

TO KNOW CHRIST AND TO MAKE HIM KNOWN

Commentary on the Book of Philippians

by Paul G. Apple, April 2001

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TRUE JOY COMES FROM FELLOWSHIP AND UNITY IN FURTHERING THE GOSPEL (IN DEPENDENCE UPON GOD) AS WE SEEK TO FULLY KNOW CHRIST

Philippians 1:27 *"striving together for the faith of the gospel"*

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

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OUTLINE OF PHILIPPIANS

OUR GOAL: TO KNOW CHRIST AND TO MAKE HIM KNOW

TRUE JOY COMES FROM FELLOWSHIP AND UNITY IN FURTHERING THE GOSPEL (IN DEPENDENCE UPON GOD) AS WE SEEK TO FULLY KNOW CHRIST

I. (1:1-26) TRUE FELLOWSHIP PROMOTES THE FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL (DESPITE PERSECUTION) AS WE FOCUS ON EXALTING CHRIST

"in view of your participation in the gospel"

(1:1-11) (AS WE LABOR TOGETHER UNTIL CHRIST RETURNS), FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL SPARKS THREE RESPONSES:

- **JOYFUL THANKSGIVING**
- **INTIMATE BONDS**
- **PURPOSEFUL PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL MATURITY**

(1:1-2) OPENING TO THE EPISTLE

- A. (:1) The Partners in Fellowship in the Gospel
- B. (:2) The Pleasantries of Typical Greetings

(1:3-6) FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL SPARKS JOYFUL THANKSGIVING

- A. (:3a) The Object of Our Thanksgiving = the God who Cares for us so Personally
- B. (:3b) The Occasion for Thanksgiving Should be Our Memories of Fellowship with the Saints
- C. (:4) The Offering of Our Thanksgiving = Consistent Petition with Joy
- D. (:5) The Orientation of Our Thanksgiving and Petition is Fellowship in the Gospel
- E. (:6) The Optimism (Confidence) for Our Thanksgiving and Petition = the Perseverance of God

(1:7-8) JOYFUL THANKSGIVING IS APPROPRIATE BECAUSE FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL SPARKS INTIMATE BONDS OF:

- (:7a) PERSONAL INTIMACY
- (:7) CLOSE UNITY
- (:8) DEEP AFFECTION

- A. (:7a) Joyful Thanksgiving is Appropriate Due to Personal Intimacy
- B. (:7b) Joyful Thanksgiving is Appropriate Due to Close Unity of Partnership in the Grace of God – Extends to Both Imprisonment and Gospel Ministry
- C. (:8) Joyful Thanksgiving is Appropriate Due to Deep Affection Attested by God

(1:9-11) FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL SPARKS PURPOSEFUL PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL MATURITY

(ABUNDANT LOVE EXERCISED IN WISDOM YIELDING THE FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH GLORIFIES GOD)

- A. (:9) Request -- Abundant Love Exercised in Wisdom
- B. (:10a) Reason -- Make Wise Choices
- C. (:10b-11) Result – Manifesting the Fruit of Righteousness Which Glorifies God

(1:12-18) THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL CAN ACTUALLY BENEFIT FROM DIFFICULT PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES:

- **BY SHOWING UNBELIEVERS THE REALITY OF OUR RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST;**
- **SHOWING BELIEVERS OUR EXAMPLE OF JOY AND FAITHFULNESS (WHICH GIVES THEM COURAGE TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL)**

I. (1:12) STATEMENT OF HIS THESIS: THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL CAN ACTUALLY BENEFIT FROM DIFFICULT PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

- A. The Apostle Paul's Personal Circumstances Looked Bleak
- B. These Difficult Circumstances Have Promoted the Advancement of the Gospel

II. (1:13-18) TWOFOLD EXPLANATION -- TWO POSITIVE RESULTS FROM HIS DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

- A. Showing Unbelievers the Reality of His Relationship to Christ

1. His bonds were an instrument of freedom and opportunity and rejoicing rather than enslavement and limitation and bitterness
2. His bonds were plainly seen by all to be in fellowship with Christ and in His service rather than on account of any wrongdoing
3. The scope of his testimony was unlimited
 - a. the strategic palace guard (praetorian guards)
 - b. all other unbelievers as well throughout Rome and the empire

B. Showing Believers His Example of Joy and Faithfulness Which Gave Them Courage to Proclaim the Gospel

1. The gospel advances more effectively through the testimony of many than just through the testimony of one superstar
2. There is a natural fear of witnessing that needs to be overcome in order for us to advance the gospel
3. The right response to difficult circumstances can mobilize the ministry of others by encouraging them to step out in faith
4. People might proclaim the gospel from either good or bad motivations
 - a. out of a sense of competition and personal ambition
 - b. out of a genuine love and sense of good will
5. We should rejoice in the proclamation of the gospel irregardless of the motives of the proclaimers or their good or bad intentions towards us personally

(1:19-26) FOCUS ON EXALTING CHRIST AND YOU CAN COUNT ON SUPERNATURAL BOLDNESS IN FRUITFUL MINISTRY --

- **ONE THAT WILL GLORIFY CHRIST**
- **AND EFFECTIVELY IMPACT OTHERS**

I. (1:19-21) SUPERNATURAL BOLDNESS IN FRUITFUL MINISTRY COMES FROM FOCUSING ON EXALTING CHRIST

- A. (:19) The Power of Intercessory Prayer and the Help of the Holy Spirit Give Confidence that We Will Persevere in the Faith**

B. (:20b) Supernatural Boldness is the Key to a Ministry that Glorifies Christ

C. (:20a, 21) Focusing on Exalting Christ is the Key to Being Able to Count on Such Supernatural Boldness in Ministry

II. (1:22-26) THE PURPOSE OF THIS LIFE IS FRUITFUL MINISTRY -- ONE THAT GLORIFIES CHRIST AND BENEFITS OTHERS

A. (:22-24) The Opportunity for Continued Fruitful Ministry Counterbalances Our Desire to Escape the Difficulties of This Life and Enter Glory

B. (:25-26) Fruitful Ministry Involves Fellowship in the Gospel that Furthers the Gospel (Effectively Impacts Others) and Focuses on Exalting Christ

II. (1:27-2:30) TRUE UNITY PROMOTES THE FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL (DESPITE PERSECUTION) AS WE SUBMIT TO HUMBLING OURSELVES

"striving together for the faith of the gospel"

(1:27-30) THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST SHOULD INSPIRE SPIRITUAL UNITY AND SUPERNATURAL COURAGE AS WE STRIVE TOGETHER TO FURTHER THE GOSPEL (WHILE ACCEPTING THE INEVITABILITY OF PERSECUTION)

I. (1:27a) THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST SHOULD BE THE INSPIRATION FOR OUR LIFESTYLE

II. (1:27b) THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST SHOULD INSPIRE SPIRITUAL UNITY

III. (1:28-30) THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST SHOULD INSPIRE SUPERNATURAL COURAGE WHILE ACCEPTING THE INEVITABILITY OF PERSECUTION

A. (:28) Empowered to Display Supernatural Courage

B. (:29) Predestined to Experience Persecution for Christ's Sake

C. (:30) Privileged to Experience Fellowship in Suffering

(2:1-4) THE CHURCH COMMUNITY MUST PURSUE UNITY AND HUMILITY TO ENJOY FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

I. (2:1-2) THE PURSUIT OF UNITY

A. (:1) The Encouragement for Unity

B. (:2a) The Plea for Unity

C. (:2b) The Secret to Pursuing Unity

II. (2:3-4) THE PURSUIT OF HUMILITY

A. (:3a) The Enemy of Humility to Avoid = Self-Centered Mindset

1. Selfish Ambition

2. Vanity, Empty Conceit

B. (:3b-4) The Secret to Pursuing Humility

1. (:3b) Make Others Great in Our Perspective by Valuing Them More Highly than Ourselves

2. (:4) Make Others Great in Our Pursuits by Making the Prosperity of Others a Higher Priority than Our own Prosperity

(2:5-11) THE PATTERN FOR BOTH HUMBLING OURSELVES AND BEING EXALTED BY GOD IS JESUS CHRIST

I. (2:5-8) THE PATTERN FOR HUMBLING OURSELVES IS JESUS CHRIST

A. (:5-7) Humbling in Mind – Christ Chose Service to Others Over Personal Rights (:5-7)

1. (:5) Christ Modeled Humility in His Mindset

2. (:6) Christ Relinquished Personal Rights Related to His Equality with God

3. (:7) Christ Emptied Himself to Function as a Human Servant

B. (:8) Humbling in Action -- Christ's Obedience Was Absolute and Humiliating

1. Action of Humbling Himself

2. Absolute Extent of His Obedience

3. Abject Humiliation of His Death

II. (2:9-11) THE PATTERN FOR BEING EXALTED BY GOD IS JESUS CHRIST

- A. (:9) Ultimate Exaltation – [Past Exaltation]
God has Exalted Christ to the Position of Absolute Supremacy
- B. (10-11) Universal Submission and Confession – [Future Exaltation]
The Lordship of Jesus Christ Will Ultimately Be Recognized by Universal Submission to the Glory of God
 - 1. Conduct of Worship – Universal Submission
 - 2. Confession of Lordship

(2:12-18) JOYFULLY PROGRESS IN HUMBLE SERVICE TO MAINTAIN A BLAMELESS TESTIMONY

I. (2:12-13) PROGRESS – GOD ENABLES OUR PROGRESS IN HUMBLE SERVICE

- A. (:12) Our Role in Progress in Humble Service
 - 1. Motivated by the Example of Christ
 - 2. Patterned after a Life of Consistent Obedience
 - 3. Commanded as a Matter of personal and Corporate Responsibility
 - 4. Manifested with the Attitude of a Humble Servant
- B. (:13) God's Role in Our Progress in Humble Service
 - 1. Sovereign Initiative
 - 2. Sovereign Enablement

II. (2:14-16) SHINE -- MAINTAIN A BLAMELESS TESTIMONY AS A CHILD OF GOD

- A. (:14) Good Attitude – Do Not Spoil Your Testimony or Undermine Your Unity
 - 1. By Grumblings
 - 2. By Arguments

- B. (:15a) Good Character Reflecting Your Identity as Children of God
1. Blameless -- nothing people can censure you for
 2. Pure; innocent -- unmixed; unadulterated
 3. Children of God -- ones who faithfully reflect the image and nature of their Father
 4. Without blemish; no flaws
- C. (:15b) Good Contrast – to the Evil Environment and Perverse Peer Pressure that Wage War Against a Blameless Testimony
- D. (:15c) Good Goal – Be a Shining Star for Christ
- E. (:16a) Good Stability and Mission – The Source and Power of a Blameless Testimony
- Source -- we need the content
 - Power -- we need the content in its efficacy
- F. (:16b) Good Encouragement – The Importance of Our Blameless Testimony to Our Spiritual Leaders

III. (2:17-18) **REJOICE -- FELLOWSHIP IN JOY MUST ALWAYS DOMINATE OUR FELLOWSHIP IN SACRIFICIAL SERVICE AND SUFFERING**

- A. (:17a) Fellowship in Sacrificial Service and Suffering
- B. (:17b-18) Fellowship in Joy Must Be the Dominating Tone

(2:19-30) TWO SERVANTHOOD EXAMPLES OF PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

I. (2:19-24) **THE EXAMPLE OF TIMOTHY -- A KINDRED SPIRIT**

- A. (:19-21) The Heart of an Undershepherd of Christ – A Servant to the Flock
1. A Blessing to both Paul and the Philippians
 - a. faithful in his interaction
 - b. encouraging in his outlook
 - c. accurate in his assessment
 2. A Kindred Spirit to both Paul and Christ
 - a. unique in this regard
 - b. genuinely concerned for other
 - c. totally unselfish
 - d. totally committed to Christ Jesus

B. (:22) The Track Record of Faithful Service

1. Man of Proven Worth
2. True Partner in the Gospel
3. Like a Faithful Son

C. (:23-24) The Availability to Meet Needs

1. Willing to Serve wherever needed
2. Patterned after the Model of the Apostle Paul Himself

II. (2:25-30) THE EXAMPLE OF EPAPHRODITUS -- A COURAGEOUS AND COMPASSIONATE MINISTER

A. (:25) A Minister of Great Value (based on his companionship/partnership)

1. To the Apostle Paul Himself
 - a. *"my brother"*
 - b. *"fellow worker"*
 - c. *"fellow soldier"*
2. To the Philippian Believers
 - a. *"your messenger"*
 - b. *"minister to my need"*

B. (:26-27) A Minister of Great Compassion and Mutual Love (based on his companionship/partnership)

1. (:26) With respect to the Philippians
2. (:27) With respect to the Apostle Paul

