thayer's Greek Definitions says, "a primary preposition denoting union"), and *psuchē*, meaning "breath" or "spirit". Believers are to have a unified spirit. Because we have the same Spirit and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we should have the same spiritual purpose and intent.

The fourth thing is "intent on one purpose." He is essentially saying the same thing in this phrase that he said in the first appeal about being of the same mind. The InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary brings this out:

The key word in the appeal, and indeed a key word in the letter, is the verb *phroneo* (see on 1:7), which is repeated in the first and third instances and has to do with the set of one's mind, how one is overall disposed toward something (cf. Rom 8:5-7)--thus (literally) "set your minds on the same thing"/"setting your minds on the one thing." This is the word that is picked up again in Philippians 2:5 ("have this same mindset, as Christ did") and in 4:2, where he reproduces the identical language of this first phrase in urging Euodia and Syntyche to the same mindset. The second occurrence (third phrase) is accompanied by the adjective *sympsychos* ("together in soul"), thus joining mind and soul together, while picking up the phrase "one soul" from 1:27.

Paul's joy will be made complete if the Philippians are on the same page mentally and spiritually, and if they maintain the same love for one another. These are things that require work to maintain.

The maintenance of unity depends on humility, so Paul exhorts the Philippians to manifest the same kind of humble attitude modeled by Christ Himself. He says in verses 3 and 4 that nothing should come from selfishness, empty conceit or exclusively from personal interest. Instead the focus must be on "one another" and on "the interests of others." The Greek term translated "selfishness" is *eritheia*, "correctly, *faction*. Lit., *according to faction*."<sup>10</sup> Thayer's Greek Definitions says it has to do with "a desire to put one's self forward, a partisan and fractious spirit." We tend to be self-centered, self-seeking, self-promoting people. We do tend to focus most on our own interests and ignore the interests of others. We tend to put forward our own agenda and disregard that of others. This causes a world of conflict in all levels of relationships, in marriages, in work relationships, in politics, in relations between nations.

"Empty conceit" is *kenodoxia*, "vainglory" in the King James Version, which is actually a good translation of the word. Pride and glory in oneself is an empty and vain thing. It produces nothing good, but instead leads to clashes and conflicts. It has to do with thinking that we are better and more important than others. It is that attitude which thinks that we deserve the best seats at the banquet (Luke 14:8-11), that we should be served rather than

serve (Matthew 20:25-28), that loves recognition and respect from others and seeks an exalted title (Matthew 23:6-7). Empty conceit is that thing that causes us to boast of our achievements and superiority. Our behavior is not to be driven by our desire to exalt ourselves above others and gain glory from them.

Instead of selfishness and empty conceit, we are exhorted to “humility of mind.” Again he touches on our mind, on our pattern of thinking. We need a humble mind, we need to be humble in our thinking. What does Paul mean by this? How does a humble mind manifest itself? He tells us. A humble mind regards others as more important. A humble mind looks out for the interests of others. The humble minded person, instead of thinking that he is the important one in any given situation or relationship, thinks of others as being more important. He actually thinks of others as superior, as those who out-rank him and stand above him in importance. This is a way of thinking that causes our sinful nature to chafe and object. Our world encourages us to take pride in ourselves and not to submit to others. In our culture we are taught to view ourselves as superior and exceptional, and that all people are equally exceptional. The humble person, though, intentionally treats others as more important. The humble mind is a mind that looks out for the interests of others. The humble person concerns himself with the needs and desires of others and not just of himself.

In verse 2 Paul exhorted the Philippians to be of the “same mind.” In verse 3 he called them to “humility of mind.” Now here in verses 5-11 he calls upon them to have the same mind as Jesus Christ Himself. The word translated “attitude” in verse 5 is *phroneo* again, “mind.” Our attitude is determined by our thinking, and here Paul calls upon us to think the same way as Christ thought with regard to ourselves. Jesus is our example and pattern when it comes to how we think of ourselves.

It's important to underline what Paul says first about Jesus in this passage. He says “He existed in the form of God.” When we think about Jesus, this is the foundational doctrine, the truth of His deity. Prior to becoming flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:14) the form of Jesus was the form of God. His essential nature and character was that of God. John is very clear on this point in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The Jews understood the claims that He was making. John 5:18 says, “For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.” Jesus explained to Thomas that to see Him was to see the Father, that the Father was in Him, and He was in the Father (John 14:7-11). There are many other passages that clearly teach the deity of Jesus Christ, and when we think of Him and His nature, this is the place to start. Jesus is, truly, “God with us” (“Immanuel” – Matthew 1:23) and God incarnate.

We've just noted that the implication of the teaching of Jesus was that he was equal with God, but Paul here goes on to say that Jesus “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.” Equality with God was not something that Jesus thought He should seize and grasp and hold on to. He was equal with God by nature, and that fact does not change. But in His thinking He did not insist on hanging onto His pre-incarnational glory as God. When Jesus became human, He laid aside the form of God and took on the form of a bond-servant, the form of a human. Though I am equal to my neighbors and friends and am in no sense a lesser or inferior being to them, I may adopt the same mindset that Jesus adopted. I may choose to humble myself and become their servant. I may choose to lay aside the insistence upon being “equal” and choose to serve them like a slave. Our insistence upon equality, particularly our individual equality, has led to a society where no one is willing to take the form of a humble servant any longer. Everyone insists that they must be served rather than serve, that their interests take precedence over the interests of others. And of course there

are many who do not regard themselves as equal to others, but superior to others. They believe they are more important and more significant and more valuable than other people. These are the “proud” whom God opposes (James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5).

Jesus did two things regarding Himself, He “emptied Himself” and He “humbled Himself”. There seems to be a significant amount of debate among commentators as to what he means when he says that Christ “emptied” Himself. Of what did He “empty” Himself? Clearly He did not cease to be God and become a mere man only. As we’ve seen He continued to claim deity even as a man. What does it mean? Well, I think the phrases that follow in verses 7 and 8 tell us what it means. Jesus took the form of a bond-servant, was made in the likeness of men and was found in appearance as a man. He appeared not in the form of God, in great power and glory, with an awesome display of divine majesty, but He appeared in the form of a man. The only time His glory was displayed to the eye was on the mount of transfiguration, where Peter, James and John were privileged to see a bit of His glory for a short period (see Matthew 17:1-8).

Instead of the form of God Jesus took upon Himself the form of a bond-servant. The word is *doulos* – a slave. It is rendered “bond-servant” here because one could become a slave either willingly or unwillingly. Probably most slaves of the time were forced into slavery by others, but some, due to debt or poverty could become bond-servants, willing slaves or servants to others. Vincent comments, “It is that Christ assumed that mode of being which answered to, and was the complete and characteristic expression of, the slave’s being. The mode itself is not defined. This is appropriately inserted here as bringing out the contrast with *counted not equality with God*, etc. What Christ grasped at in His incarnation was not divine sovereignty, but *service*.”<sup>11</sup> Jesus said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). A slave is one who must give up his own will to do the will of someone else in their service. This is what Jesus humbled Himself to become. Again, Jesus said, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent me” (John 6:38). Jesus was the bond-servant of the Father, here to do His will and accomplish His work (John 4:34). In doing this He is also the servant of mankind, laying down His life for our salvation.

Another aspect of Jesus “emptying Himself” was “being made in the likeness of men.” I don’t think Paul means that Jesus only appeared to be a man, but was really something else, or that Jesus was a picture of a man but not the reality. The scriptures emphasize the true humanity of Jesus. He was born as men are born. He ate, drank and slept as all men do. Even after His resurrection He emphasized the fact that he had a flesh and blood body as all men do (Luke 24:39). John tells us that Jesus “became flesh, and dwelt among us” in John 1:14. Jesus genuinely became a man. He appeared to be a man and looked like a man because He was a man! When people encountered Jesus they found Him “in appearance as a man.” He did not appear to them to be anything other than a real man. That is why they were astonished when he controlled the weather or walked on the water or raised the dead or healed the sick or changed water into wine. These are not things that men can do, but they are things that we would expect to see if this man were God in human form. This is also the reason they found it outrageous when He made claims to deity, because in their sight He appeared to be a normal human man.

Having “emptied Himself” by becoming a man, Jesus also “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (verse 8). The means by which Jesus humbled Himself was obedience. Obedience requires humility. I suppose the proud can be forced to obey through threats or intimidation, but for the most part one must be humble to

obey willingly. Obedience requires us to willingly submit our will and desires to the will and desires of another. Obedience means we put ourselves under the authority of someone else, to do what they tell us to do. They may tell us to do something we hate to do. They may tell us to do something very uncomfortable, strenuous or difficult. They may even tell us to do something dangerous or risky. The Father had commanded Jesus to lay down His life. In John 10:17-18 Jesus says, "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father." Jesus was under orders from the Father to lay down His life and then take it up again, and the Father gave Him the authority to do so. Just before He was arrested, Jesus wrestled with the reality of what was going to happen to Him and prayed intensely in the garden of Gethsemane. He said, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). He humbled Himself and became obedient at this point and did not disobey the command of the Father. He submitted Himself to arrest, trial, condemnation, abuse and death on a cross. When He existed in the form of God there was no requirement to be obedient in this sense. He "became obedient" as a man and thereby humbled Himself as He had never had to do before.