C. (:28-29a) A Minister of Great Joy (based on his companionship/partnership)

D. (:29b-30) A Minister of Great Courage and Dedication

III. (3:1-21) OUR PERSONAL PURSUIT OF CONFORMITY TO CHRIST MUST TAKE PRIORITY OVER EVERYTHING -- EVEN OUR EFFORTS AT FURTHERING THE GOSPEL

"that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings"

(3:1-6) REJOICING IN CHRIST INVOLVES TURNING OUR BACK ON EVERYTHING THAT WOULD EXALT OUR FLESH

I. (3:1) REMEMBER THE COMMAND = REJOICE IN THE LORD

- A. Point of Emphasis -- "*Finally, my brethren*"
- B. Point of the Command -- "*rejoice in the Lord*"
- C. Point to Remember -- We need to be reminded
 "*To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.*"

II. (3:2) WATCH OUT FOR JOY STEALERS = FLESH PROMOTERS (CHARLATANS)

- A. Their Character -- "*dogs*"
- B. Their Conduct -- "*evil workers*"
- C. Their Creed -- "*false circumcision*"

III. (3:3) REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE = CHRIST EXALTERS

- A. Christian Identity (vs. Imposters)
- B. Christian Identifiers
 - 1. Christian Activity
 - 2. Christian Focus
 - 3. Christian Confidence

IV. (3:4-6) EXPOSE THE FUTILITY OF CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH

- A. (:4) Poster Boy for Confidence in the Flesh
- B. (:5-6) Futility of Confidence in the Flesh
 - 1. Futility of Trusting in Religious Rites (Sacraments)
 - 2. Futility of Trusting in Religious Pedigree (Heritage)
 - 3. Futility of Trusting in Religious Rule Keeping (Orthodoxy)
 - 4. Futility of Trusting in Religious Zeal (Commitment)

(3:7-11) KNOWING CHRIST IN A TRANSFORMING WAY IS THE ONLY PURSUIT WORTHY OF ETERNITY

I. (3:7) FOCUS ON THE BOTTOM LINE = KNOWING CHRIST – THE SUPREME GOAL

- A. Counting the Necessary Cost
- B. Committing to the Supreme Goal

I. (3:8-9) KNOWING CHRIST AS THE SOURCE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS TRANSFORMS US TO LIVE A LIFE OF FAITH

- A. Committing to the Supreme Goal
 - 1. Supreme Goal = *“knowing Christ Jesus my Lord”*
 - 2. Two Supporting Goals
 - “that I might gain Christ”*
 - “and may be found in Him”*
 - 3. End Result: Approved by God as One Who Has the Righteousness of Christ
- B. Counting the Necessary Cost
 - "I count all things to be loss"*
 - "for whom I have suffered the loss of all things"*
 - "and count them but rubbish"*

II. (3:10-11) KNOWING CHRIST AS THE SOURCE OF RESURRECTION POWER TRANSFORMS US TO LIVE A LIFE OF FELLOWSHIP WITH HIS SUFFERINGS AND HIS GLORY

- A. Committing to the Supreme Goal
 - 1. Supreme Goal: *"that I may know Him"*
 - 2. Two Supporting Goals:
 - a. *"the power of His resurrection"*
 - b. *"the fellowship of His sufferings"*
 - 3. End Result
 - "in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead"*
- B. Counting the Necessary Cost -- *"being conformed to His death"*

(3:12-14) PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL IS THE ONLY WAY TO RUN THE RACE OF CONFORMITY TO JESUS CHRIST

I. THE GOAL IS CONFORMITY TO JESUS CHRIST

*"in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus"
"the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"*

THE MOTIVATION OF A LOFTY GOAL:

- A. Salvation is Just a Starting Point
- B. Christ Jesus Sets the Standard
- C. The Prize is Worthy of the Effort

II. IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE ALREADY "ARRIVED" YOU ARE OFF TARGET

*"Not that I have already obtained it"
"or have already become perfect"
"Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet"*

THE DELUSION OF PERFECTION:

- A. Some People Feel They Have Reached the Spiritual Mountaintop
- B. Some People Feel They Have Arrived
- C. The Reality is That We All Have a Long Way to Go

III. LOOKING AT THE PAST WILL SLOW YOU DOWN

"forgetting what lies behind"

THE PITFALLS OF THE PAST:

- A. Weighed down by Sins/Failures of the Past (Heb. 12:1-2) / OR
Complacent because of Past Spiritual Success
- B. Tainted by Bitterness and a Lack of Forgiveness / OR
Over Confident because of the Evidence of the Fruit of the Spirit
- C. Resigned to Powerlessness / OR
Distracted from Continuing to Rely on the Lord

IV. PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL IS THE ONLY WAY TO RUN THE RACE

*"I press on"
"but one thing I do... reaching forward to what lies ahead"
"I press on toward the goal"*

THE CHALLENGE OF PERSEVERING IN MAKING PROGRESS:

- A. Requires a Perspective of Hope

- B. Requires a Work Ethic of Diligence
- C. Requires a Large Dose of Perseverance

(3:15-21) FOLLOWING THE RIGHT EXAMPLES (THE WAY OF THE CROSS RATHER THAN THE WAY OF INDULGENCE) WILL KEEP US ON TRACK IN THE RACE TO GLORY TO JOIN OUR SAVIOR, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

I. (3:15-16) BUILD ON THE PAST WHILE PRESSING ONWARD

- A. Common Pursuit -- Be Like-Minded in Your Perspective of Pressing Onward
- B. Consistent Practice -- Be Careful to Continue to Build on the Foundation of Past Maturity.

II. (3:17-19) IMITATE ONLY THE RIGHT EXAMPLES

- A. Right Example = Sacrificial Pattern of Life
Demonstrated by the Apostle Paul (and His faithful co-workers)
- B. Wrong Example = Indulgent Pattern of Life
Demonstrated by the *"enemies of the cross of Christ"*
 1. Their Description
 2. Their Destiny
 3. Their Dependency
 4. Their Dishonor
 5. Their Delight

III. (3:20-21) FOCUS ON FUTURE GLORY

- A. Future Glory Seen in Our Heavenly Citizenship
- B. Future Glory Seen in Our Coming Savior
- C. Future Glory Seen in Our Resurrection Body

IV. (4:1-23) FELLOWSHIP AND UNITY IN FURTHERING THE GOSPEL REQUIRES DEPENDENCE ON GOD FOR PEACE OF HEART AND PROVISION OF NEEDS

"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me"

(4:1-9) 4 PRESCRIPTIONS FOR PEACE

I. (4:1-3) HOW TO EXPERIENCE PEACE IN OUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH

REQUIRES OUR TOTAL COMMITMENT TO STICK TOGETHER IN THE LORD AS WE STRIVE TOGETHER FOR THE FAITH OF THE GOSPEL (cf. 1:27)

Significance of phrase “*in the Lord*”

- A. Encouragement to Stand Firm in the Lord
 - 1. Based on our Common Pursuit
 - 2. Based on our Preciousness
(to the Apostle Paul and hopefully to one another)
- B. Exhortation to Live in Harmony in the Lord
- C. Plea for Assistance from Fellow Partners in the Gospel
- D. Final Encouragement
 - 1. Based on our history of partnership in the gospel
 - 2. Based on our common and guaranteed final destination

II. (4:4-5) HOW TO EXPERIENCE PEACE IN ALL OUR RELATIONSHIPS

- A. (:4) Prerequisite -- Requires Our Total Commitment to Always Rejoice in the Lord
- B. (:5a) Graciousness – Requires Our Total Commitment to Put up With a Lot
“*Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men*”
- C. (:5b) Accountability – Requires Our Consciousness of the Nearness of the Lord
“*The Lord is near*”

III. (4:6-7) HOW TO EXPERIENCE PEACE IN OUR HEART

- A. (:6a) Formula for Certain Defeat = Giving in to Anxiety
- B. (:6b) Formula for Certain Victory = Life of Inner Peace
 - 1. Transfer of Responsibility = Cast all your cares upon God
 - 2. Tools of Appropriation
 - a. “*by prayer*”
 - b. “*and supplication*”

3. Tone of Approach = *"with thanksgiving"*

C. (:7) Assurance of Victory When We Depend on the Amazing Resources of God

1. Key Resource Here

"the peace of God"

2. Supernatural Quality and Quantity of God's Amazing Resources

"which surpasses all comprehension"

3. Active Nature of God's Peace

"shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"

IV. (4:8-9) ALL PEACE ULTIMATELY DERIVES FROM THE GOD OF PEACE

"the God of Peace shall be with you"

2 KEYS TO TAPPING INTO GOD'S GRACE AND FAVOR

A. (:8) Thinking Right

1. Appropriate Food for Thought

a. *"whatever is true"*

b. *"whatever is honorable"*

c. *"whatever is right"*

d. *"whatever is pure"*

e. *"whatever is lovely"*

f. *"whatever is of good repute"*

2. Highest Possible Standard

a. *"if there is any excellence"*

b. *"and if anything worthy of praise"*

3. Active Focus -- *"let your mind dwell on these things"*

B. (:9) Acting Right

1. Actions Worth Imitating

"The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me"

2. Practice Makes Perfect

"practice these things"

(4:10-23) GOD CAN BE TRUSTED TO PROVIDE ALL MATERIAL NEEDS FOR THOSE WHO PARTNER IN THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL

I. (4:10-16) CONTENTMENT AND COMMENDATION EXPRESSED TO SUPPORTERS

A. Contentment -- The Lesson of Contentment Must be Learned by Christian Workers and Communicated to Supporters

1. (:11) Summary: Contentment vs. Complaining Despite the Circumstances
"Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am."
"in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret"
2. (:12a) Contentment in Hard Times
"I know how to get along with humble means"
"I have learned the secret of going hungry"
"and of suffering need"
3. (:12b) Contentment in Prosperous Times
"and I also know how to live in prosperity"
"I have learned the secret of being filled"
"both of having abundance"
4. (:13) Secret of Contentment
"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me"

B. Commendation -- Repeated Commendation Should be the Response to Repeated Generous Gifts

1. (:10) Commendation for Concern Shown As Opportunity Allows
"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."
2. (:14) The Principle of Contentment Does Not Nullify the Need for Support
"Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction."
3. (:15-16) Commendation for Repeated Faithfulness in Supporting Paul
"And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs."

II. (4:17-20) PROFIT AND PROVISION

A. Profit -- Who Ultimately Profits More from the Gift?

1. (:17) The Giver
"Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account."
2. (:18a) But the Recipient Profits as Well
"But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent"
3. (:18b) More Importantly, God is Well Pleased
"a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God."

B. Provision -- Who Ultimately Must Trust God for the Provision of Material Needs?

1. (:19) Both the Giver

*"And my God shall supply all your needs
according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."*

2. (:13) And the Recipient

Repeat: *"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."*

(:20) Doxology

"Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

(4:21-23) CLOSING GREETINGS AND BENEDICTION

A. (:21-22) Mutual Greetings

1. (:21a) Giving the Greeting

"Greet every saint in Christ Jesus"

2. (:21b-22) Receiving the Greeting

"The brethren who are with me greet you.

All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household."

B. (:23) Benediction – Focusing on the Spiritual Resource of Grace

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."

BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Dr. Daniel Wallace: **Good Overview**

<https://bible.org/seriespage/philippians-introduction-argument-and-outline>

GENERAL

Ray Stedman: The letter to the Philippians has been called not only the tenderest letter that Paul ever wrote, but also the most delightful. It brims over with expressions of praise, confidence and rejoicing, despite the fact that this is one of Paul's prison epistles, written in Rome during his first imprisonment.

J. Sidlow Baxter: An immortal interest attaches to this little Philippian epistle, for it was sent to the first Christian church ever planted in Europe. Few events of history have had deeper or wider repercussions than the unostentatious visit of Paul and his few helpers to that colonial township of long ago. The letter was written about ten years later.

Kit Johnson: I would imagine that for many people . . .Philippians is one your **favorite** Bible books if not the favorite. It's such a **warm, personal** letter. You get to see Paul's heart in Philippians more than in any other letter. It's both convicting and encouraging.

There are also many **practical helps** in Philippians. It teaches us how resolve conflict, how to serve each other, and how to discipline the mind. It also provides vital instruction regarding how to replace anxiety and depression with joy, peace, and contentment.

But what **sets** Philippians **apart** from any secular counseling resource is that it grounds all of it in a rich **theology of Christ**. Philippians **2:5–11** is the foundational NT text on the incarnation and humiliation of Christ, but it's also filled with practical insight regarding how we can follow Christ's example. And Philippians **3:1–16** combines a rich exposition of Christ's imputed righteousness with a pastoral call to live in light of this righteousness. . .