The death of Jesus was a ghastly death, it was death on a cross. It was a crucifixion. It was an execution of a type only reserved for the worst criminals. In general Roman citizens could not be executed by crucifixion, but it was reserved for slaves and foreigners. In Galatians 3:13 Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 21:23 to point out that to be hung on a tree is to be cursed. He says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us--for it is written, 'CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE'". This is the point of obedience to which Christ humbled Himself. From existing in the form of God He humbled Himself to the point that He died like a criminal on a Roman cross. As He hung on the cross, He took the form of a robber or a murderer, a man cursed by men and by God. In doing this He took our curse upon Himself. No one has ever humbled himself to the degree that Christ did. He went from existing in the form of God to taking on humanity and becoming a slave and then dying on the cross as if He were the worst sort of criminal.

Because of His self-humiliation, God "highly exalted Him." Jesus gave us the principle that the one who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted (Matthew 23:12). Jesus Himself is the perfect example of this principle. Because He humbled Himself, He was also highly exalted. The word for "highly exalted" is *huperupsoō* – we might translate it "hyper exalted." God lifted Jesus up to the highest of all positions, to the highest rank and highest position of power. There is no power or authority or place of honor higher than that of Jesus Christ.

In addition to highly exalting Jesus, God gave Him the name that is above every name, that is, the name Jesus (verse 10). The name Jesus (YHWH is salvation) is the highest and greatest name. There is no one who compares with Jesus in all human history. He is unique in His humility and He is unique in His exaltation.

God gave Him the name above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and this will glorify the Father. There will be universal submission to Jesus Christ by everyone, wherever they are and whoever they are. No one will be exempt from bowing down before Jesus in acknowledgment of His majesty. Every tongue of everyone who has ever lived will say what is true about Jesus, that He is the Lord, that He is the one sovereign, that He reigns supreme over all. Whether they are willing or unwilling, they will have to admit this truth, and it will bring glory to the Father. Psalm 2 is a prophetic challenge to the nations to acknowledge this truth:

Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a vain thing?  
 The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against  
 the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,  
 "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!"  
 He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them.  
 Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury, saying, "But as for  
 Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain."  
 "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I  
 have begotten You.  
 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of  
 the earth as Your possession. 'You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter  
 them like earthenware."  
 Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth.  
 Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son,  
 that He not become angry, and you perish *in* the way, For His wrath may soon be  
 kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

There is no indication here that everyone will do this willingly. Probably many will bow  
 before Jesus and confess that He is Lord who do not want to do so. All will be made to  
 recognize the truth about Jesus whether they want to or not. Everyone is going to be made  
 subject to Jesus Christ. In his chapter about the resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15, Paul mentions  
 this. He writes "For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last  
 enemy that will be abolished is death. For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION  
 UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, 'All things are put in subjection,' it is evident that He is  
 excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then  
 the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God  
 may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:25-28). The only one excepted from being subject to Jesus  
 is God the Father Himself. All other creatures, human and otherwise, will be made subject to  
 Him and will have to acknowledge His reign.

Bowing before Jesus and confessing that He is Lord brings glory to the Father. God the  
 Father is the one who has brought it all about. He is the one who installed His Son as King  
 and Lord. Jesus is one with the Father, and to glorify Christ is to glorify the Father.

#### Philippians 2:12-18

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only,  
 but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and  
 trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His*  
 good pleasure. 14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing; 15 so that you will  
 prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in  
 the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights  
 in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have  
 reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. 17 But even if I am  
 being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I  
 rejoice and share my joy with you all. 18 You too, *I urge you*, rejoice in the same  
 way and share your joy with me.

Jesus became obedient to the point of death on a cross, and now Paul exhorts the  
 Philippians to continue their obedience. When he was with them, he observed that they were

always obedient. They always listened to him and heeded his instruction. They were disciples who learned to observe the things that Jesus had commanded (Matthew 28:20). They needed to continue this in his absence. Often it's easier to be obedient and observant when our mentor and authority figure is present with us, then we start to lapse when they aren't around. Paul wants them to continue on in obedience even when he's gone from them. He is absent from them, but God is not. God is still there among them, doing His work in them.

We need to be clear about Paul's command here to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." He is not saying "work **for** your salvation." Paul always insists that we are not saved by works, but by the grace of God through faith (Ephesians 2:1-10). He is therefore not saying that we must work to attain or achieve salvation. It is "your" salvation. You already have it. Salvation has already been given to you as a gracious gift from God. So what does it mean to "work out your salvation"? I think it's not too hard to understand. He's saying, "you've been saved, so live like it!" You've been saved from the darkness and brought into the light, so don't go back to living in the darkness. You've been saved from the lusts of the flesh and of the world, so don't go back to being controlled by those lusts. You've been saved out of death and given life, so don't keep living like you are still dead in sin. A person who is saved from drowning doesn't fling themselves back into the water unless they are mentally unbalanced. A person who is healed from blindness doesn't gouge their eyes out again so that they can continue being blind. Someone healed from a broken bone does not intentionally break it again. It makes no sense for saved people to live as if they haven't been saved.

Verse 13 explains why your salvation must be worked out "with fear and trembling." It is because God is at work in you, "both to will and to work for His good pleasure." The motivation to work out our salvation is not just because it's a good idea or will improve our lives or make us feel better. The motivation is that God is working in us. The will of God is active in us and the power, the energy of God is working in us to achieve His objective in us. That objective is "His good pleasure." God's will is His good pleasure, and His work in us aims at His good pleasure. He wants to see in us what is pleasing to Him. God does what He does to please Himself and to achieve His aims. This is why we often experience things that don't seem to fit with our objectives. God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:9). We will often fail to see or understand what God is doing in us, but we must remember that it is a fact that He is working in us for His purpose.

How do we go about this business of "working out our salvation"? How do we behave as saved people? How should our salvation impact our attitude and behavior? I think verses 14 through 16 are tied into this. Working out our salvation with fear and trembling means doing all things without grumbling or disputing. By "all things" I think Paul means all the things that have to do with obedience to the will and purpose of God. Alexander MacLaren writes,

Have we never known what it was to have some course manifestly prescribed to us as right, from which we have shrunk with reluctance of will? If some course has all at once struck us as wrong which we had been long accustomed to do without hesitation, has there been no 'murmuring' before we yielded? A voice has said to us, 'Give up such and such a habit,' or 'such and such a pursuit is becoming too engrossing': do we not all know what it is not only to feel obedience an effort, but even to cherish reluctance, and to let it stifle the voice?<sup>12</sup>

Over and over as God and Moses lead Israel out of Egypt to the land promised to them, the Israelites grumbled and disputed with God and with Moses. They were at many points

unwilling to believe and obey and challenged not only the leadership of Moses but the leadership and good intentions of God Himself! Here are some of the passages where we read of the “grumbling” of the Israelites: Exodus 15:24; 16:2-9; 17:2-3; Numbers 14:2 and 27-30; Numbers 16:41. Because we know and believe that the Lord is good and that His intentions for us are always good, when He commands us to do something, we must not grumble about it or question it. He knows what is best for us and for His kingdom. He will not tell us to do something evil. He will not make a wrong decision. When Jesus told the apostles that it was necessary for Him to suffer and die, Peter tried to rebuke Him. Peter tried to dispute the issue with the Lord and Jesus said to him, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's” (Matthew 16:23). It's not wise for us to try to correct the Lord or to complain that He is wrong or unfair or doesn't know what He is doing. We never know better than the Lord!

When we refuse to grumble and dispute about our lives, our circumstances and the will of God for us, we demonstrate a number of things about ourselves to the world. We prove that we are blameless and innocent. We prove that we are children of God. We prove that we are above reproach (verse 15). Those who don't grumble and dispute stand out among the many who do. In a world full of people who often complain, argue and criticize, those who go about their business in an uncomplaining manner provide a strong contrast.

Let's be clear that we don't become blameless and innocent and so forth by not grumbling or disputing. Anyone can force themselves to hold their tongue when they would like to grumble and argue. The reason we don't grumble or dispute is because we already are blameless and innocent children of God who are above reproach. The virtues of blamelessness and innocence do away with grumbling and disputing. Grumbling and disputing is a characteristic of a crooked and perverse generation. Why are we blameless and innocent and above reproach? Because we have been saved! Because we, by the grace of God, have in Christ been made children of God. He has “made us alive with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5) and “caused us to be born again” (1 Peter 1:3). John says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13). We are children of God because of what He has done in our lives, leading us to faith in Jesus Christ and causing us to be born again into His family. We are to live as those who are indeed children of God, who have indeed been saved out of the world.

The “generation” in which we live is one that is “crooked and perverse.” The Greek for “crooked” is *skolios* – meaning crooked or curved. We get our word “scoliosis” from this word. This generation is not straight, as it ought to be, but it is bent and crooked and twisted. “Perverse” is *diastrepho*, which has to do with taking a wrong turn, to depart from the right path. Paul is pointing to a fundamental truth that we must understand. Things in the world are not as God originally intended them to be. Sin has perverted our world. When we see violence, injustice, victimization, immorality, addiction and disaster in this world and ask the question, “Why is this happening?” we are asking the question we should ask. The world isn't right and isn't as God originally intended it to be. Why has He allowed this to happen and why hasn't He done something about it? The answer Jesus gave us is that the responsibility for the evils of the world lies with God's enemy Satan, and is embodied in Satan's children who live on the earth (see the Parable of the Wheat and Tares in Matthew 13). When we ask why God hasn't done something about it, we overlook the fact that He has done something about it and will still in the future do more. God has sent His Son into the world so that we might be delivered from the domain of darkness and be transferred into His kingdom (Colossians 1:13-14). There is a day coming in the future when evil will be removed from the earth. The “tares”

will be removed from among the “wheat” and will be burned. The “bad fish” will be removed from among the “good fish” and thrown away (Matthew 13:47-50). The angels will take the wicked from among the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire. When we assume that things are now the way that God created them and intended them to be, we make a huge mistake. Likewise, when we assume that God is not doing anything about the problem we make a huge mistake. The world will be straightened out and put right again, but right now God is being patient and gracious toward us, waiting for more people to turn away from their sin and turn back to Him. In 2 Peter 3:7-10 Peter writes,

But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. 8 But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

In this midst of this “crooked and perverse generation” those who have been saved and follow Christ “appear as lights in the world.” There is, or should be, a marked difference between those who are part of the present evil generation and those who have been delivered from it and who are citizens of God's kingdom. The difference should be seen in their beliefs, in their attitudes, in the joy and peace and love manifested in their lives, and in the good works they do that allow people to see that Christ dwells in them. Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16). The light of Christ in us is not to be covered up or hidden. As the light we who know Christ have the responsibility to allow the light to shine in a dark world.

In order to shine as lights in the world it is required that we hold fast to the word of life. The message we have believed is a message about Jesus Christ who is the light of the world, whose life is the light of men (John 1:14). He is the one who “enlightens every man” (John 1:9). The word of life is the gospel, the good news about Jesus and about His death and resurrection, about life and salvation in Him. Paul wants to know that they are holding fast to the message about life so that he will know that he did not “run in vain nor toil in vain” in the day of Christ. When Christ returns, he wants to know that his ministry among them had not been a waste of time. In the day of Christ Paul will be able to exult and glory in the fact that he had been used of the Lord to bring the life of Christ to them. Elsewhere Paul expresses this same anxiety about whether his labor might be “in vain.” In 1 Thessalonians 3:5 he says, “For this reason, when I could endure *it* no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain.” He had sent Timothy to Thessalonica to find out about their faith. He needed reassurance that they were still holding to the gospel of Christ, and hadn't turned away due to the temptations of Satan.

This concern over the condition of the faith of those who had professed Christ is a very valid concern. In the “Parable of the Sower” in Matthew 13 Jesus illustrated that there are those who receive the “seed” of the word of the kingdom, but after a period of time it dies out. There are those who are like rocky soil with no depth, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, they quickly drop it and turn away from their faith. There are



those who are like the thorny soil where the word is choked out by other competing concerns and desires; Jesus mentions the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth. When someone puts their faith in the message of Christ, we need to urge them to hang on to it and remain faithful no matter what happens. Every good spiritual blessing that God has for us comes to us through faith in Jesus Christ. Without faith in Him we are not saved, do not enter the kingdom, do not receive the Holy Spirit, cannot bear good fruit and will not please God (Hebrews 11:6). We need to do what Paul did and check in with one another concerning our faith. We need to see that we are all faithfully holding fast to the word of life!

It may be that Paul's life will be "poured out" like a drink offering poured on a sacrifice. If this happens, Paul knows that his life was given for a great cause. He rejoices because it was for the "sacrifice and service of your faith" that he has given his life. His offering to God was the faith of those who had come to know Christ through his ministry. If his life is taken from him because he has invested in the faith of others, it is reason for him to rejoice and to share his joy. Losing your life for the sake of Christ and the gospel and the faith of others is a joyful thing to do.

Paul determined and chose to rejoice and to share his joy with the Philippians, and he asks them to do the same. Joy and rejoicing is a thing that needs to be shared. It spreads out to others as it is shared. When the shepherd found his lost sheep, he shared his joy with his neighbors and had a celebration (Luke 15:6). When the woman found the coin she had lost, she called together her friends and neighbors for a celebration (Luke 15:9). When the lost son came home, the father had a big celebration (Luke 15:22-24). There is enough misery and sadness in the world. We need to have more genuine sharing of joy and rejoicing together!

#### Philippians 2:19-24

But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. 20 For I have no one *else* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. 21 For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. 22 But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child *servi*ng his father. 23 Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; 24 and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly.

Because he was concerned about their faith and whether they were holding fast to the word of life, Paul hoped to send Timothy to Philippi to find out how they were doing. As we've seen, Paul did not want them to be discouraged or turned from their faith because of his sufferings. He has tried to reassure them that he is confident that he will be released from prison, but that even if he dies, it is gain for him. Despite his circumstances, he is in a "win-win" situation whichever way things go for him. In the midst of his imprisonment and suffering, he was thinking of the condition of the believers in Philippi. He needed to be encouraged concerning them, so he planned to send Timothy.

The concern that Paul expresses was for "your condition" (verse 19) and "your welfare" (verse 20). Both expressions mean basically "the things about you." Timothy shared the genuine concern that Paul had about the condition of the Philippians. Paul had no one else at his disposal at this time who shared his real concern for their welfare. Everyone else around him was seeking "after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus." I suppose this is true of most people, even sincere believers. The flesh has a powerful pull on all of us and shouts at us to pursue selfish interests. The things that Christ is interested in are usually at odds with our self-interest. This is why Jesus said that if we wanted to follow after Him we would have to

deny ourselves (Matthew 16:24-26). Jesus calls us to sacrificial service, but that is very uncomfortable. Jesus calls us to selfless, humble, serving love, but that also is very difficult for the self-absorbed and proud who think that they should be served. We need to ask the Lord for the same attitude as Timothy, for a genuine concern for the welfare of others.

In contrast to those who seek their own interests, Timothy had proven his worth to Paul as he served alongside him. He had been tested and proved himself valuable. This is something that is done over time. We do not instantly prove ourselves as soon as we are employed in a task. It takes time and effort and consistency to prove your value. The task that Paul and Timothy had given themselves to was “the furtherance of the gospel.” They had worked side-by-side to proclaim the good news of Christ, and Timothy had done it like a son alongside his father. As you read about Paul in Acts and in his epistles, you find that his life revolved around the gospel and the preaching of the gospel. The gospel of the cross of Christ is the means of salvation for those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:21). It was this message that had saved Paul and it was this message that Paul was sent to communicate to the world.

Paul hoped to send Timothy immediately, and trusted that he would also be able to come to them shortly. He is not certain what is going to happen, so he cannot speak definitely. He has to use the language of contingency. He is hoping to send Timothy, but he's not sure he can. He trusts he will be able to come, but again this is not certain. He has to see how things go with him. He has to wait for the outcome of his trial. Our lives are uncertain. We must plan with the will of God in view, as James says, “Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.'” (James 4:13-15.)

#### Philippians 2:25-30

But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; 26 because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. 27 For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned *about you*. 29 Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; 30 because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

No doubt Epaphroditus was the man who carried this epistle from Paul back to Philippi. He had come to Paul carrying a gift from the Philippians (4:18) to help meet his needs. Paul calls him, “my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need.” He was a brother who shared in the work and shared in the fight with Paul. The word for “messenger” is *apostolos* – apostle, one sent forth to represent someone else, an envoy or ambassador. Epaphroditus represented the church of Philippi to Paul. He acted in their stead. He ministered in their place to Paul's need. Real help for people comes from other people. Human needs are most often met through other humans. Paul was not too proud to admit that he had needs, and not too proud to accept help from others. This can be a big problem, especially in a culture that values self-sufficiency.

Paul explains why he felt it necessary to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi in verse 26,

“because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.” He missed his brothers and sisters at home in Philippi. He knew that they had heard he was sick, and it distressed him. He wanted to be with them and for them to know that he had recovered from his illness.

Indeed, Epaphroditus had been sick “to the point of death.” He came close to death in his illness, but thankfully God had mercy on him. In his recovery Paul saw and experienced the mercy of God. The Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary notes, “Epaphroditus’ sickness proves that the apostles had not ordinarily the *permanent* gift of miracles, any more than of inspiration: both were vouchsafed to them only for each particular occasion, as the Spirit thought fit.” No doubt Paul prayed for Epaphroditus, probably numerous people prayed for him, but there is no indication here that he was instantly and miraculously healed. Paul does not say that he “claimed healing” for Epaphroditus, or that he used the name of Jesus to raise him up. He just expresses thankfulness that God had mercy on him and he recovered. It is due to God's mercy that we are spared and healed from the sufferings we inherit because of our sinful nature. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Death is what we have earned from God because of our sinfulness. We deserve illness, suffering and death, but because God is merciful, we are often healed and spared.

Not only had God been merciful to Epaphroditus, but also to Paul. Paul's perspective was that God had healed Epaphroditus in order to spare Paul sorrow piled upon sorrow. We should banish the idea that a godly Christian should never experience sorrow. Jesus Himself was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). Paul said he had “great sorrow and unceasing grief” in his heart because of the unbelief of his fellow Jews (Romans 9:2). We should not look upon sorrow as a foreign experience for a follower of Jesus, or as something that is unusual or even sinful in itself. Sorrow is part of our lot as humans in a fallen and rebellious world. Paul was very thankful to the Lord for sparing him the sorrow of the loss of Epaphroditus on top of the sorrow of his imprisonment.

Paul sent Epaphroditus eagerly so that the Philippians might rejoice at seeing him alive and well again, and so that he might be relieved of his concern. The word he uses here for “less concerned” means “free from pain or grief.”<sup>13</sup> It's related to the word he used for “sorrow” in verse 27. Sending Epaphroditus back to Philippi relieved Paul of some of his sorrow.

Paul exhorts the Philippians to receive Epaphroditus with all joy in the Lord and to hold him in high regard because of what he had done in risking his life to serve Paul on their behalf. People like Epaphroditus who are exemplary in their service to the Lord and to others should be honored and respected. In what he had done, Epaphroditus was participating in the work of Christ. In helping support the work of the Lord through Paul, Epaphroditus was working alongside Christ as well.