Partnership in Gospel Ministry: One of the things that **stands out** about Philippians is Paul's **passion** for the spread of the gospel. And one of the unique features of Philippians is how it describes the **Philippians' partnership** in Paul's mission. Philippians has so much to say about how we can work together to fulfill the Great Commission.

<https://www.lifepointbaptist.org/sermons/sermon/2019-07-07/introduction-to-philippians>

G. Walter Hansen: Paul's letter to the Philippians exudes a joyful spirit and warm affection. As a "thank you" note to his friends for their generosity, Paul's letter wraps them in his warm embrace. Yet, as he affirms his friends, he also responds to their problems: rivalry and gossip in the church separate leaders; hostility and skepticism in the world challenge faith in Christ; and the spirituality of impressive religious teachers promoting a bogus formula for perfect success attracts recent converts. Since followers of Jesus in the twenty-first-century experience similar problems, Paul's first-century response to the Philippians sounds strangely applicable to the

present time. Paul validates the authenticity of his message by speaking honestly about his own experience in prison and openly admitting his shortcomings in his journey of faith. His letter strengthens our faith in Christ in the face of suffering and death, encourages us to resolve our conflicts in our community, and teaches us how to embody the gospel so that the world can see and hear the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Above all, Paul's letter leads us to worship Jesus Christ as we contemplate his suffering on the cross, his exaltation as Lord, and his ultimate victory over all earthly powers.

Richard Melick: Philippians, more than any other Pauline epistle, reveals insights into Paul's situation, commitments, and background. Paul spoke candidly to his strongest supporters. He explained the situation at Rome and how his imprisonment caused mixed reactions in the church. He thanked his dear friends for their financial and prayer support and urged them to continue in the faith in spite of opposition. By sharing his thoughts and actions, Paul hoped to provide a model of the truth. This incarnational principle permeates his writing in this epistle. He found that he could even counter the false teachers by appealing to his past experiences. As a rabbi, he had lived what they taught and found it lacking.

In addition to revealing the life of Paul, the epistle contains a fresh presentation of Jesus Christ. In a lofty hymn about Jesus Christ, Paul called his readers to an examination and interpretation of the mind of Christ. Paul clearly believed his life had been transformed radically because of following Christ, and thus every portion of the epistle reveals the Lord through his servant.

AUTHORSHIP, BACKGROUND, SETTING, DATE

David Jeremiah: The writer of the letter identifies himself as the apostle Paul (see **1:1**), and early church historians were nearly unanimous in identifying him as the author. The events depicted align with accounts given in Acts, and the theology aligns with Paul's teachings in his other letters. Luke tells us that Paul established the church in Philippi after being directed by the Holy Spirit to travel to Macedonia rather than go to Asia Minor (see **Acts 16:6–10**). It was there a woman named Lydia, “*a seller of purple [cloth]*” from the nearby city of Thyatira (**verse 14**), became one of his first converts—and thus one of the first converts in all of Europe. Paul composed the letter during one of his imprisonments, either AD 50 from Corinth, AD 53–55 from Ephesus, AD 58–59 from Caesarea—or, as most scholars believe, **AD 60–62 from the city of Rome.**

The city of Philippi was located along the *Via Egnatia*, a critical road that linked Rome with its eastern provinces, and was a center of trade. Paul established the church during his second missionary journey, and the church had become instrumental in supporting his ministry efforts. It appears that when the congregation heard Paul was in prison, they became concerned and sent a man named Epaphroditus to bring money to Paul and help in his time of need. Paul thus wrote this letter to thank the Philippians for their gift and to explain the significance of his imprisonment so the believers would not lose heart. Above all, Paul wanted them to learn to rejoice regardless of the circumstances they faced. In addition, the apostle had evidently heard of tensions brewing among certain members in the church so he wanted to remind all of the believers to remain unified as a community and bear with one another in love.

Chuck Swindoll: Paul ministered at Philippi during his second missionary journey, spending about three months in the city. The ministry at Philippi marked Paul's entrance into Macedonia, which came about as a result of a vision he had in the city of Troas, just across the northeastern corner of the Aegean Sea from the port city of Neapolis and its close neighbor Philippi (**Acts 16:8–12**).

During this first stay in Philippi—he later briefly visited the city on his third missionary journey (**20:6**)—Paul brought to faith in Christ people who would form the core of the burgeoning congregation in the city. Among them were Lydia, a businesswoman who opened her home to Paul and his coworkers (**16:13–15**), and the Philippian jailer, who was converted under Paul's ministry after an earthquake miraculously broke open the prison (**16:22–34**).

Of the four Prison Epistles, Paul likely wrote Philippians last, near the end of his Roman imprisonment in AD 61 or 62. Paul sent the other three Prison Epistles—Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon—by the hand of Tychicus, as their destinations were near one another. However, the letter to the Philippians was to be delivered by Epaphroditus, who had come to Paul in Rome with financial help from the church at Philippi (**Philippians 2:25; 4:18**). But during his time in Rome, Epaphroditus took ill, which delayed his return home and, therefore, the delivery of the letter (**2:26–27**).

Joseph Hellerman: A Roman provenance is not without problems, however, and a strong case has been made in recent years for Ephesus in the mid-50s (**Hansen 19–25; Reumann 14; F. Thielman**, “Ephesus and the Literary Setting of Philippians,” in *New Testament Greek and Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Gerald Hawthorne*, ed. **Amy M. Donaldson and Timothy B. Sailors** [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 205–23), and, to a lesser degree, for Caesarea ca. AD 59–60 (**Hawthorne**, DPL 711; H-M xxxix–l). **The main objections to Rome are twofold.**

1. First, the distance between Rome and Philippi becomes problematic in light of the number of journeys between the cities that Philippians appears to assume.
2. Second, the style and contents of the epistle seem to have more in common with Galatians and 1 Corinthians than with Ephesians and Colossians, letters written during the Roman imprisonment.

The decision is a difficult one. The data relating to the distance and journeys can reasonably be interpreted to support any of the three views (see on **2:25–30**). The argument from Paul's concerns in the letter carries a bit more weight but not enough to overturn evidence to the contrary for Rome as the origin of Philippians: (1) the reference to ὅλῳ τῷ πραιτωρίῳ (“*the whole praetorian guard*” [**1:13**]); and (2) the greeting from οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας (“*those of Caesar's household*” [**4:22**]). Although both praetorians and Caesar's civil servants were found elsewhere in the empire, **1:13** and **4:22** are more naturally taken to indicate a **Roman provenance** for Philippians.

The Gospel Coalition: Genre and Tone

Today Philippians would be called a missionary support letter. Paul is writing to people who help provide the prayer support and financial assistance necessary for his ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. To fulfill his end of the partnership, Paul assures the Philippians of his prayers, updates

them on his personal circumstances, reports on the effectiveness of gospel ministry in his area, offers spiritual encouragement, and expresses heartfelt gratitude for the many ways they support his ministry. With its highly patterned lines of praise to Christ, **Philippians 2:5–11** is usually identified as one of the earliest hymns or confessions of the Christian church. The letter exhibits such stylistic techniques as aphorism, metaphor, and lyric to heighten the impact of the writing.

Philippians is unified by its joyful, almost exuberant mood (the words for “joy” or “rejoice” occur more than a dozen times); by the strong personal relationship between its author and its recipients (a relationship that is almost constantly in view, from the beginning of the letter to the end); and by the many connections Paul draws between the saving work of Jesus Christ and the servant ministry of his followers, who are called to live and die according to the pattern of the sufferings, death, resurrection, and glorious exaltation of Jesus himself.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/philippians-introduction/#genre-setting>

Max Anders: City Profile

- A historically Greek city, named after Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great.
- Located in the northern part of what is modern Greece, near the coast of the Aegean Sea.
- In New Testament times, a Roman colony (in the Roman province of Macedonia) whose citizens had Roman citizenship.
- It was a fairly large and important gold-mining town.
- Home to many pagan religious influences.

Gerald Hawthorne: The inhabitants were a people proud of their city, proud of their ties with Rome, proud to observe Roman customs and obey Roman laws, proud to be Roman citizens (cf. **Acts 16:21**). Philippi was a reproduction of Rome. ..

Women seem to have played a major role in the Philippian church, . . . not only in meeting the physical needs of the missionaries, but also in working side by side with them in the proclamation of the gospel . . . Lydia, who welcomed Paul into her home and first provided for him in those earliest days, probably should get the credit for rallying these women and for keeping alive the cordial and intimate relations that existed between Paul and the rest of the Philippian Christians.

Frank Thielman: In the mid-first century, Philippi, although not large, was a **strategically located** city with a rich heritage and distinctive culture. It spilled down a mountainside and onto a fertile, well-watered plain about ten miles inland from the important port of Neapolis. The Egnatian Way, a critical artery of commerce linking the city of Rome with its eastern provinces, passed through the city center.

Although located many miles east of Rome in a province whose common tongue was Greek, Philippi had been a Roman colony since Mark Anthony and Octavian had defeated the forces of Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar, at the site in 42 B.C. Large numbers of Philippians were descended from the soldiers who settled in the city after the battle or from those who came to the city slightly less than a decade later in the wake of Octavian’s victory over Mark Anthony. As a result Latin was the common language in Philippi, and the city proudly

maintained a Roman character. Its architecture and administration, for example, appear to have been modeled on Rome's, and worship of the emperor was an important element in the religious life of the city.

No mystery, then, shrouds Paul's reasoning for choosing Philippi as the base for his first evangelistic effort in Macedonia. He chose one of the most important cities in the region for his efforts.

Doug Jeffries:

A. Historical Background

1. Philippi

a. 386 B.C.: founded by Phillip II, father of Alexander the Great

(1) Located at a strategic military and commercial crossroads, in present-day northern Greece.

(2) Once the site of rich gold and silver mines, but they were largely exhausted by 400 B.C.

(3) Both an overland and marine trade city, Philippi was located literally where "east" (Asia) met "west" (Europe).

b. 187 B.C.: becomes a Roman colony

(1) Roman colonies were not "outposts in the wilderness," as that term is understood by most of us. They were usually located in commercially strategic areas, started with about 300 veteran military families. According to **William Barclay**:

"...these colonies were little fragments of Rome and their pride in their Roman citizenship was their dominating characteristic. The Roman language was spoken; Roman dress was worn; Roman customs were observed; their magistrates had Roman titles, and carried out the same ceremonies as were carried out in Rome itself. They were stubbornly and unalterably Roman and would never have dreamt of becoming assimilated to the people amidst whom they were set."

(2) See **Acts 16:12**

c. 31 B.C.: In one of the most decisive battles in the history of the Roman Empire, Octavian (who ultimately became Caesar Augustus) defeated the armies of Marc Anthony and Cleopatra at Actium, near Philippi.

(1) Philippi shortly thereafter attains status of "*ius Italicum*." A designation which identified it as a key Roman outpost.

"This is defined as the privilege 'by which the whole legal position of the colonists in respect to ownership, transfer of land, payment of taxes, local administration, and law, became the same as if they were on Italian soil; as, in fact, by a legal fiction, they were.'"

(Ralph Martin: Philippians, quoting K. Lake and H.J. Cadbury: The Beginnings of Christianity)

(2) This combination of historical factors – A Greco-Roman culture dominated by fierce loyalty to Rome and a place where a Roman citizen enjoyed all the privileges of that status – made Philippi, in the Providence of God, a fertile seedbed for the planting of the Gospel.

2. Paul

- a. Began life as Saul, born in Tarsus, a prosperous commercial center in what is now southern Turkey, close to the Syrian border, in the first century A.D.
- b. He was named after Israel's first king, and was born into his tribe, Benjamin. We are certain that his family was of the upper class, since he was not only a citizen of Tarsus (**Acts 21:39**), but also a citizen of Rome (**Acts 22:27-28**), a status available only to those who owned land in Italy or a colony of Italy.
- c. Saul studied Jewish law in Jerusalem under the renowned rabbi and Pharisee Gamaliel (**Acts 22:3, Galatians 1:14**), and he, too, became a Pharisee (**Philippians 3:5**), a legendary one, in fact.

(1) Pharisee means "*separated one*." They believed that God had set them apart as a sect to live literally by every detail of the Torah (the "Law," the teachings of Moses)

(2) The Pharisees expected a Messiah, one who would deliver them from foreign occupation, reestablish the greatness of Israel as a kingdom, and rule with justice. However, they utterly rejected Jesus' Messianic claims, largely because he did not fit their "royal" Messianic paradigm and because he interpreted the Law differently.