Finally regarding Epaphroditus, Paul says that he risked his life “to complete what was deficient in your service to me.” I don't think Paul means this as a criticism of the Philippians. I think he means that they had wanted to do more for Paul, but had lacked the opportunity to fulfill the service that they wanted to render to him. Perhaps they had told him that they would help support him to a certain level, but hadn't yet been able to actually send him the gift they had promised. This idea is supported by what he says in chapter 4, verses 10 to 19, noting that they had “revived” their concern for him, then clarifying that they were concerned, but lacked opportunity to help him. In 4:16 he mentions that they had sent gifts to him more than once. They didn't send a “one time gift” but were regular supporters of Paul. They were sustaining partners. They did not sit on the sidelines, but were in the game with Paul.

## Philippians 3:1-16

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. 2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; 3 for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, 4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. 7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; 16 however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.

It appears that Paul is wrapping up his letter, but still has a number of things to say to the Philippians. As he writes out some exhortations for them, more ideas grow out of what he is saying.

First, he says, “rejoice in the Lord.” Rejoicing is something that can be commanded. We can rejoice regardless of how we feel. In the Lord there is always a reason for rejoicing, for being full of gladness and thankfulness. He just told them in 2:28 that he sent Epaphroditus back to them so that they might rejoice when they see him again, and now again he orders them to rejoice.

Repetition is often necessary. It is a vital part of learning. The things we really know have been learned through repetition, so Paul says it doesn't bother him to write the same things to them that he has said before. He says it is a “safeguard” for them. The word is *asphalēs* which means to “not fall” or “not trip up”.<sup>14</sup> His reminders will help keep them from stumbling and falling. Repetition can help keep people from making mistakes.

Three times in verse 2 Paul says, “beware” (to look out for or watch out for) and gives us three epithets describing those known as Judaizers. These were people like those whom Paul

encountered in Antioch in Acts 15. They came from Judea and were saying “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). The church and apostles convened a council in Jerusalem to discuss the matter, and some of the Pharisees were saying regarding Gentile believers, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses” (Acts 15:5). They had believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but they wanted to make circumcision and obedience to the Law a requirement of salvation. Peter pointed out that when he preached to the Gentiles, God saved them and gave them the Holy Spirit apart from circumcision (Acts 15:7-11). They came to the conclusion that God had saved the Gentile believers through His grace apart from circumcision and obedience to the Law and it was not reasonable for them to add these burdens to them.

The first word Paul uses for the Judaizers is “dogs”. This was a term that the Jews used for Gentiles. Paul turns it around and applies it to these men who were trying to enslave the Gentiles in the futile attempt to gain God's favor by trying to obey the Law. Though they called others “dogs,” they were the true dogs, those who were to be despised as such.

The second label he applies to them is “evil workers.” In 2 Corinthians 11:13 he calls them “deceitful workers.” Their labor is evil and deceitful. They are not leading people to the truth but away from it. Few things are worse than leading people away from the Lord and away from faith in Christ. Jesus said, “It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble” (Luke 17:1-2). It's bad to stumble, but it's even worse if you are a cause of stumbling for others.

The third thing he calls them is “the false circumcision”. There is actually a play on words here. The word translated “false circumcision” in verse 2 is *katatomē* – to cut up, to mutilate. He uses the true word for circumcision in verse 3, *peritomē* – to cut around. Paul is saying that the Judaizers are actually mutilators, and that those who follow Christ are the real circumcision. Those who are really set apart for God and are members of His kingdom and family are characterized by things other than physical circumcision.

The “true circumcision” worship in the Spirit of God, glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh (verse 3). When he says that we “worship in the Spirit of God” he is saying we worship by means of God's Spirit. Our worship is spiritual, not fleshly. Paul always contrasts the Spirit with the flesh (Romans 8, Galatians 5) and tells us that they are in opposition to one another. In contrast to those whose worship is only an outward physical “fleshly” thing, we worship in the Spirit of God. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24). Christian worship is different from fleshly worship. Paul says in Romans 12:1, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your rational service of worship.” Jewish worship had to do with all sorts of ritual and sacrifice, but the Christian's worship is to offer oneself as a sacrifice, a living one. Christian worship is more an internal thing than an external thing. Anyone can go through the external motions of worship, but real spiritual worship may not be happening in their heart at all. It is worship prompted by, led by and responding to the Holy Spirit.

The true circumcision are those who “glory in Christ Jesus.” We don't glory in the Law or in circumcision or in being a child of Abraham or in any fleshly thing. Jesus Christ is the One of whom we boast. We sing His praises and talk about who He is and what He has done. It's kind of like glorying in your favorite sports team when they win the Super Bowl or the World Series, but doing it constantly. We should always be excited about Jesus, hyping Him and

bragging on Him.

We also “put no confidence in the flesh.” When you put your confidence in something it means you are convinced that the thing is trustworthy. If you put your confidence in an airline to fly you from one place to another, you are trusting that the aircraft and those who fly it are trustworthy. If you got to the airport and noticed that the plane was dirty, the tires looked worn out, there was something dripping from the engines, and you weren't sure the pilot was sober, you would probably not put your confidence in the ability of the airline to get you safely to your destination. We must not put our confidence in the flesh, in our sinful nature. Paul wrote in Romans 7:18, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.” The flesh is not able to do the good that the spirit wills to do. You can't trust your fleshly effort.

If anyone could have put confidence in the flesh, it was Paul. If there are others who think they can put confidence in the flesh, Paul goes beyond them. He went beyond the zeal of ordinary Jews in his commitment to what he thought was a righteous path. In verses 4 through 6 he lists the things that were and could have still been the basis for his confidence as a Jew. He says first that he was “circumcised the eighth day”. God had said to Abraham in Genesis 17:12, “And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants.” Luke tells us that both John the Baptist and Jesus were circumcised on the eighth day (Luke 1:59 and Luke 2:21). Paul's parents had seen to it that he was properly circumcised on the proper day. Though this wasn't his own doing, it was foundational to his confidence in the flesh.

Paul was “of the nation of Israel.” He was not a convert from among the Gentiles, but was a true Israelite by birth. To be specific, he was “of the tribe of Benjamin.” Benjamin was the youngest son of Jacob (Israel) and the second son of the wife Jacob really loved, Rachel. Rachel had died giving birth to Benjamin, and so Benjamin became to Jacob his most precious son, whom he would protect at all costs. Paul could trace his lineage back to Benjamin.

Paul says he was “a Hebrew of Hebrews.” He probably means that he was a pure Hebrew. Both parents were Hebrews, descendants of Abraham. He did not have any mixture of foreign blood in him. Alexander MacLaren comments, “He was a ‘Hebrew of the Hebrews,’ which does not mean, as it is usually taken to do, intensely, superlatively Hebrew, but simply is equivalent to ‘myself a Hebrew, and come from pure Hebrew ancestors on both sides.’ Possibly also the phrase may have reference to purity of language and customs as well as blood.”<sup>15</sup> Again, Paul was not a Gentile convert and did not have a non-Jewish parent.

As to his view of the Law, he says he was a Pharisee. He was a conservative, and the Sadducees were the liberals. The Pharisees believed in angels while the Sadducees rejected the idea. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead while the Sadducees rejected the doctrine. Paul took advantage of this disagreement among these sects when he spoke to the Sanhedrin in Acts 23,

6 But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul *began* crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" 7 As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. 9 And there occurred a great

15 MacLaren, Alexander, Expositions of Holy Scripture

uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and *began* to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" 10 And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks. (Acts 23:6-10.)

The Pharisees called themselves "disciples of Moses" (John 9:28) and were insistent on strict obedience to the Law of Moses. Their obedience, however, was most often merely an external show meant to impress others. Jesus pointed this out clearly in Matthew 6 and elsewhere. What they did they did "for appearance sake" (Luke 20:47). Jesus issued a scathing rebuke to their hypocrisy in Matthew 23. Paul was probably a more sincere and honest Pharisee, thinking he was doing what he needed to do and what was right. In 1 Timothy 1:13 Paul says that he was shown mercy because he "acted ignorantly in unbelief."

Paul was zealous for the persecution of the church. He was passionate in his belief that he needed to help put a stop to the spread of the Christian church. His persecution of the church was a central point in his conversion story when he recounted to others. He mentioned it in Acts 22 when he spoke to the crowd in Jerusalem, and he talked about it again as he told his story to Agrippa in Acts 26. In Acts 26:4-15 we read:

4 "So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my *own* nation and at Jerusalem; 5 since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. 6 "And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; 7 *the promise* to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve *God* night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. 8 "Why is it considered incredible among you *people* if God does raise the dead? 9 "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 "And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. 11 "And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities. 12 "While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, 13 at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. 14 "And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' 15 "And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.'"

Note that when Jesus confronted Saul on the road to Damascus, He said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" and "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." It was not just the church that Saul was persecuting, but the Lord Jesus Himself! When the people belonging to Christ are persecuted, Christ Himself is persecuted! Paul had not simply been hostile toward the church, but hostile toward Christ Himself! He had been opposing and persecuting the very Messiah whom the Jews had for so long been anticipating! And Paul had been zealous for this! He was "hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth", not knowing that Jesus was the

Messiah! When Paul learned the truth that Jesus is the Messiah, his whole world changed. His whole life took on a totally different trajectory.

The last thing that Paul mentions as a basis for his “confidence in the flesh” is his fleshly blamelessness. He says, “as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.” Other Jews watching Paul’s performance as a fellow Jew and Pharisee would not have been able to find anything in him to criticize. AT Robertson remarks, “He knew and practised all the rules of the rabbis. A marvellous record, scoring a hundred in Judaism.” If anyone could have made it into the kingdom based on their performance of the Law, it would have been Paul.