(3) The Pharisees took it largely upon themselves to oppose Jesus publicly, and to persecute Christians after His crucifixion. Saul helped to lead the fight against the proclaimers of Christ in Jerusalem (**Acts 7:58-8:3; Galatians 1:13**), then obtained permission to persecute the new church in Damascus.

(4) It was on the road to Damascus, of course, that Saul was confronted by the risen Christ Himself in a literally blinding encounter (**Acts 9:1-19**). Saul learned that day that he was, in fact, persecuting the very God he professed to worship.

(5) After ten years or so in the Roman province of Cilicia and Syria (**Galatians 1:21**) Paul was called to Antioch by a believer named Barnabas. After a while the church there commissioned the two men as evangelists to Cyprus and Galatia, and they succeeded in planting several churches in the region during that first missionary journey. So many Gentiles were becoming Christians that the church at Jerusalem sent for Paul and Barnabas to clarify exactly what God expected of these non-Jewish converts. Paul's view of the Gospel was largely endorsed by the council at Jerusalem, but it was as a result of this decision that he would suffer life-long opposition by those he came to call "Judaizers."

(6) In Jerusalem Paul and Barnabas had a severe falling-out over the issue of the trustworthiness of Barnabas' nephew, John Mark. He began his second missionary journey with a new partner, Silas. It was on this trip that Paul, in response to a dramatic "night vision," decided to toil in Macedonia.

3. Paul and the church at Philippi

a. **Acts 16:6-40**

(1) Apparently Philippi contained too few Jewish families even to have a synagogue, for which 10 Jewish adult men were required

(2) Yet **v.13** reveals the presence of a Jewish community before the coming of the Christian missionaries. A group of women met regularly outside of town, by the river, for prayer.

(3) **V.13-14** record the details of the first Christian convert in Europe: a merchant woman named Lydia. In fact, her entire family entered the family of God through faith in Christ, and the church in Philippi began in their home.

(4) It didn't take Paul very long to get himself into trouble! **V.16-24** record the story of how his powerful ministry touched the very pocketbooks of a group of masters who "hired out" a young girl who was possessed by a spirit through whom she could predict the future. After Paul exorcised the demon, he and Silas were placed under arrest, beaten, and thrown into prison.

(5) **V.25-34** record the miraculous conversion of Paul and Silas' jailor, along with his entire family.

(6) I wonder what might be the perfect situation in which a new church could get started, nurtured and matured? We get a fascinating insight in **v. 35-40** of how God, at least in the case of the brand new church at Philippi, orchestrated events to establish the atmosphere He desired for their growth and development.

(7) It is believed by many Bible scholars that Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, stayed on at Philippi after Paul and Silas left. The chief basis for this assumption is the fact that the "we" narrative style of Acts ends abruptly in **16:17** and does not begin again until **Acts 20:5** – again in Philippi – where Luke makes reference to Paul's "*waiting for us*" before making his final visit to Jerusalem.

- b. The church of Philippi became one of Paul's most faithful and substantial supporters.

4. Some particulars about the Epistle to the Philippians

- a. It is clearly a prison epistle
- b. Unlike most of his epistles, Paul's authorship of the letter has gone virtually unchallenged.
- c. There is some scholastic argument over whether Philippians is, in fact, a single letter or a composite of two separate ones.
- d. The theme of this letter? It is known by many as "**The Epistle of Joy.**" Is this possible? A letter full of JOY written from prison by a man facing a most uncertain future?

Gordon Fee: We may assume Philippians to have been occasioned by the following:

- (1) Paul's imprisonment, to which the Philippians have responded with a gift by way of Epaphroditus, thus renewing their commitment to "friendship" with Paul in the matter of "*giving and receiving.*"
- (2) That Epaphroditus has apparently told him about the situation back home, which involved opposition and suffering at the hands of their pagan neighbors and some internal unrest, especially between two of the women who were probably leaders of some kind.

Paul's response takes the basic "form" of a **letter of friendship**, which in this case weaves in his exhortations regarding their present situation at the chronologically appropriate places, saving his acknowledgment of their gift until the end, so that it will not get lost in the midst of the exhortations.

Nijay Gupta: Characteristics of the Church at Philippi

1. The Philippians were **facing local persecution**. In **Phil 1:28–29**, Paul refers to their suffering for the sake of the gospel, and the challenge posed by "*enemies.*" We are not given details, but one can imagine that the Christians' ties to this new religion—and especially their rejection of local and ancestral gods—did not go over well with family, friends, and neighbors. People may have refused to do business with them. Some may have run into trouble with the authorities, as Paul and Silas did (but perhaps without the benefits of claiming Roman citizenship). But a bigger problem would have been the shame associated with society rejecting

them and treating them as pariahs. If they could no longer aspire to public honor, what hope did they have in life?

2. The Philippians **worried about Epaphroditus**. He was sent from them to Paul to aid him in prison. They sent him with a gift (perhaps of food, medical supplies, and clothing). But we know that Epaphroditus ran into problems and almost died. They heard about this and feared for his life (see **2:19–30**).

3. The **apostle was in prison**. Obviously the Philippians knew Paul was in prison. No doubt when he was in Philippi, they witnessed amazing works of God, and many experienced dramatic conversions (like Lydia and the jailer). But then their fearless leader (Paul) ended up in prison facing a potentially dire fate. This may have caused them to doubt, not only the future of his ministry, but also the joy of the gospel.

4. There were **troubles in the church**. We can surmise that there was some disunity or disharmony in the church. It was not at the level of a major split, but enough of an issue such that Paul had to call Euodia and Syntyche (two women leaders in the church) to come together in agreement and to set aside their differences (**4:2–3**).

5. **Were there false teachers?** There is some evidence that false teaching was a danger to this community. Paul warns them about “*evil workers*” selling bad theology (**Phil 3:2**). It is unclear whether Paul was concerned about a present threat, a future one, or simply false teachers in general.

6. Given that most of the believers in Philippi were living at the subsistence level (e.g., hand to mouth), **money troubles** were probably common. But Paul mentions a delay in their gift-giving (**4:10**), which may have indicated a period of financial difficulty.

Homer Kent: Re **Occasion and Purpose** -- The Philippian church sent Epaphroditus to Paul with a gift from the congregation (**4:18**) and with instructions to minister to his needs through personal service (**2:25**). He also must have brought news of the progress and problems of the church. In the performance of his responsibilities, Epaphroditus became gravely ill, and the Philippians heard about it. For some reason, this latter circumstance greatly distressed Epaphroditus. Was he embarrassed because he felt he had disappointed the church? Or was he aware that his condition had been misinterpreted and criticized? Paul's request that the church receive Epaphroditus with all joy and that they hold him in high regard (**2:29**) implies that some misunderstanding had occurred.

But Epaphroditus recovered and was ready to return home. This furnished the occasion for writing the Epistle. Paul wanted the church at Philippi to understand clearly that Epaphroditus had been a real fellow soldier in the Lord's work (**2:25**), that his illness had been extremely serious (**2:27–30**), and that he was worthy of a hero's welcome (**2:29**).

The mention of the Philippians' gift (**4:10–20**) should not be regarded as Paul's first acknowledgment of their help. Too much time had elapsed since Epaphroditus's arrival for this to be a reasonable inference, nor would this mention have been delayed to the end if it had been

the occasion for Paul's writing the Epistle. Because of the several contacts between Philippi and Rome before this time, Paul had undoubtedly sent his initial thanks promptly. We may adequately account for the additional mention of the gift in this Epistle as the apostle's grateful recollection of a very generous contribution.

Other factors of a secondary nature may also have prompted the Epistle, such as Timothy's approaching visit (**2:19**), Paul's own hope of visiting the church (**2:24**), and the problem of the two women at Philippi (**4:2**).

Of all the letters Paul wrote to churches, this one to the Philippians stands out as being the most personal. No sharp rebukes of the congregation mar its joyful spirit: no disturbing problems threaten the progress of the church. The warnings are of a cautionary and preventive nature that are always in order. The frequent emphasis on Christ explains the underlying relationship of Paul to his readers. The names Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus, Lord Jesus Christ, Lord Jesus, Jesus, Christ, Lord, and Savior, occur 51 times in the 104 verses of the Epistle.

Grant Osborne: Major debate over the identity of those who were causing trouble among the Philippian believers. While a few interpreters have tried to isolate a single group of opponents, that scenario is unlikely; it is best to recognize at least three and perhaps four separate groups of opponents mentioned in the letter.

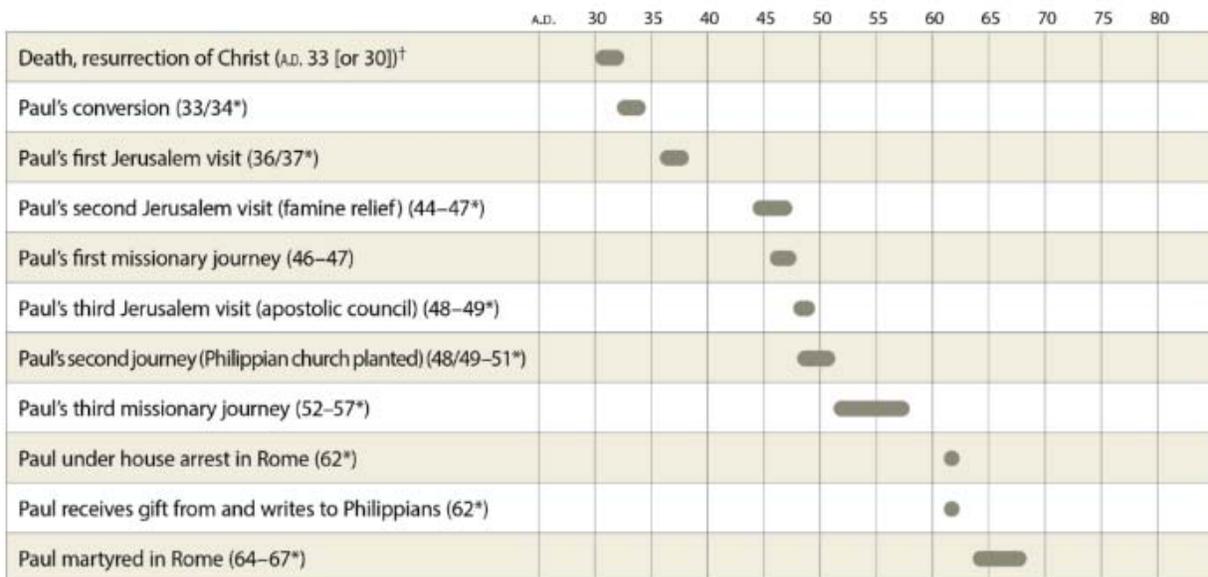
1. The first would be the preachers who were using their opportunity to promote the gospel to oppose Paul (**1:15–17**). They were definitely believers, for Paul rejoiced in them even though they were “*stir[ring] up trouble*” for him, because they were still preaching Christ faithfully.
2. The second group includes Roman citizens and unbelievers who were persecuting the saints and frightening many (**1:27–30**). They cannot have been the same as any of the other groups because the others were problematic from inside the church, while the source of this trouble lay outside.
3. The third group is the Judaizers, who believed that a Gentile had to convert to Judaism and observe the Mosaic law when coming to Christ (**3:2–3**; see also **Galatians**).
4. The potential fourth group, mentioned at **3:18–19**, is more difficult to identify. For most of my teaching career I held that there was a single group behind **3:2–3** and **3:18–19** (so three groups total), but as I re-examined the issue in writing this commentary I have changed my mind.

When taken at face value, Paul's remarks in **3:19** (“*their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame*”) do not seem to fit a Jewish orientation for these opponents. Nevertheless, some interpreters—including myself, until recently—believe the Judaizers are still Paul's target here, based on reading **verse 19** with a heavy dose of irony. In **verse 2**, Paul calls the Judaizers “*dogs*”; this epithet was used by Jews to label Gentiles unclean, but Paul flips it around, implying that the Judaizers were in fact the unclean ones because they had replaced the cross with circumcision as the basis of salvation. Paul also

calls the Judaizers “*mutulators*,” a sarcastic twist on their agenda of circumcising Gentile Christians. In light of these remarks in **verse 2** (so the theory goes), Paul could be doing something similar in **verse 19**, referring with irony to Jewish food laws (“*their god is their stomach*”) and circumcision (“*their glory is in their shame*”).

While this reading remains viable for some interpreters, I now regard it as too much of a stretch. As we will see in the commentary, the imagery in **3:18–19** seems to be referring directly to **Gentiles** (rather than indirectly to Jews), making it more plausible that Paul is describing a group different from the Judaizers. The data suggest a group of Gentile converts who were proto-gnostics following a libertine, sensual lifestyle (similar to the false teachers in **1 John**). So I find it probable that **verses 2–3** refer to Judaizers and **verses 18–19** to Gentile libertines, making four sets of opponents in all.