In verse 7 Paul introduces a contrast with the word “but.” The things he had just listed which had been his source of confidence he now counts as loss. The things that used to be “gains” for him, that had been on the assets side of the spiritual ledger, he had moved over to the liabilities side. They were no longer profitable and no longer worthy of his confidence. When he encountered Jesus Christ things turned around completely for him. His pedigree and performance as a Jew, which had been central to him, he wrote off for the sake of Christ. Now Christ became central, and all other things were peripheral. We are all called to this kind of commitment as followers of Christ. One of the big mistakes we make when we hear about Christ is to simply try to add Him in as one thing among many that we consider valuable. We place Him right up there alongside our Mom and Dad, brothers and sisters, girlfriend or boyfriend or spouse. We put Christ right up there with our profession or hobbies or the indulgences that we enjoy. But Christ must be the chief value and the chief relationship. He must take the top place in our lives. Christ must not merely reside in us, He must preside. He must rule! He is the Lord!

In the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3-23) some of the seed fell among the thorns, among the weeds, and the seed was choked out by the weeds and became unfruitful. Jesus explained that this represents the man who hears the word of God, but it is then choked out by other concerns, by “the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth.” Mark mentions also “the desires for other things” (Mark 4:19). When we try to add Jesus in alongside other priorities and concerns inevitably those other things crowd Him out. Knowing Christ will become secondary to other things. This is why we must do what Paul did and consider everything else to be worthless compared to knowing Christ.

Beyond the things that used to be all-important to him, Paul also says that he has counted “all things to be loss in view of he surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish, so that I may gain Christ” (verse 8). One surpassing value had overtaken everything else in Paul’s life, and that was the value of knowing Christ Jesus the Lord. There was nothing else of value to Paul that came close to that of knowing Christ. In fact he says that he counted everything else as “rubbish” compared to knowing Christ. The word can mean “excrement” to use a polite form of the word. Not only are all things “loss”, but they are less than that compared to knowing Christ. They are things to be cast out and thrown away and taken to the garbage dump or flushed down the sewer. His attitude reflects what Jesus said in Luke 14:26, “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.” He probably means it as it is rendered in Matthew 10:37, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” If we are disciples of Christ all others loves, all other relationships, all other values become secondary and less than secondary.

There is pain in counting things as loss, however. Paul says that he “suffered loss” for the sake of gaining Christ. The word he uses is *zēmioō*, meaning “to affect with damage, do



damage to, to sustain damage, to receive injury, suffer loss".<sup>16</sup> When Jesus told the rich young man that he needed to sell all of his possessions, give the money to the poor and come follow Him in order to obtain eternal life, the man went away sad because he was very wealthy (Matthew 19:16-22). He could not bring himself to suffer such a loss, and it cost him eternal life. Normally we want to avoid suffering loss. There is grief involved in suffering loss. If your house burns down, if a loved one dies, you have suffered loss and experience the pain of that loss. What we need to do is focus on the gain and not the loss. To gain Christ is far more valuable than any loss.

Paul talks about his aims in losing everything else in order to gain Christ in verses 8b through 11. First he says, "so that I may gain Christ and be found in Him." Jesus talked about how the kingdom of heaven was like a treasure hidden in a field which was found by a man who went and sold everything he had in order to buy the field and gain the treasure (Matthew 13:44). He said the kingdom of heaven was like a man looking for fine pearls who found one that was of great value and went and sold everything in order to buy that one pearl (Matthew 13:45-46). Gaining Christ and His kingdom is worth giving up everything else. The men in the parables realized the great value of the things they had found, and were eager to sell everything to obtain them, and so Paul saw that gaining Christ far surpassed every other value in life. He wanted Christ to be in him and himself to be in Christ. When Christ returns, he wants to be "found in Him." Christ is not only in us, but we are in Him. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:30-31, "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, 'LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.'"

When Paul is found in Christ he will be found righteous (verse 9). He will be found in a righteous state, in a right or just standing before God. He will be found to be "not guilty" before God. But this righteousness will not be his own righteousness derived from the Law. He will not have attained this righteousness because he always and completely obeyed the Law, but he will have received righteousness as a gift from God on the basis of faith in Christ. We will not be found to be "in Christ" unless we have received this gift of righteousness through faith in Him. Paul discusses this at length in the book of Romans, particularly chapters 3 through 5. Because we are inherently unrighteous, it is impossible for us to establish our own righteousness by attempting to obey the Law. Our attempts to fulfill the Law by our own efforts must always fail. The reason is that God requires perfect obedience at all times throughout our lives. James says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10). He also says, "We all stumble in many ways" (James 3:2). Since we all stumble in many ways, and to stumble once means we have violated God's Law and are guilty before Him, it is impossible for us to establish a righteous standing by our own efforts. Instead, we receive righteousness as a gift from God and the righteousness of Christ is credited to us because He died for our sins and took upon Himself our guilt. (Again, see Romans 4-5.)

The second aim or purpose that Paul mentions is in verse 10, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." Knowing Christ is the surpassing value in his life now, so Paul repeats that he has counted everything as a loss in order to know Christ and the things that come along with knowing Christ. He wants to know, to experience, the power of His resurrection. He wants to be raised from the dead as Christ was raised from the dead, and resurrecting the dead requires divine power. Paul penned this promise in 1 Corinthians 6:14, "Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power." No one but God can raise the

dead. No one else has this ability.

Before Jesus was raised from the dead through the power of God, He had to suffer and die. You can't be raised from the dead unless you are dead, and you can't be dead if you haven't died. I think this is why Paul mentions "the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." Note that these things are the things "of Christ," the resurrection of Christ, the sufferings of Christ, the death of Christ. Paul wants to share in the sufferings of Christ. As Paul had persecuted Christ in his former life by persecuting the church, so now he was being persecuted because he preached Christ and represented Christ. In doing this he was sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Insofar as he suffered because of his identification with Christ, he was suffering the sufferings of Christ. As he looked ahead to his death, he says similarly that he wants to be conformed to the death of Christ. The sufferings of Christ led to the death of Christ. If Paul is about to die, he wants to die the death of Christ, a death as a representative of Christ. If he's going to be put to death, he wants to be put to death because of Christ, and not because of some other reason. I don't think he means he wants to be crucified like Christ was crucified, but that he wants to die for the cause of Christ.

Suffering the sufferings of Christ and dying His death leads to being raised as He was raised. This is what Paul wants to attain (verse 11). The words translated "in order that" would be better translated "if somehow".<sup>17</sup> Vincent says this is not an expression of doubt, but of humility.<sup>18</sup> He will arrive at the resurrection of the dead through sharing in the sufferings and the death of Christ. I think he has in mind here the resurrection of the righteous. John 5:29 tells us that those who did good will be resurrected to life, and those who did evil will be resurrected to judgment. Paul is obviously referring to the first rather than the second. He wants to live such a life that will so please God that there will be no doubt that he will be among those who share in the resurrection of the righteous.

In verses 12 to 14 Paul reveals that he's still in process toward the goal and has not yet achieved the goal. He is still a student in process and in development. He has not yet achieved perfection. He is not yet entirely Christlike. He is not writing to these people from the perspective of one who has completely "arrived" spiritually. We do not become entirely sanctified through some earnest decision and quick ceremony. Becoming like Christ is a lifelong process, even for apostles.

We should notice that twice in these verses he says that he "presses on" (verses 12 and 14). Three times he uses the phrase "lay hold of" or "laid hold of." There is something ahead of him, out in front of him in the future, the thing he is focused on and is pursuing. It is his goal. Christ laid hold of him for this purpose, and so he is seeking to lay hold of the same thing. The purpose of Christ for him has become his purpose for himself. This is one of the reasons that we sometimes fail as Christians to be what we should be and to do what we should do – because our purpose for ourselves does not align with the purpose of Christ for us. Our goal for ourselves differs from the goal Christ has for us. The prize we are pursuing differs from the prize He wants us to pursue. We get tripped up by the things of this world and this life when Christ wants us to aim for the things of His kingdom and of the life to come. He wants us to "lay up treasures in heaven" but we are focused on laying up treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19-21).

So we must ask, what is the goal? What is the prize? Paul states it clearly. It is "the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (verse 14). At the end of a race, the winner is called up to receive his prize, his award. The "upward call of God" is probably the invitation of God to Paul to come up at the resurrection and receive his prize because he has finished his race and has accomplished his mission. Paul uses this word "prize" in one other place – 1

17 New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance

18 Vincent's Word Studies

Corinthians 9:24, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win." Near the end of his life Paul wrote to Timothy, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6-8). The "upward call of God" is the time of our departure, when God calls us up to be with Him and to receive our awards for our faithful service in Christ.

Paul said in verse 12 that he is not yet perfect, but now in verse 15 he says, "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude..." So is he perfect or isn't he perfect? The verb in verse 12 indicates a state of completion where no further development is needed, a complete and truly perfect Christlikeness. This he has not yet attained. Paul still has quite a ways to go to reach complete perfection. In verse 15 the word has to do with "relative perfection, not the absolute perfection so pointedly denied in 3:12."<sup>19</sup> In verse 15 he's using the word to denote spiritual maturity, believers who are no longer babes in Christ, but spiritual grownups.

Those who are spiritually mature should have the same attitude that Paul has in his quest to lay hold of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. They should be doing what he does in forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. The word translated "attitude" is the word for "mind" we have encountered previously, *phroneo*. He's saying they should be thinking the same way that he is thinking. If their minds are set in another direction, he says that God will reveal that to them. God will disclose to us if we are setting our minds in the wrong direction and on the wrong things. Colossians 3:1-3 says, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." Those who are mature in Christ should be setting their minds on heavenly things and not on the things of this earth and of this world.