ESV Study Bible: Important Dates



* denotes approximate date; / signifies either/or; † see *The Date of Jesus' Crucifixion*, pp. 1809–1810

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/philippians-introduction/#author-date>

PURPOSE OF WRITING

David Malick: His **Big Idea** for the book – As one who is himself suffering for the gospel Paul honors the Philippians for their participation with him in his sufferings, and urges them to humble themselves for the sake of one another against the divisive threats of inner disputes and external false teachers so that they might continue in their gospel ministry and one day be exalted by the Lord.

Chuck Swindoll: Paul’s joy at the mere thought of the Philippian church is undeniable in the letter, and it’s that same joy that he wanted the recipients to possess as well. To lead the Philippians to this truth, Paul took them directly to Jesus, teaching them that a community of

believers living in harmony with one another comes only through mutual humility modeled after the Savior. Paul wrote that he poured out his life as an offering for the sake of Christ, leading Paul to find great joy and contentment in Christ's service. His letter to the Philippians showed them that by centering their lives on Christ, they, too, might live in true joy.

John MacArthur: Paul had several purposes in composing this epistle.

1. First, he wanted to express in writing his thanks for the Philippians' gift (4:10–18).
2. Second, he wanted the Philippians to know why he decided to return Epaphroditus to them, so they would not think his service to Paul had been unsatisfactory (2:25, 26).
3. Third, he wanted to inform them about his circumstances at Rome (1:12–26).
4. Fourth, he wrote to exhort them to unity (2:1, 2; 4:2).
5. Finally, he wrote to warn them against false teachers (3:1 – 4:1).

G. Walter Hansen: Ten expressions of friendship language in Philippians run parallel to common motifs in Hellenistic letters and essays on friendship.

1. Affection: Letters of friendship repeatedly express warm affection: “*I long for you.*” “*I love you.*” Paul intensifies his expression of affection for the Philippians by pointing to the divine source and power of his affection: “*I long for you with the affection of Christ Jesus*” (1:8).

2. Partnership (*koinōnia*): Friendship is the basis of true partnership. “All friendship,” says **Aristotle**, “involves *koinōnia*.” Partnership (*koinōnia*) is a major theme in Philippians (1:5, 7; 2:1, 3:10; 4:15). In Paul's development of the meaning of partnership he moves from a *koinōnia* in the gospel (1:5) to the *koinōnia* of the Spirit (2:1) to the *koinōnia* in the sufferings of Christ (3:10).

3. Unity of soul and spirit: Paul's appeal to be of one soul (1:27), fellow soul (2:2), equal soul (2:20), and one spirit (1:27) represents the desire in Greco-Roman culture for friends to be of one soul. **Aristotle** repeats the proverbs of his day on this subject: “Friends have one soul between them; friends' goods are common property; friendship is equality.” In Paul's theology, unity of soul and spirit are formed and maintained in Christ.

4. Like-mindedness: Paul's letter sounds similar to the teaching of the Stoics on friendship when he urges the Philippian Christians to be “*like-minded*” and “*of the same mind*” (2:2; 4:2). According to **Cicero**, “There is no surer bond of friendship than the sympathetic union of thought and inclination.” The “whole essence of friendship” is the “most complete agreement in policy, in pursuits and in opinions.” Paul urges the Philippians to be like-minded by having “*the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had*” (2:5).

5. Yokefellow: When Paul calls upon his “*true companion*” (4:3: true yokefellow; *gnēsie syzyge*) to help the women who are quarreling to be reconciled, he is drawing on a common appellation used for famous pairs of friends in Greco-Roman literature. The metaphor of the “yoke of friendship” was used by **Plutarch** to depict the relationship between pairs of friends such as Theseus and Perithous, Achilles and Patoclus, Orestes and Pylades, Phintias and Damon, and Epameinondas and Pelopidas. **Euripides** employed the metaphor “yokefellow” to depict the

friendship between Orestes and Pylades. Paul's yokefellow and co-workers are those who contended with him in the cause of the gospel (4:3).

6. Giving and receiving: Paul commends the Philippian community for the distinction of being the only church who shared with him in "*the matter of giving and receiving*" (4:15). Aristotle explains the ethics of "giving and getting" in the context of his treatise on friendship: "In regard to giving and getting money, the observance of the mean is liberality; the excess and deficiency are prodigality and meanness, but the prodigal man and mean man exceed and fall short in opposite ways of one another: the prodigal exceeds in giving but is deficient in getting, whereas the mean man exceeds in getting and is deficient in getting."

7. Common struggles and joys: Friends share common struggles and common enemies. Paul reminds the Philippians of their common struggle: "*you are going through the same struggle that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have*" (1:30). And Paul warns against "*enemies of the cross*" (3:18). Plutarch expresses the view that friends share the same struggles and enemies: "Enmities follow close upon friendships, and interwoven with them, inasmuch as it is impossible for a friend not to share his friend's wrongs or disrepute or disfavor." Friends also share common joys. Paul tells his friends in Philippi, "*I rejoice, and I share my joy with all of you. In the same way, you also should rejoice and share your joy with me*" (2:17-18; my trans.). Dio Chrysostom expresses this view in his maxim: "Friends share one's joys while enemies gloat over one's misfortunes."

8. Absence/presence: Friendship letters often refer to personal presence and absence. At strategic points in his exhortations to the Philippians, Paul comments on his absence and promises that he will soon be present (1:27; 2:12, 24).

9. Virtue friendship: Aristotle asserts that "the perfect form of friendship is that between the good, those who resemble each other in virtue." Cicero also insists that virtue is the basis of true friendship: "Let this be ordained as the first law of friendship: ask of friends only what is honorable; do for friends only what is honorable." Aristotle describes two types of inferior friendship as the friendship of utility and the friendship of pleasure. In these types of friendship, friends do not love each other for what they are in themselves but for some useful benefit or pleasure to be gained through the friendship. "Friendships of this kind are easily broken off, in the event of the parties themselves changing, for if no longer pleasant or useful to each other, they cease to love each other."

Paul identifies his friendship with the Philippians as a virtue friendship by directing them to think about virtue (4:8). He corrects any misconception that he had utilitarian motives for his friendship with the Philippians by insisting that he had not written because he was in need, for he had learned to be content (4:11). Friendship based on need is viewed negatively in ancient discussions of friendships. Genuine friendship can be given and experienced only by one who is self-sufficient and content. "It is far from being true that friendship is cultivated because of need; rather it is cultivated by those who are abundantly blessed with wealth and power and especially virtue, which is man's best defense; by those least in need of another's help; and by those most generous and most given to acts of kindness." Paul's self-sufficiency was

empowered by God (4:13). And he led the Philippians to experience the same dependence on God to meet their needs (4:19).

10. Moral paradigm: Friendship is built on a moral paradigm of **virtue**. By calling his readers to think about the list of virtues in 4:8, Paul elevates his friendship with the Philippians to the level of a virtue friendship. But thinking about a list of virtues is not the ultimate goal of friendship. Paul connects the command to think with the command to practice (4:9). The virtues to be practiced are exemplified in the paradigm presented by Paul's message and life. The ultimate paradigm to guide true friendship is the paradigm of Christ's "all-surpassing act of selfless love." The self-emptying, self-humbling of Christ is replicated in Paul's own person story (3:3-14). His life serves as an example to follow (3:17).

Ryan Kelly: Philippians is not just a letter of thanks and updates. Ever the teacher, Paul also writes to encourage their faith and growth. More specifically:

- to spur them on to progress in their Christian growth (2:12; 3:12-17)
- to warn of those who proclaim another gospel (3:2, 18-19)
- to reiterate the true gospel and encourage them to hold tightly to it (3:3-11)
- to encourage their unity and confront any lack of unity (2:1-4; 4:2-3)
- to call them to joy and thankfulness and peace (2:18; 3:1; 4:4-7)
- to plead with them to keep their eyes on Christ and the hope of heaven (3:2-21)

Steven Lawson: Why should the book of Philippians be so important to your spiritual life? Here are seven reasons.

1. First, this is an **intensely personal book**. The relationship that the apostle Paul had developed with the believers in Philippi was a close bond marked by a deep affection. Paul was the founding pastor of this church, and had already invested much of his life in them. He warmly refers to them as "*my joy and crown*" (4:1). This book reveals the depth of authentic Christian fellowship between believers. This kind of love is what I sought to convey to my flock. Likewise, this is what you need to experience in your spiritual life. Your walk with the Lord will thrive to the extent that you are a part of the kind of community that the Philippian church and their founding pastor enjoyed together.
2. Second, the book of Philippians is a **joy-producing book**. It was written by Paul to encourage the hearts of believers and urge them to rejoice in the Lord (2:18; 3:1; 4:4). Joy is a spiritual grace that we all need to experience in our Christian lives. We live in a world of stress and anxiety that all too easily and subtly can steal the peace of God from our hearts. We need an abundant, overflowing joy to flood our souls. The book of Philippians is written for that very purpose—to point us to that joy. Surely, there is not a one of us who does not need to know more of the supernatural joy of the Lord in our lives.
3. Third, the book of Philippians is a **gospel-focused book**. There is a repeated emphasis upon the good news of salvation that is in God's Son, Jesus Christ (1:5, 7, 12, 16, 27; 2:22; 4:3, 15). Paul places great stress upon the saving message of the gospel, as well as the need for us to live it out in our daily lives. This is what Paul continuously mentioned

in order to encourage the believers in Philippi. They needed a gospel focus. We are no different.

4. Fourth, the book of Philippians is a **doctrinally-rich book**. It is an apostolic letter that contains great theological truth. Found in this book is the signature passage on the self-emptying of Christ in his incarnation. Here Paul teaches how the Son of God entered into this world to take upon himself human flesh and die for sins (**2:6-8**). Further, we see the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God the Father (**2:9-11**). We discover the eternal security of the believer (**1:6**). The list could go on. These are truths that must be ever at the forefront of the mind of each believer, including you and me, and they are doctrines taught in the letter to the Philippians.

5. Fifth, the book of Philippians is a **prayer-inclining book**. From the opening of this book, the apostle Paul expresses his sincere prayers offered on behalf of the Philippians (**1:3-11**). In the last chapter of this letter, Paul reminds the believers once again of the need to cast their burdens upon the Lord in order to experience his peace (**4:6-7**). In like manner, we should read the book of Philippians and allow it to deepen our own prayer life. Not a one of us is without need of further instruction and encouragement in regards to coming before the Lord in fervent, frequent, believing prayer.

6. Sixth, the book of Philippians is a **holiness-growing book**. This letter teaches us much about how to live the Christian life. Paul will tell us that we bear great responsibility to work out our salvation in fear and trembling (**2:12-13**). At the same time, he will instruct us that it is God who is at work within us for his good pleasure. We will find ourselves challenged to forget what lies behind, and press forward to the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. This teaching on spiritual growth is applicable for the life of every Christian. Expect to grow in a desire for holiness and a life of holiness as we walk through this letter.

7. Seventh, the book of Philippians is an **eternity-gazing book**. Here we are given the eternal perspective we need as we are faced with life's difficulties (**3:20-21**). In the opening chapter, Paul expresses his confidence that the work of God is going forward despite the fact that there are other believers in Rome jealous of his ministry (**1:12-14**). This letter reminds us that we must rejoice whenever the gospel is advancing, regardless of the personal affliction we might have to suffer. Based on Paul's tone as he writes this letter, we would never guess that he is actually writing from a prison cell. The apostle personally models how to live triumphantly and joyfully in the midst of difficult circumstances.

MAJOR THEMES AND THEOLOGY

John MacArthur: There is . . . little direct theological instruction, also with one momentous exception. The magnificent passage describing Christ's humiliation and exaltation (**2:5-11**) contains some of the most profound and crucial teaching on the Lord Jesus Christ in all the

Bible. The major theme of pursuing Christlikeness, as the most defining element of spiritual growth and the one passion of Paul in his own life, is presented in **3:12–14**.

YMI.today:

The primary theme of the letter is to encourage the Philippians to live as citizens of a heavenly city, growing in their commitment to serve God and one another. Paul points them towards Jesus as the supreme example of this way of life—and urges them to imitate Paul himself, Timothy and Epaphroditus as they follow in Jesus’ footsteps.

This letter reminds believers that true joy and righteousness comes from Jesus Christ alone, and warns them against false teaching and temptations to seek their joy and righteousness from other places. It also encourages believers to remain joyful in affliction, united in service, and to stand firm in Christ.

<https://ymi.today/ymi-reading-philippians/introduction-to-philippians/>

Brian Racer: HOW TO HAVE JOY IN LIFE’S MOST DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

Theme: THE PURSUIT OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST AND HIS POWER PRODUCES A HUMILITY AND UNITY THAT BRINGS GREAT JOY

Purpose: To praise and encourage the Philippians for their progress and example and to warn of the dangers that could erode the strength and purpose of their church

Tone: Tender, personal, optimistic, encouraging; You would love to be the church receiving this letter

Paul is concerned with the legacy of his ministry; what exactly will he leave behind? What will have been the ultimate impact of his ministry? Letter sent back with Epaphroditus; one of the servant leaders of the church (deacon or elder?); has the freedom to be sent out and to travel all the way to Rome to visit Paul personally and give him a significant financial gift; he has been delayed in his return because he became deathly ill; the Philippian believers had concern as to why he is not back yet

Communicates Hopes and Warnings that Apostle Paul has for this church at Philippi; Once we are not there to monitor how things go on ... we have some degree of uncertainty as to how it will go

Not crises ... but Paul wants them to give attention to these things before it would come to that; doesn’t want his ministry there to be eroded away

James Gray: **Keyword, Rejoice (3:1).**

1. Rejoice in the fellowship of the saints (**1:3-11**).
2. Rejoice over afflictions that turn out for the furtherance of the Gospel (**1:12-30**).
- 3 Rejoice in the ministry for the saints (**2:1-18**).
4. Rejoice in the fellowship of such faithful saints as Timothy and Epaphroditus (**2:19 - 3:1**).
5. Rejoice that our hopes are in JESUS and not in the deeds of the law and the flesh (**3:2-16**).

6. Rejoice that our citizenship is in Heaven rather than on earth and in fleshly indulgences (3:17- 4:1).
7. Rejoice even over such Christians as Euodias and Syntyche who, though at strife, have the root of the matter in them, whose names are written in the book of life (4:2, 3).
8. Rejoice always and over all things (4:4-9).
9. Rejoice in the bounties of GOD's people to those in need as was Paul (4:10-20).

Esv.org: Universal Themes in Philippians:

Selflessness rooted in the gospel. Throughout Philippians Paul exhorts his readers to give of themselves gladly for the sake of Christ and others. Paul himself says that he is content even with imprisonment as long as Christ is lifted up (Phil. 1:12–18). He tells the Philippians that he will be glad to be “poured out as a drink offering” if it will strengthen their faith (2:17). He reminds them of the self-giving love of Timothy (2:20) and Epaphroditus (2:30). And he exhorts the Philippians themselves to count others more significant than themselves and to look to others’ concerns (2:3–4). In all of this it is the gospel that fuels such self-giving. For Christ gave of himself for our sake (2:6–11; 3:10). In this self-giving love the global church has its fundamental motivation to love and serve our neighbors, recognizing how God in Christ has loved and served us.

Hard work for God’s sake. Paul says he is straining forward and pressing on in the upward call of God in Christ (Phil. 3:12–14), calling on the Philippians to join him in this strenuous effort (3:17) and to “work out” their salvation (2:12). The apostle reminds them of the hard work of Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:22, 25, 30). While the central message of the Bible for God’s people is his great love for them in Christ—love that has eliminated the need for anyone to work his way into God’s favor—this does not mean Christians around the world are encouraged to be passive or apathetic. God’s love and grace in the gospel is the very thing that fuels heartfelt Christian activity and service (see 2:13; 3:8–9).

The crucial place of joy in the Christian life. Throughout Philippians Paul describes the Christian life as one of joy (Phil. 1:4, 25; 2:2, 29; 4:1) and encourages his readers to rejoice (3:1; 4:4). This is the great call and the great need of the Christian church today. Whatever our circumstances, whether we are rich or poor, comfortable or afflicted, we are called to rejoice in God (4:10–13). The gospel will multiply not as Christians around the world display superior intellect, or material blessing, or social influence. The gospel will grow as we display joy, a joy that is unconquerable whatever the circumstances.

<https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/global-message-of-philippians/>

The Gospel Coalition: Themes

1. Christians need to keep making progress in their lives.
Philippians 1:12, 25; 3:12–16
2. A proper spiritual outlook is critical for progress in the faith.
Philippians 1:5–11; 2:1–11; 3:7, 15; 4:7–9
3. Christ is the supreme example of loving and faithful service to God, and mature Christians can also serve as role models in this regard.

Philippians 1:12–26; 2:5–11, 19–30; 3:3–17; 4:9

4. Suffering will come, but through faith it can be met with joy.

Philippians 1:12–26; 2:14–15; 4:4, 11–13, 19

5. Prayer is crucial for maintaining a joyful Christian life.

Philippians 1:3–11; 4:5–7

6. The gospel is not individualistic: Christians are to share in rich fellowship with one another, and to be united together in service to promote the gospel.

Philippians 1:4, 7, 24–27; 2:1–4, 19–30; 4:2–4, 14

7. The old covenant and observance of the law cannot provide the necessary right standing with God. Believers can be saved only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:2–10

8. Jesus is fully God and fully man. Because of his suffering on the cross, he is now exalted as Lord and Christ.

Philippians 2:5–11

STRUCTURE

Overview Outline (taken from **Talk Through the Bible** notes)

1:1-4	Salutation
1:5-11	Rejoicing in Harmony
1:12-26	Rejoicing in Hardship
1:27-2:18	Rejoicing in Humility
2:19-2:30	Rejoicing in Helpers
3:1-4:1	Rejoicing in Heaven
4:2-9	Rejoicing in Holiness
4:10-20	Rejoicing in Help
4:21-23	Greetings and Benediction

Ray Stedman: The four chapters present Christ in four different aspects. The themes are caught up for us in four key verses that appear in these chapters.

Chap. 1 – Christ Our Life

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

Chap. 2 – Christ Our Example

Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 2:5 RSV)

Chap. 3 – Christ Our Confidence (Our Motivator)

...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection... (Philippians 3:10a RSV)

Chap. 4 – Christ Our Strength

I can do all things in him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13 RSV)

James Van Dyne: OUTLINE

I. Introductory greeting: Paul writes to the entire church at Philippi. 1:1-3

- A. Paul and Timothy write to the church as servants. **1:1**
- B. Paul and Timothy greet the church with its elders and deacons. **1:2**
- C. Paul and Timothy wish for the church grace and peace. **1:3**

II. Prologue: Paul relates his own experience for the church's encouragement. 1:4-26

- A. Paul prays for the church. **1:4-11**
 - 1. Paul thanks God for the Philippians' fellowship in the gospel. **1:4-8**
 - a. They had helped him from the beginning. **1:4-5**
 - b. They will be helped by God in the future. **1:6**
 - c. They are fellow partakers of grace. **1:7-8**
 - 2. Paul petitions God for the Philippians' spiritual progress. **1:9-11**
 - a. He prays for them to abound in love. **1:9**
 - b. He prays for them to continue in sincere faith. **1:10**
 - c. He prays for them to manifest the righteousness of Christ. **1:11**
- B. Paul comforts the church with respect to his condition. **1:12-26**
 - 1. His captivity has furthered the proclamation of the gospel. **1:12-18**
 - a. His captivity has been seen as for the cause of Christ. **1:12-13**
 - b. His captivity has encouraged Christians to testify of Christ. **1:14**
 - c. His captivity has furthered the gospel despite the hostile intents of some. **1:15-18**
 - 2. His captivity will soon end resulting in their benefit. **1:19-26**
 - a. He is confident that his testimony will remain effective. **1:19-20**
 - b. He is content to either remain with them or be with the Lord. **1:21-23**
 - c. He is convinced that he will remain for their benefit. **1:24-26**

III. Body: Paul commends conduct worthy of their heavenly citizenship. 1:27 – 4:1

- A. Theme statement: In light of anticipated suffering, the believers ought to be united in diligence in manifesting conduct worthy of their true citizenship. **1:27-30**
 - 1. Their citizenship ought to be worthy of the gospel. **1:27**
 - 2. They must not be terrified of their adversaries. **1:28**
 - 3. They have been granted the privilege of suffering for Christ. **1:29-30**
- B. Development: The believer has sufficient resource and example to live as a citizen worthy of heaven. **2:1 – 3:16**
 - 1. Paul communicates the expectation of heavenly citizenship. **2:1-4**
 - a. The attitude expected is that of a mutual concern. **2:1-2**
 - 1) The basis is the work of God. **2:1**
 - 2) The expectation is like-minded love. **2:2**
 - b. The action expected is humility of mind. **2:3-4**
 - 1) It esteems others as better than self. **2:3**

- 2) It cares for the interests of others before self. **2:4**
 2. Paul commends the standard par excellence of heavenly citizenship, Jesus Christ. **2:5-11**
 - a. They are commanded to adopt the mind of Christ. **2:5**
 - b. They are confronted with the humility of Christ. **2:6-8**
 - c. They are comforted with the exaltation of Christ. **2:9-11**
 3. Paul communicates the implications of heavenly citizenship. **2:12-18**
 - a. They are to give attention to their own spiritual development. **2:12-13**
 - b. They are to reflect the character of God. **2:14-15**
 - 1) They are not to grumble. **2:14**
 - 2) They are to shine as lights in the world. **2:15**
 - 3) They are to hold forth the word of life to the world. **2:16-18**
 4. Paul commends examples of heavenly citizenship. **2:19 – 3:16**
 - a. Timothy exemplified the humility of Christ through his genuine care for the Philippians. **2:19-24**
 - 1) He sought the welfare of the church. **2:19-21**
 - 2) He served with Paul in an exemplary fashion. **2:22-24**
 - b. Epaphroditus exemplified the humility of Christ through his distress over the church's anxiety on his behalf. **2:25-30**
 - 1) He was a committed servant. **2:25**
 - 2) He was a selfless servant. **2:26-30**
 - c. Paul exemplified the humility of Christ through a life of sacrificial devotion to Jesus Christ. **3:1-16**
 - 1) Paul was able to rejoice in his position regardless of the opposition. **3:1-3**
 - 2) Paul had forsaken all earthly privilege for Christ. **3:4-11**
 - 3) Paul was pressing on toward the goal of Christ. **3:12-14**
 - 4) Paul commends the same goal to the readers. **3:15-16**
- C. Application: Walk as a worthy citizen. **3:17 – 4:1**
1. Paul commands them to live as he had been living. **3:17**
 2. Paul warns them of those who live for earthly things. **3:18-19**
 3. Paul reminds them that they are heavenly citizens. **3:20-21**
 - a. The Savior will appear from heaven. **3:20**
 - b. The Savior will transform the earthly body. **3:21**
 4. Paul exhorts them to stand fast. **4:1**

IV. Epilogue: Paul exhorts and thanks the church in specific ways. 4:2-20

- A. Paul exhorts the church in various ways. **4:2-9**
 1. Unity is implored. **4:2-3**
 2. Rejoicing is commended. **4:4**
 3. Gentleness is expected. **4:5**
 4. Anxiety is to be replaced by the peace of God through prayer. **4:6-7**
 5. Meditation on the good will result in the presence of the God of peace. **4:8-9**
- B. Paul thanks the church for their material generosity. **4:10-20**
 1. Paul expresses thanks for their gift though he had not been feeling needful. **4:10-14**
 2. Paul commends them for giving and assures them of its value to God. **4:15-18**

3. Paul assures them of God's continued supply. **4:19-20**

V. Concluding greeting and blessing. 4:21-23

J. Vernon McGee: Outline

I. PHILOSOPHY for Christian living, Chapter 1

- A. Introduction, vv. 1, 2
- B. Paul's tender feeling for the Philippians, vv. 3-11
- C. Bonds and afflictions further the gospel, vv. 12-20
- D. In life or death — Christ, vv. 21-30

II. PATTERN for Christian living, Chapter 2 (Key verses: 5-11)

- A. Others, vv. 1-4
- B. Mind of Christ — humble, vv. 5-8
- C. Mind of God — exaltation of Christ, vv. 9-11
- D. Mind of Paul — things of Christ, vv. 12-18
- E. Mind of Timothy — like-minded with Paul, vv. 19-24
- F. Mind of Epaphroditus — the work of Christ, vv. 25-30

III. PRIZE for Christian living, Chapter 3 (Key verses: 10-14)

- A. Paul changed his bookkeeping system of the past, vv. 1-9
- B. Paul changed his purpose for the present, vv. 10-19
- C. Paul changed his hope for the future, vv. 20, 21

IV. POWER for Christian living, Chapter 4 (Key verse: 13)

- A. Joy — the source of power, vv. 1-4
- B. Prayer — the secret of power, vv. 5-7
- C. Contemplation of Christ — the sanctuary of power, vv. 8, 9
- D. In Christ — the satisfaction of power, vv. 10-23