In verse 16 Paul exhorts his readers to "keep living by that same standard to which we have attained." I think he means that whatever level of maturity you have reached, you should continue on in the same direction. You should keep going on in your progress toward Christlikeness.

#### Philippians 3:17-21

Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. 18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Paul has the audacity to hold himself up as an example and to say "follow my example and the example of others who follow my pattern." The words "following my example"

translate the word *summimētēs*, meaning “a fellow imitator.”<sup>20</sup> He's telling them to follow along and imitate him and what he has done. I think he primarily has in mind the things he's just been talking about, that is, considering all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ and forgetting what lies behind and pressing on toward the prize that lies ahead.

The best way to learn a new skill, whether it be woodworking or playing the piano or plumbing or flying or whatever, is to be taught or mentored by someone who is an expert at the thing. You watch what they do and how they do it, and they coach you along so that eventually you can do the thing as skillfully as they do it. The best way to learn how to walk the Christian walk in a practical way is to follow the example of someone who's been doing it for a while. We all need some spiritual mentoring, and this is what should be happening as we get together in the body of Christ. We need to be critiqued and coached. I have found this to be very valuable in my work as an on-air radio host. An experienced radio researcher from a company called Audience Development Group has critiqued and coached me and others at the station where I work and helped us improve what we are doing on the air. Mature believers should be able to say, “Follow my example. Watch what I do and do the same.”

Many do not follow Paul's example. Paul told them often and warned them often about these people, and it caused him great grief and anguish. He says that the people he's talking about are enemies of the cross of Christ, their end is destruction, their appetite is their god, the things they should be ashamed of are the things in which they glory, and they set their minds on earthly things.

The first thing about these who go astray is that they are “enemies of the cross of Christ.” They are opposed to the cross and the message of the cross. The cross is about the death of Jesus Christ and the significance of His death. The cross was a Roman tool of execution, used to execute Christ as a criminal, which was, to the Jews especially, an unthinkable thing. They expected the Messiah to come and establish His kingdom on earth and destroy their enemies. They did not understand that scripture taught He was to die as a sacrifice for sins (see Isaiah 53). When Jesus began to tell the disciples that He was going to be crucified, Peter himself tried to oppose the cross. Peter said, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.” Jesus rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.” (See Matthew 16:21-22.) The idea that Jesus would die was unthinkable to Peter. He had just confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, and now the Messiah was telling him that He had to die. This was outside Peter's understanding of the mission of the Messiah. In saying what he said, Peter became a spokesman for Satan! Peter's interests were opposed to those of God, and his mind was set on the interests of man.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1 that the cross is a problem for both Jews and Gentiles. He writes:

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. 18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 for it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the

foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Corinthians 1:17-25)

When Jesus started talking about being crucified and dying, it sounded like crazy talk to Peter and probably to the rest of the apostles as well. Paul says the message of Christ crucified is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. Jews are into signs and Greeks are into wisdom and intellectualism, and the idea that a man who had been crucified is the Savior was an outlandish idea to both. The cross is an offense to many today, and they oppose the message of Christ crucified. This is evidence that the gospel message is not a man-made message. Man-made messages are more reasonable to us than the gospel of the cross. It doesn't make sense to us that a crucified man could through that death atone for our sins and reconcile us to God. The whole idea seems crazy from a human perspective. But the wisdom of God transcends human wisdom. In Romans 11:32 Paul exclaims, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" There is a limit to how much we can understand. Our wisdom falls far short of God's wisdom.

The second thing about those who are walking contrary to the truth is that their "end is destruction." The destination of the path they have taken is destruction. Jesus told us in Matthew 7 to "enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). There are two destinations possible for all of us in life. One is destruction if we are disobedient to the gospel, the other is life if we take the narrow path and put our faith in Christ. Those who are enemies of the cross of Christ demonstrate that they are on the road to destruction.

The third thing that characterizes these people is that their "god is their appetite." The word for "appetite" is *koilia*, meaning stomach or belly. Vincent's Word Studies quotes the Cyclops in Euripides, "My flocks which I sacrifice to no one but myself, and not to the gods, and to this my belly the greatest of the gods: for to eat and drink each day, and to give one's self no trouble, this is the god for wise men" ("Cyclops," 334-338). These people worship and serve their appetites, their sensual and physical desires. They are slaves to their appetites and their lifestyle is dictated by them.

The fourth thing Paul mentions is that their "glory is in their shame." Normally the things that can bring shame upon people are things they try to hide. People should be ashamed of their wrongdoing, their immorality and their drunkenness and their selfish abuse of others. But some people, those who worship their bellies, are actually proud of these things. Sometimes I've heard people boasting about how much they drank and how drunk they got and how they behaved when they were drunk, as if it was some great achievement. Instead of being ashamed of what they had done they acted as if they had done something great and honorable. Some boast of their sexual "conquests" as if it is a great and praiseworthy thing. These are examples of glorying in shame.

The fifth thing is the bottom line, the root problem. Paul says they "set their minds on earthly things." As we noted above, Jesus said that this was Peter's problem when Peter tried to turn Him away from the necessity of the cross. His mind was not set on the interests of God. The people Paul is talking about here have their minds set on earthly rather than heavenly things. Their purposes, goals, aims and pursuits all revolve around earthly things

rather than heavenly things.

Our mindset, our thinking, is all-important when it comes to the direction and outcome of our lives. Paul mentions this in a couple of other places:

Romans 8:5-8, "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

Colossians 3:1-3, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

If we truly know Christ and the Holy Spirit lives in us, then we have the ability to set our minds on the "things of the Spirit." The mind set on the flesh instead of the Spirit is hostile to God and unable to fulfill God's law and cannot please God. Those who are in Christ need not set their minds on the flesh. We can exercise our will and set our minds on the Spirit and His will and His leading. We may set our minds on "things above, where Christ is." We may set our minds on heavenly things instead of earthly things.

By contrast, Paul points out in verse 20 that our citizenship is in heaven. We set our minds on heavenly things because we are citizens of heaven. Heaven is our real country. An ambassador living in a foreign country does not represent the interests of the foreign country, but of the country that sent him as an ambassador. Similarly as representatives of Christ on earth we do not seek and promote earthly things, but the things of the kingdom of Christ.

Because we are not yet in heaven, but on earth, we look forward to future events. We look forward, eagerly waiting for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will come from heaven. We look forward to His coming because at His coming he will transform us. He will come and complete our salvation by transforming our humble bodies into conformity with His glorious body. John writes, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2). His purpose is to make us like Himself. Paul discussed this same thing in more depth in Romans 8:

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. 24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

Notice again here the theme of “eagerly waiting” for something in the future. The creation “waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God” (verse 19). We ourselves are “waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (verse 23). We “wait eagerly” with perseverance for the hope that we do not yet see (verse 25). What we and all creation are waiting for eagerly is the coming of Christ and the transformation of our mortal bodies. When this happens the “sons of God” will be revealed, we will be adopted as sons and our bodies will be redeemed. Our physical bodies are not going to be shed and cast aside, but are going to be raised, redeemed and made immortal. This will be part of the process of setting the entire creation free from its slavery to corruption. Paul explains further in 1 Corinthians 15:

41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. 42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable *body*, it is raised an imperishable *body*; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*. 45 So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit. 46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. 47 The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. 48 As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly. 50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55 "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

So this is what the Lord Jesus Christ is going to do at His return and at the resurrection. He is going to transform our bodies and make them like His. Our mortal bodies will become immortal. Our perishable bodies will become imperishable. Death will be abolished. This will be the final step of our salvation, the redemption of our bodies.

How will He do this? “By the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” He will use His ability to subject everything to Himself. He has the ability to put everything under His power and authority as the ultimate King of kings. One day He will exercise that ability and part of that will be to transform us and to make us like Himself. The power of Jesus is the power of God. The authority of Jesus is the authority of God.

#### Philippians 4:1-3

Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long *to see*, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. 3 Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in *the cause of the gospel*, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

I'm not sure why it was decided that verse 1 should be the beginning of chapter 4 instead of the end of chapter 3, but for some reason the decision was made. It brings a close to the discussion in chapter 3. He says, "Therefore...in this way stand firm in the Lord." In chapter 3 he was telling them not to have confidence in the flesh, but to forget what was behind and strive for what was ahead. He was telling them that righteousness does not come from the Law but from God on the basis of faith in Christ. He was telling them to follow his example. He encouraged them to live as citizens of heaven on earth and to keep eagerly waiting for the full salvation and transformation Christ will bring to them when He comes. Then finally he says this, that they are his beloved (he says it twice!), his joy and crown, and that by doing as he has said they will stand firm in the Lord. He has just given them the means to stand firm in Christ, and so exhorts them to do so. Paul also discusses standing firm in the Lord by means of "the full armor of God" in Ephesians 6:10-17.

In Philippians 2:2 Paul had exhorted all of the believers in Philippi to be "of the same mind" and now he singles out two women, Euodia and Syntyche and urges them to the same thing. The words "live in harmony" translate the Greek word *phroneō*, to think. Obviously they had some sort of disagreement or conflict with each other and it had gotten severe enough that Paul himself felt he had to write something about it. He wants them to resolve their differences in thinking and restore harmony with each other. How embarrassing it would be to have your name recorded in scripture because of some conflict or failure in your life! If Paul knew about this, obviously many others did as well, and Paul urges both ladies to resolve the issue. In the Lord there should be substantial harmony between those who follow Him.

Paul addresses someone in verse 3 he calls "true companion" and requests that this person help Euodia and Syntyche resolve their problems. The question has been who is this "true companion" Paul is addressing? One suggestion is that the word for "companion" (*Syzygus*) is a proper name of an individual, that Paul is asking someone named Syzygus (which means companion) to help these two women. This is a possibility, but the name is not found elsewhere. Ultimately it doesn't really matter. Paul felt that these women needed some help and counsel in order to resolve their issues with each other. Sometimes in disputes between individual a third party is needed to help with a fresh and objective perspective on the issues involved.

Euodia and Syntyche were among those who had "shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel." The Greek word for "shared my struggle" is *sunathleō* – to wrestle in company with another (Strong's). This word could apply to athletes on the same team who compete alongside one another. These two women were teammates of Paul's, working alongside him in spreading the gospel. Paul also mentions Clement and "the rest of my fellow workers." The work of sharing the gospel requires striving. It is a battle. It will never be very easy. The enemy will oppose our efforts to preach Christ at every turn. We need to be teammates of one another in this work. Probably these women had helped support Paul and had facilitated his ministry. Some of his co-workers traveled with him and preached and taught alongside him. What he didn't need was strife among his teammates.

Paul says an interesting thing about these co-workers of his. He says that their "names are in the book of life." I'm tempted to wonder how Paul knew this and how he could be so confident in saying this. Doesn't the Lord alone ultimately know whose names are in the book of life? Can we say this for sure for anyone? Well, it seems likely that Paul was looking at the



fruit in their lives and the evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in them. The fact that they committed themselves to working alongside Paul and striving with him and suffering with him in proclaiming the gospel was evidence that they had been redeemed. You don't put your life on the line for a message you don't fully believe.

The book of life is mentioned quite a few times in scripture, particularly in Revelation.

- Revelation 3:5, "He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."
- Revelation 13:8, "All who dwell on the earth will worship him, *everyone* whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain."
- Revelation 17:8, "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come."
- Revelation 20:12, "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds."
- Revelation 20:15, "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."
- Revelation 21:27, "and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

It becomes clear that it is crucial to have one's name written in the book of life. If your name is not found there, you will be cast into the lake of fire. It's interesting that Revelation 13:8 and 17:8 seem to indicate that these names were written in the book of life "from the foundation of the world." These names were known and fixed before the world was created. Paul could see that the people he was talking about were among those whose names had been recorded there.

There are other references to the book of life or to having one's name recorded in heaven elsewhere. Psalm 69:28 says, "May they be blotted out of the book of life And may they not be recorded with the righteous." In Exodus 32:31-33 we read, "Then Moses returned to the LORD, and said, 'Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if You will, forgive their sin--and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!' The LORD said to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.'" In Luke 10:20 Jesus said to His apostles, "Nevertheless do not rejoice in that, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven." It is clear that God knows those who belong to Him, and their names are known to Him, and that we also can know that our names are recorded in His book and the names of others are there as well.

#### Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

In chapter 3, verse 1 Paul wrote, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." Here again he repeats this command, and repeats it twice! He has come around again to the conclusion of his epistle. Even though Paul was in prison and uncertain about whether he would live or die, his epistle is full of this theme of rejoicing. In 2:17-18 he says, "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, *I urge you*, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me." In 2:28, speaking of Epaphroditus, he says, "Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned *about you*." We have noted 3:1 and verse 4 of chapter 4 above. Again in 4:10 he writes, "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned *before*, but you lacked opportunity." Paul had learned to rejoice in the midst of his sufferings. When he was in prison with Silas in Philippi they were praying and singing hymns of praise to God (Acts 16:25). He had set the example of rejoicing and praise in the midst of persecution and suffering. In the Lord there is always reason to rejoice, even if we are suffering, even if our circumstances are very difficult. In fact, Jesus commanded us to rejoice when we are persecuted and told us why in Matthew 5:11-12, "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Those who suffer for Christ have a great reward waiting for them in heaven. There is great future blessing for those who suffer for Christ, and therefore we are commanded to rejoice. Rejoicing is not just something we may do, it is something we must do. It is a responsibility!

Paul's next command is "Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near." The word translated "gentle spirit" is *epieikēs* in the Greek. The Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary says of this word:

from a Greek root, "to yield," whence *yieldingness* [Trench]; or from a root, "it is fitting," whence "*reasonableness of dealing*" [Alford], that considerateness for others, *not urging one's own rights to the uttermost*, but waiving a part, and thereby rectifying the injustices of justice. The archetype of this grace is God, who presses not the strictness of His law against us as we deserve (Psa\_130:3, Psa\_130:4); though having exacted the fullest payment for us from our Divine Surety. There are included in "moderation," *candor* and *kindliness*. *Joy in the Lord* raises us above rigorism towards others (Phi\_4:5), and carefulness (Phi\_4:6) as to one's own affairs. Sadness produces *morose harshness* towards others, and a troublesome spirit in ourselves.

So this "yieldingness", this gentleness is to be made known to all men. We are to exhibit this quality by our behavior. The reason is because the Lord is near. I think he means that the coming of the Lord, the presence of the Lord is near. The time when we will give an account to Him is coming soon, and so we need to be gentle in our dealings with others and not harsh and unyielding.

In verses 6 and 7 Paul prohibits anxiety and prescribes prayer instead. The King James Version says "be careful for nothing" which sounds odd to us, since we are always saying "be careful!" to one another. But the King James sense of the word "careful" means "full of care," and is probably in that sense a good translation of the Greek *merimnaō*. Jesus gives us a good idea of what this anxiety and worry looks like in Matthew 6:25-33. Anxiety is being overly concerned about the daily needs of life and how they will be attained. Anxious people say things like "What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear for clothing?" (Matthew

6:31). Today those simple worries are multiplied and amplified. Today we ask, "Where will we work? How will we make money? How can we buy a house? How can we afford a new car? Can we save enough for retirement? Can our kids go to college?" Hundreds of other anxious questions could be added to these. Paul says, "Be anxious for nothing."

Worry is one of the things that can choke out the word of God in our lives and make it unfruitful (Matthew 13:22). Instead of focusing on what God has said, what He has commanded and promised, we focus on our worries about the future. Instead of meditating on His word, we meditate on our worries. We need to reverse this tendency.

Prayer is the cure for anxiety. Paul says that by means of prayer and supplication with thanksgiving we are to let our requests be made known to God. Prayer is more general and supplication is more specific, and then making requests is more specific still. What are we to do when we pray and when we supplicate? We are to make requests. We are to let God know our requests, to ask Him for what we want and need. Now, it's true that God knows what we need before we ask (Matthew 6:8), but nonetheless we are urged and commanded to ask. It seems that His response is dependent on our asking! James says, "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2b). Apparently we sometimes lack what we need because we haven't asked it of God, we haven't turned to Him with our requests and relied on His provision. Too often we try to manage things on our own independent of Him, and He is waiting for us to turn to Him and ask for His help. He wants us to see that we can't do it without Him and so He waits until we realize our inability and humble ourselves and call on Him. Anxiety is an indicator that it's time to call out to God and bring our requests to Him. If you're wondering what you should be praying about, here is an answer for you. What are you worried about? What is causing you to fret and keeps you awake at night? Pray about those things! Ask for what you need!

As we make our requests known to God, Paul says that the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Anxiety will be replaced with the peace of God. He does not promise that all of our requests will be granted. He does not say that God will do whatever we ask. He says we will receive the peace of God. He says that this peace of God "surpasses all comprehension." His peace goes beyond our understanding and our minds can't get hold of it. It is peace that makes no sense given our circumstances. Jesus also promised this peace in the midst of tribulation, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful" (John 14:27). And in John 16:33 He says, "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." Note that Jesus says, "do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful," implying that if our hearts are troubled and fearful it is because we have allowed it to happen. He implies that we have the option of experiencing His peace rather than trouble and fear, and that we have the ability to shut down a troubled and fearful heart through His peace. In the world we do have tribulation, but because Christ has overcome the world, we have peace and courage in Him, and this is something that is incomprehensible. In the world peace depends on being free from trouble, but Jesus promises His peace in the midst of suffering and tribulation. In the world peace depends on being in good health, having everything you need at hand, being secure and safe from all threats, having people around you who always affirm you and don't give you any grief, and perhaps many other things. But this can never fully happen for anyone in this life. Therefore we pursue peace on these terms but do not find it. Jesus says, "My peace I give to you." His peace is a gift, imparted to us through His teaching and through the fact that He has overcome the world.

The incomprehensible peace of God will function to guard our hearts and minds in Christ. Guards are posted to protect people and things from harm. Their function is to watch over

something to keep it from being stolen or vandalized or destroyed by enemies. Guards serve as a deterrent to criminals and enemies. We need something to guard our inner life, our hearts and minds. The heart is the seat of our affections and emotions. The mind is our thinking, our reasoning. Both of these need to be protected from the enemy, and this is what the peace of God does. When our inner life is in turmoil and our thinking is confused and anxious, we lack peace. We need the peace that comes from God in answer to our petitions in order to move forward.

#### Philippians 4:8-9

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. 9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Having taken our anxieties to the Lord and having made our requests known to Him in our prayers and petitions with thanksgiving, we then need to re-direct our thoughts. The trouble often is that we allow the anxious thoughts to re-assert themselves. We need to subject negative and evil thoughts to this checklist. Are we thinking things that are true? Often in our anxiety we are dwelling on things that simply aren't true and have succumbed to the lies of the Devil. Are we thinking of honorable things? Things that are venerable or respectable? Are we thinking of things that are right? The Greek word also means "just" or "equitable". Are we thinking of things that are pure, things that are clean? Are we thinking of things that are lovely? Are we thinking things that are of good repute? Are we thinking things that are excellent? Moral excellence in particular. Are we thinking things that are worthy of praise? If we revealed our thoughts to someone else, would they say that our thoughts are praiseworthy? It might be helpful at this point to mention the alternatives to these things. We've already touched on lies and falsehood as contrasted with truth. We often also allow thoughts that are dishonorable, unrighteous, impure, ugly, of bad repute, less than excellent and unworthy of praise.