Ryan Kelly: Outline

I. Greeting and Prayer (1:1-11)

II. Encouragement about His Imprisonment (1:12-30)

- A. Paul's imprisonment has meant progress for the gospel (1:12-18)
- B. Christ will be magnified in Paul's life or death (1:19-26)
- C. Exhortation to walk worthy of the gospel (1:27-30)

III. Exhortation to Humble Service (2:1-30)

- A. A call to unity, humility, and service to one another (2:1-4)
- B. Christ's example of humble service (2:5-11)
- C. Living as lights in the world (2:12-18)
- D. The Faithful Examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30)

IV. Warning about Distortions of the Gospel (3:1–21)

- A. Contrast between false teachers and the true people of God (3:1–3)
- B. Contrast between self-righteousness and receiving Christ’s righteousness (3:4–11)
- C. Paul’s progress in the pursuit of Christ (3:12–16)
- D. Contrast between earthly-mindedness and heavenly-mindedness (3:17–21)

V. Concluding Exhortations and Thanksgiving (4:1–23)

- A. A call to unity (4:1–3)
- B. A call to rejoice, trust, pray, and think rightly (4:4–9)
- C. Thanksgiving for the Philippians’ gift; Paul’s contentment in God (4:10–20)
- D. Greetings and benediction (4:21–23)

Warren Wiersbe: Outline

I. THE SINGLE MIND—Philippians 1

- A. The fellowship of the Gospel—**Philippians 1:1–11**
- B. The furtherance of the Gospel—**Philippians 1:12–26**
- C. The faith of the Gospel—**Philippians 1:27–30**

II. THE SUBMISSIVE MIND—Philippians 2

- A. The example of Christ—**Philippians 2:1–11**
- B. The example of Paul—**Philippians 2:12–18**
- C. The example of Timothy—Philippians 2:19–24
- D. The example of Epaphroditus—**Philippians 2:25–30**

III. THE SPIRITUAL MIND—Philippians 3

- A. Paul’s past—**Philippians 3:1–11** (the accountant—“*I count*”)
- B. Paul’s present—**Philippians 3:12–16** (the athlete—“*I press*”)
- C. Paul’s future—**Philippians 3:17–21** (the alien—“*I look*”)

IV. THE SECURE MIND—Philippians 4

- A. God’s peace—**Philippians 4:1–9**
- B. God’s power—**Philippians 4:10–13**
- C. God’s provision—**Philippians 4:14–23**

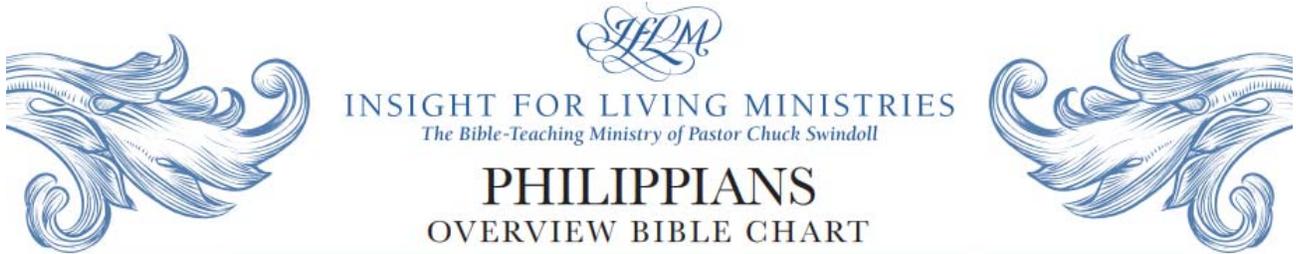
Irving Jensen: Survey of the NT

A KEY VERSE 1:21 KEY WORDS: Day of Christ In Christ Rejoice Gospel Spirit Mind Love Joy All 1:1	TESTIMONY	EXAMPLES		EXHORTATIONS	KEY VERSES	
	[despite imprisonment] For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain (1:21).	1:27 Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (1:27). Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus (2:5-11).	3:1 More than that I count all things to be lost (3:8). That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection (3:10). Forgetting what lies behind, I press toward the goal (3:13, 14). Citizenship in heaven (3:20).	4:2 Have no anxiety about anything (4:6-7). I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am (4:11). I can do all things (4:13). My God shall supply all your needs (4:19). 4:23		
	Christ our LIFE	Christ our PATTERN	Christ our GOAL	Christ our SUFFICIENCY		Life in Christ
	GLORIFY CHRIST (1:20)	BE LIKE CHRIST (1:27)	GAIN CHRIST (3:8)	BE CONTENT IN CHRIST (4:11)		Motives
	SUPPLY of the SPIRIT 1:19	FELLOWSHIP in the SPIRIT 2:1	WORSHIP by the SPIRIT 3:3	GRACE through the SPIRIT 4:23		Spirit
THE CHRISTIAN LIFE — AN ABIDING JOY (2:17-18)						
REJOICE: in fellowship of saints (1:3-11) over afflictions (1:12-30)	REJOICE: in the ministry for the saints (2:1-18). in fellowship of Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30).	REJOICE: that your hopes are in Jesus (3:2-16). that your citizenship is in heaven (3:20).	REJOICE: always over all things (4:4-9). in bounties of God's people (4:10-19).	J O Y		

Bruce Hurt:

Account of Paul's Circumstances Php 1:1-30	Have the Mind of Christ Php 2:1-30	Have the Knowledge of Christ Php 3:1- 21	Have the Peace of Christ Php 4:1-23
Partakers of Christ	People of Christ	Pursuit of Christ	Power of Christ
Suffering	Submission	Salvation	Sanctification
Experience	Examples	Exhortation	

Chuck Swindoll:



	JOY IN LIVING FOR CHRIST	JOY IN SERVING CHRIST IN UNITY	JOY IN KNOWING CHRIST	JOY IN RESTING IN CHRIST
	Philippians 1	Philippians 2	Philippians 3	Philippians 4
	Even when we don't get what we want In spite of circumstances Even with conflicts	Starts with right attitude Maintained through right theology Encouraged by right models	A warning A testimony A goal A command	Unity Peace Final words
CHRIST	My life	My model	My goal	My contentment
SPIRIT	His help (<i>Phil. 1:19</i>)	His fellowship (<i>Phil. 2:1</i>)	His worship (<i>Phil. 3:3</i>)	His peace (<i>Phil. 4:7</i>)
POSITIVE REACTION	To difficulty: "I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News." (<i>Phil. 1:12</i>)	To others: "Do everything without complaining and arguing." (<i>Phil. 2:14</i>)	To the past: "Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize." (<i>Phil. 3:13-14</i>)	To every situation: "Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have." (<i>Phil. 4:11</i>)
UNIQUENESS	Not one quotation from the Old Testament; Christ mentioned over forty times; most positive and joyful of all of Paul's letters, yet written while he was chained to a Roman guard			
TONE	Warm, encouraging, affirming			
KEY WORDS	"Rejoice," "Christ," "mind," "act"			
THEME	By centering our lives around Christ, we can experience true joy.			
KEY VERSE	Philippians 1:21			
CHRIST IN PHILIPPIANS	Jesus is the Son of God from heaven, who humbled Himself by becoming human, suffered for us, and was exalted by the Father (<i>Phil. 2:5-11</i>).			

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TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

TITLE: FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

BIG IDEA:

**(AS WE LABOR TOGETHER UNTIL CHRIST RETURNS,
FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL SPARKS THREE RESPONSES:**

- **JOYFUL THANKSGIVING**
- **INTIMATE BONDS**
- **PURPOSEFUL PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL MATURITY**

INTRODUCTION:

Gordon Zerbe: You give me joy! Paul establishes a mood of affection and hopeful optimism in the opening thanksgiving and prayer as he recalls unspoken highpoints in his relationship with the congregation. He congratulates them for their overall commitment to Messiah Jesus, and his carefully crafted words make repeated allusions specifically to their recent support of his ministry while in prison, offering an indirect thanksgiving for their assistance. Most important, he identifies their provision as an expression of their partnership in the gospel—indeed a partnership of generosity—that emphatically involves all of them. Most modern English translations miss these key emphases by spiritualizing Paul’s repeated references to mutual assistance as a concrete expression of the gospel. Still, while highlighting their own good work, he also draws attention to the God who energizes all good work, the basis for his future confidence. Paul has them recall both the past and present of their relationship with him, yet he also invites them into the future, the day of Messiah Jesus, the goal of history. His confidence in them is matched by his prayer for their continued maturation. Above all, he wishes to communicate his deep affection and longing for them. . .

It is striking how subjective feeling, deep relational bonds, and gospel-oriented priorities come together in this opening. Paul does not just say, “Remember our good times together, I think of you always, thanks for your gift to me,” or the like, as would be typical of simple letters of friendship. Rather, his concern throughout is to create a framework for what relationships, corporate behavior, and disposition look like when oriented around the gospel and Messiah and the experience of divine grace. What drives Paul is concern for how the Philippians express their partnership in the gospel (1:5), their status as copartners in generosity (1:7), and ultimately their practice of citizenship in a manner worthy of the gospel of Messiah (1:27). While there is indeed deep human feeling and longing expressed in the opening (1:7–8) and throughout the letter (1:24–26; 2:16–18, 19–30; 4:1), such affection is ultimately founded on the bowels of Messiah Jesus himself (1:8; cf. 2:1). This is what provides an occasion for thanksgiving to God. In Philippians, Christ Jesus is not only the model for the mind-set and pathway for messianic citizenship (2:5–11), but also the very resource and foundation for the individual and the community’s depth of emotional solidarity and consolation.

Charles Swindoll: Paul understood that **joy** doesn't depend on our circumstances, our possessions, or other people. Joy is an attitude of the heart determined by confidence in God. Paul knew that he had no control over the struggles and strife of life. But by yielding to the Spirit's work in his soul, Paul's trust and hope in God could guide him like an inner compass, keeping him on joy's course regardless of how strong the gale-force winds blew.

John MacArthur: The love bond between Paul and the Philippian believers may have been stronger than the one he had with any other church. It was in large measure because of the joy that their love brought to him that the theme of Paul's letter to the Philippians is joy. The depth of their relationship with him encouraged the apostle during his imprisonment and added to his joy. He was concerned about their unity, their faithfulness, and many other important spiritual and practical matters. But his overriding concern was that their sorrow over his afflictions would be tempered by their joy over his faithfulness to the Lord and the great reward that awaited him in heaven. Paul wanted them not to be sad, but to share in the fullest measure his deep, abiding joy in Jesus Christ. It is a noteworthy testimony to the maturity of the Philippian believers that, although Paul warned and encouraged them, he made no mention of any theological or moral problem in the church at Philippi. That also brought the apostle joy.

Frank Thielman: The passage can be divided into three paragraphs, a greeting (1:1–2), a prayer of thanks (1:3–8), and a prayer of intercession (1:9–11). In the first paragraph Paul modifies the standard letter form for greetings to provide a model of the kind of humility he will urge upon the Philippians in later sections. In the second and third paragraphs he reshapes the typical form of the prayer section to describe the Philippians' concern for the advancement of the gospel and his own concern for their progress in the faith. As the letter progresses beyond these initial paragraphs, it becomes clear that these themes are Paul's primary interest. . .

In this introductory section, then, Paul has given theological depth to the conventional customs for opening a letter and has sketched out the major themes of the argument to come. He has reminded the Philippians of their unity as saints and of the gracious nature of the gospel. He has provided a model of the unselfish regard for others that will preserve the unity of their congregation. He has commended them on their participation in his ministry, provided encouragement that their efforts are evidence of God's work within them, and assured them of his prayers for their continued progress toward a successful verdict before God's tribunal on the final day. He has therefore prepared the way for the work of encouragement and persuasion that follows in this letter.

(:1-2) OPENING TO THE EPISTLE

A. (:1) The Partners in Fellowship in the Gospel

1. Ministry Team Sending the Letter

a. Ministry Identification

"Paul and Timothy,"

Despite Paul's prominence as the apostle to the Gentiles, he always maintained the spirit of teamwork (rather than dominating in some type of hierarchical fashion)

F. F. Bruce: Paul is the sole author of the letter, even if Timothy's name is conjoined with his in the prescript.

Turner: Timothy, who was not an apostle and did not have Paul's authority, was considered by Paul to be his equal when it came to servanthood.

Gordon Zerbe: Paul includes Timothy as co-sender, thereby testifying to Timothy's close working relationship with Paul, yet also acknowledging his role in the founding of the congregation (**Acts 16**) and endorsing his anticipated ministry among the Philippian congregation on Paul's behalf (**2:19–24**; see TBC on **2:19–30**, "Timothy"). Although he names Timothy as a co-sender, Paul remains the actual author of the letter as the one addressing the Philippian community, as the one composing the letter, and as the primary one with a crucial relationship with the Philippian assembly (e.g., **1:25, 27; 2:12, 19; 4:10–20**). Paul takes the role of the sole writer in **1:3**, communicating in the first-person singular ("I," not "we"). Later he shares information about Timothy, providing a character reference in the third person ("he") while continuing to speak of himself in the first person (**2:19–24**).