The things we dwell on will determine our direction in life. The word for "dwell" is *logizomai*, "to reckon, count, compute, calculate, count over"<sup>21</sup>. I think he's speaking of the practice of meditation. Not "transcendental meditation" where the goal is to empty one's mind, but biblical meditation where we are thinking of the Law and word of God and are thinking constantly of these good things. It means to constantly ruminate on the word of God and let it dominate our thoughts. Practicing this will transform our lives.

Paul again puts himself forward as a pattern in verse 9. In verse 8 he talked about the "things" they should think about, and in verse 9 he talks about the "things" they have learned, received, heard and seen in him. He exhorts them to practice these things and assures them that the God of peace will be with them if they do so. As Paul was among them teaching them and equipping them with what they needed to follow Jesus, he not only spoke to them about these things, but he also demonstrated them to them. He lived them out and showed them how to practice the disciplines that were necessary to life in Christ. There are Christian "practices" that need to be learned and received, heard and seen. This is the process of teaching and imparting to others the things they need to know and be able to do. We should be able to demonstrate walking in faith and prayer and meditation on God's word and how to

study the scriptures. We need to be able to demonstrate a godly mindset.

Paul had just mentioned the “peace of God” in verse 7 and now in verse 9 he mentions “the God of peace”. His presence brings peace with it. He not only gives peace, but He is peace, and His presence is promised if we practice the spiritual disciplines that Paul has been talking about and modeled in his life. But I think here he is not just talking about the God of peace being present in our lives as individuals, but being present *among us* collectively, in the church. Clearly in his words about Euodia and Syntyche we discover that there was some friction among some members in the Christian community in Philippi, and there was a need to practice Christian virtues in order to deal with the conflicts and lack of peace. He wants all of the believers in Philippi to practice these things and the result will be that the God who brings about peace will be among them.

#### Philippians 4:10-19

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned *before*, but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. 14 Nevertheless, you have done well to share *with me* in my affliction. 15 You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; 16 for even in Thessalonica you sent *a gift* more than once for my needs. 17 Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. 18 But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. 19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Here again we see another note of rejoicing. It was the Philippians who caused Paul to rejoice greatly in the Lord. Again, his rejoicing is “in the Lord.” What caused him to rejoice? “That now at last you have revived your concern for me.” The word for “concern” is *phroneō* – to think. They had revived their thoughts about Paul. Paul is quick to backpedal a bit and say that he doesn’t mean that they had not been thinking of him, that they hadn’t been concerned, but that they had lacked an opportunity to express that concern. He is talking about how he had perceived things. Sometimes when we are far away from those we care about and we don’t hear from them for a while, we may begin to think that they have forgotten about us or are not concerned about us any more. Then when we get a letter from them, or a call or an email, we rejoice because we realize that they have been thinking of us after all. This is how Paul felt. When Epaphroditus arrived with the gift from the Philippian church, it was a great encouragement to him and demonstrated to him that they had been thinking of him.

Paul did not rejoice because the gift met a great need or lack in his finances. He says, “Not that I speak from want.” It wasn’t that the need was so enormous and the gift brought relief. He rejoiced because of their expression of concern for him and because of their consistency in sharing with him. It wasn’t the money that mattered so much but the love behind the money. A gift should be a tangible expression of love, concern and partnership.

His explanation for why he says he's not speaking from want has to do with having learned contentment. It's not that he didn't have any needs, it's that he had learned to be content no matter how much or how little he had. He defines contentment in verse 12. Contentment is knowing how to get along with humble means and knowing how to live in prosperity. It is knowing how to be filled and go hungry, to have abundance and suffer need. It's the art of allowing whatever he has to be sufficient. He learned to adapt to the supply he had. He learned to trust the Lord whatever his circumstances happened to be. This is learned through experience. He had experienced times of prosperity and of need, and had learned that "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

I would say that verse 13 is one of the most misused and misapplied verses in the whole Bible! It seems like everyone takes it out of context and uses it to say "I can do anything through Christ who strengthens me." This is not what Paul is saying. We must understand it in context. Clearly he's saying that he can handle any circumstances that come his way through Christ who gives him strength. What he is saying is, "I have strength for all things." The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges commentary says,

More exactly, **I have strength for all things**; whether to do or to bear. The Latin versions, beautifully, render, *omnia possum*. The "all things" are, of course, not all things absolutely; he is not the Omnipotent. They are "all things" with which he has to do, as the will of God brings them to him; not the boundless field of possibilities, but a straight line across it, the actual path of duty and suffering, chosen not by himself but by his Lord and Master. The reference is thus limited and practical; but *within* that reference it is, observe, not "*some*" but "*all*" things that he can meet in peace and strength.

If hardship comes his way, Christ gives him strength to handle it. If prosperity comes along, Christ enables him to handle that as well. Christ empowers him and enables him to deal with all the things that God allows in his life. I like how the Contemporary English Version renders this verse, "Christ gives me the strength to face anything." As we walk with Christ, His strength is there to enable us to handle whatever He allows in our lives. We do not face difficult circumstances alone, but He is there, and His strength is manifested in our weakness (see 2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

The Philippians stood out as those who alone shared with Paul in his affliction (verses 14 and 15). They were the only church after he left Macedonia that had participated with him in the matter of giving and receiving to help meet his needs. He of course commends them for this. They had done well to participate with him. When we support missionaries and evangelists and pastors we are sharing with them in their ministries. We are having fellowship with them by our support. We have a share in their ministry and in the fruit of their ministry. Love for them and for those to whom they are ministering should compel us to this. Supporting those who do these things takes us off the sidelines and puts us in the game with them.

The Philippians were not "one-time-gift" type givers. They sent gifts of support to Paul "more than once" to meet his needs. One time gifts are not to be despised and are crucial to the work, but the real partners are those who give regularly and consistently.

Paul is careful to say in verse 17 that he's not motivated by seeking a gift in itself. He is not fishing for more gifts. He's not engaging in fundraising. He is seeking "the profit which increases to your account." He does not want them to think he only values money, that he only cares for them because they support him. If we work in donor-supported ministry we must be careful that this attitude does not creep in. We must be careful that we don't see

those who participate with us in our ministries as mere donors. We are in ministry to care for the needs of people, not to make money and not to get them to give us money. We should beware of ministries and organizations that continually talk about how important it is to give them money. The giving of those who supported Paul did not just benefit him, but it benefited them as well. It increased their bank account in heaven. It was a means for them of laying up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21 and 1 Timothy 6:17-19). Participating in his ministry through their support would accrue rewards for them in the kingdom. Paul sought for whatever would benefit those to whom he ministered.

He reassures them in verse 18 that at this point he is “amply supplied” due to the gift that he had received from them through Epaphroditus. Having an abundance means that you have more than you need. His cup has been filled to the full. He now has all the supply he needs and more. He says that their gift was “a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.” Their gift was more than just money given to support an apostle, it was a sacrifice that was accepted by God. Sacrifices are not just animals killed in some ritual offering, but sacrifices are offerings of any kind made to God. Hebrews 13:15-16 says, “Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” Praise and giving thanks is a sacrifice. Doing good and sharing is a sacrifice. The crucial thing is that one's sacrifice be acceptable to God and please Him. The key is that whatever is offered is offered from a sincere and obedient heart, and that we offer our best. In Malachi 1 the Lord rebuked Israel for offering “defiled food upon my altar” (1:7). They were not obeying the law that required spotless animals for sacrifice, but they were offering the blind, the lame and the sick animals (1:8). Behind their unacceptable offerings was a disdainful, disrespectful and irreverent attitude. God pointed out that their governor would not be pleased with such flawed “gifts” and neither will He. When we give lousy, leftover junk to the Lord and think we are virtuous for doing so, we make a big mistake. God deserves our best. The gifts the Philippians sent to Paul were a loving, sincere sacrifice in God's sight.

Paul could not repay the Philippians for their generosity, but he assures them that God Himself would supply their needs. God had used them to supply his needs, and God would supply their needs. Paul's God would do this for him. Jesus taught that God repays those who give to those who cannot repay them. Luke 14:12-14 says, “And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and *that* will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite *the* poor, *the* crippled, *the* lame, *the* blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have *the means* to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'”

God has unlimited riches in glory, and it is no problem for Him to supply our needs both now and in eternity. These needs are supplied in Christ Jesus. No one comes to the Father except through the Son (John 14:6), and no one receives anything from the Father except through the Son.

#### Philippians 4:20-23

20 Now to our God and Father *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen. 21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Paul wraps up his letter with customary greetings and blessings. Glory is to go to God the Father forever and ever. The One worthy of ultimate glory is God the Father. All things have come from Him and owe their existence to Him.

He tells them to greet every saint in Christ Jesus and offers the greetings from those who are with him. Significant here is the mention of "Caesar's household." He does not necessarily mean relatives of Caesar (Nero), but perhaps slaves or servants of Nero. He's probably referring to those who in some way served Caesar. Among them were people Paul had led to faith in Christ.

Finally Paul finishes with a blessing he uses often, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." It is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that helps us in our times of need. Hebrews 4:14-16 says, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." What Paul wishes for them is that they would always be recipients of the favor of God that comes to them through Jesus Christ.