Moises Silva: We may then recognize that the apostle, by joining Timothy's name to his, calls upon his coworker as a corroborating witness of the truths he expounds. Timothy, in turn, lends his influence and authority to Paul's words, which he commends as an expression of his own thoughts.

Gerald Hawthorne: Why then did the apostle choose to share, for this one time, his otherwise carefully and jealously guarded "uniqueness"? The best explanation seems to be that Paul, by such condescension, was able most effectively to teach the Philippians a lesson they needed to learn—"that relationships in the bosom of the church between collaborators were not those of authority, superiority or inferiority but of humble equality" (**Collange**, 36; cf. Phil 2:6–11).

b. Ministry Commitment
"bondservants of Christ Jesus"

Dedicated to the will of another; frees one up for fellowship;
Based on true unity (both seeking the same goal) rather than conflict over selfish desires and ambitions

Gordon Zerbe: Paul's self-presentation is brief and provocative. Both he and his co-sender Timothy are **slaves of Messiah Jesus**. This depiction is crucial for Paul's persuasive purposes in Philippians. A pivotal theme to come is how, in the realm of Christ, Paul inverts prevailing social assumptions about what counts for real status in Roman Philippi, and thus what constitutes grounds for either shame or boasting (esp.

2:2–11; 3:2–14, 18–21; cf. shame and boasting in 1:20, 26). Not accidentally, the word slave (*doulos*) will occur one more time in the letter: in the letter’s shocking centerpiece, which declares the exemplary pathway of Messiah (2:5–11). Jesus is the one who has deliberately taken the form of a slave (2:7) as the necessary self-humbling course that precedes his own exaltation and acclamation from all humankind (2:9–11; 3:19–21). Moreover, that messianic example will be modeled both in the life and ministry of Paul (3:2–17; 4:9) and in the ministry of Timothy (2:19–23), who as a son with a father has served as a slave [*douleuō*] with me for the gospel (v. 22). Both Paul and Timothy, then, display the way of lowly status divestment (2:20–22; 3:3–11) instead of selfish, rivalrous ambition (1:15–17; 2:3–4, 20–21), thereby embracing Messiah’s cause and pathway.

Ben Witherington: Paul is, then, modeling **servant leadership** here, a model he wants Euodia and Syntyche, among others, to follow. He interjects the note of humility and humble service, of having the same mind and attitude as Christ, at the outset of this discourse. Paul is happy to call other leaders his fellow servants of Christ (see **Col. 1:7** and **4:7**), and here he shares the title with Timothy. What we see here already is a transvaluation of values. While many Greco-Romans would despise and see as shameful being called a slave or a servant in light of the character and example of Christ, the title takes on just the opposite nuance — it is an honor because Christ took it upon himself (see, e.g., **Mark 10:45**). This is part of the countercultural values that Paul is trying to reinforce for and in the Philippian community. He does indeed seem to believe that the key to human freedom is serving the right master — in this case Christ rather than any of the gods of this world. The Book of Common Prayer puts it right: “in his service is perfect freedom.” Paul is not suggesting that being the servant of Christ is somehow exclusive to his own calling. “Paul’s use of the title of slaves for himself and Timothy points to their total subjection to the will of their master: they were not autonomous; they were subject to the claims of the one who owned them.”

George Hunsinger: Paul and Timothy’s unity is derived from a higher authority. Whatever differences may have existed between an apostle and his successor, they were relativized by a larger consideration. Paul introduced himself and Timothy as being in the same category—namely, “servants” or “slaves” of Christ. Their lives were no longer their own, for they had been claimed in the service of another. They knew themselves to be entirely at Christ’s disposal, in life and in death. To be a “servant” (*doulos*) of this Lord meant having been set apart for a special task. As with some of God’s servants in the Hebrew scriptures (e.g., **Isa. 53**), a peculiar authority has been invested in Paul and Timothy that is finally inseparable from suffering and death.

G. Walter Hansen: Paul considered the position that he and Timothy had as servants of Christ Jesus to be a **high privilege**. It is a high calling to have the same position taken by Christ Jesus, who “*emptied himself, taking the form of a slave*” (2:7). And there is no one greater to serve than the one who was exalted by God and will be universally acclaimed to be the Lord of all (2:9–11). Paul’s reasoning was simple: If Christ is our Lord, then we are his servants.

To be called servants of the Lord was a mark of distinction in the history of God's people. In the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, the term "*servant*" is used as a title for Moses, Joshua, and David, who were each called servants of the Lord. By announcing that he and Timothy were servants of Christ Jesus, Paul accepted a **humble** yet honored position taken by servants of the Lord among God's people.

The title of servants for himself and Timothy points to Paul's view of relationships in Christ: when believers in Christ freely and joyfully accept the position of servants of Christ Jesus, they will be united and effective in service. Relationships are ruined by envy, rivalry, and selfish ambition (**1:15-17; 2:3**), but they will thrive when friends humbly serve each other before looking out for their own interests (**2:3-4**). At the beginning of his letter, Paul exemplifies the attitude he calls for all believers to have, the attitude of the one who accepted the form of a slave (**2:5-8**).

2. Church at Philippi Receiving the Letter

a. General Membership = Saints without Distinction

"to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi"

Not just some elite group of believers;

Fellowship in the gospel is the calling for all of us;

We have been separated from fellowship with the world and with sin so that we can fellowship with one another and with God (**1 John 1**);

The issue is not one of attained holiness, but of consecration accomplished by God

Frank Thielman: He wants the Philippians to know that the letter is addressed to them all, although he also wants to recognize the leaders of the church in a special way.

Gordon Zerbe: Paul adopts this plural designation *hagioi* (*consecrated ones*) as a key term for the community of those loyal to Messiah. It implies

- (1) a special status, identity, and belonging (as "*consecrated*");
- (2) an alternative character and manner of life ("*holiness*"); and
- (3) a distinctive vocation and mission (as "*devoted*").

When one considers the force of this simple designation in the context of Greco-Roman conceptions and practices, it appears that Paul is using those who are consecrated to highlight a special sense of **priestly honor** that all adherents of Messiah Jesus share.

Grant Osborne: Paul frequently addresses his recipients as "*saints*" (**1 and 2 Cor 1:1; Rom 1:1; Eph 1:2; Col 1:2**) or "*holy ones*," one of the primary titles in the New Testament for those called to live as "*set apart*" from the world for God. God had chosen them to belong to himself and set them apart to be his special people. This is another title of honor, and together with "*slave*" it indicated that they were God's special possession, called to a sacred task in serving and living for him.

John MacArthur: All believers are saints, not because they are themselves righteous, but because they are **in their Lord, Christ Jesus**, whose righteousness is imputed to them (**Rom. 4:22-24**). A Buddhist does not speak of himself as in Buddha, nor does a

Muslim speak of himself as in Mohammed. A Christian Scientist is not in Mary Baker Eddy or a Mormon in Joseph Smith or Brigham Young. They may faithfully follow the teaching and example of those religious leaders, but they are not in them. Only Christians can claim to be in their Lord, because they have been made spiritually one with Him (cf. **Rom. 6:1–11**). “*But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,*” Paul wrote, “*even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*” (**Eph. 2:4–6**). To the Galatians he declared, “*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*” (**Gal. 2:20**). In Paul’s letters, the phrase “*in Christ Jesus*” occurs fifty times, “*in Christ*” twenty-nine times, and “*in the Lord*” forty-five times. Being in Christ Jesus and therefore acceptable to God is the believer’s supreme source of joy.

Joseph Hellerman: “*in Christ Jesus*” -- The options are:

1. incorporation (“*in union with Christ Jesus*” [GNB]; Hansen 40; O’Brien 46);
2. instr. or causal dat., telling “how those in Philippi came to be ‘saints,’ namely, ‘by (the work of) Jesus Christ’” (Reumann 84; O. Procksch, TDNT 1.107);
3. a locat. sense; ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ “tells us where the Christian community lives, just as the phrase in Philippi tells us where the church resides” (Hansen 40); or
- *4. ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ simply identifies the recipients as Christian (Campbell 124; “*those who belong to Christ Jesus*” [CEV, NLT, NIV; Fee 65]).

The first view is theologically attractive, but the last alternative most naturally fits the context of a straightforward greeting.

Steven Lawson: At the same time, Paul stresses that every believer in Philippi was, positionally, “*in Christ Jesus*.” Before their conversion, they belonged to the evil world system with its anti-God agenda. But they had been delivered out of the kingdom of darkness and brought into vital union and communion with Christ Jesus. They were washed in his blood and given a new standing in his grace. They were made citizens of the kingdom of God. This little prepositional phrase, “*in Christ Jesus*,” makes all the difference to everything.

George Hunsinger: I would suggest that the phrase “*in Christ*” has a double aspect. It is, for lack of better terms, at once “**mystical**” and “**apocalyptic**.” In this verse it is used to suggest a **status of holiness through spiritual union with Christ** (the mystical side). The mystical interpretation that I suggest includes both personal union with Christ and membership in Christ’s body, the church. At the same time this holiness remains ineffable. Despite being real in itself, it is a holiness that still remains hidden apart from the eyes of faith. It is yet to be revealed in glory at the end of all things (the apocalyptic side).

b. Specific Leadership – Two Groups
“including the overseers and deacons:”

The church leaders ("overseers and deacons") are addressed as a subset of this community of believers -- not set apart on some pedestal. Even within this subset, the emphasis is on teamwork and plurality of godly leadership - not dominance by one superstar. (Note: no differentiation between one pastor-teacher who is in a special category from all the other ruling elders.)

Robert Gromacki: Although the three terms (bishop, elder, pastor) describe the same person, it is possible to isolate their distinctive emphases.

- First, the concept behind '*pastor*' is to shepherd and to feed. The main responsibility here is the supply of spiritual nourishment through biblical teaching. A pastor must be a teacher, first and foremost (**Eph. 4:11; I Tim. 3:2**). Pastoral care has three goals, delineated by Jesus Christ Himself; to teach the immature or new Christians (**John 21:15**), to teach adult believers (**John 21:17**), and to guide all the flock (**John 21:16**).
- Second, the essence of the '*bishop*' is to render oversight, to see that the work of the local church is done correctly by the members who have been trained by him.
- Third, the term '*elder*' refers to the individual's position and to his respect by others.

Charles Swindoll: In the New Testament period, “elder”, “pastor”, and “overseer” all represented **one calling** with the same responsibility to shepherd the flock. All three of these terms are used together in **Acts 20:17, 28**. In that account, Paul calls the “elders” of the church of Ephesus to meet him in Miletus, then he instructs them, “*Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (episkopos), to shepherd (poimainō) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood*” (**Acts 20:28**).

Turner: It is interesting to note that there was a plurality of both bishops and deacons. This is the New Testament pattern.

Joseph Hellerman: The inclusion of ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνους is interpreted as an attempt on Paul’s part

1. to buttress the leaders’ authority in the face of grumbling among the Philippians (**2:14–15**);
2. to show his regard for them while at the same time preparing to challenge them to tackle the difficult issues the letter raises (**O’Brien 49–50; Silva 41**); or
3. to single out the leaders because they oversaw Epaphroditus’s gift-bearing

mission to Paul (Hansen 42; Chrysostom, Homily on Philippians, 2.1.1–2).

*4. But recent research points to another option. The two anomalies in the salutation should, instead, be taken together since they interpret one another when read against the social background of Roman Philippi. By

(1) deemphasizing his own status (δοῦλος sans ἀπόστολος) and

(2) honoring the congregation's leaders with their titles (ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνους), Paul intentionally **subverts the honor culture** of Philippi, where rank and titles were viewed as prizes to be competitively sought and publicly proclaimed, in order to enhance the holder's social status. Paul thus begins, at the outset of the letter, to **model a relational ethos** he will later

(1) commend to the Philippians (2:5) and

(2) vividly portray in his remarkable narrative of the humiliation of Christ (2:6–8).

B. (:2) The Pleasantries of Typical Greetings

1. Substance of Blessings

“Grace to you and peace”

Steven Lawson: The peace that Paul is talking about here in **Philippians 1:2** is the subjective peace of God. Notice how he words this as "*peace from God*," rather than peace with God. He means the personal experience of supernatural peace within their souls. Only God can give this inner tranquility. This is the quiet calm within the human spirit in the midst of life's raging storms. This personal serenity comes from knowing that God is in control of all circumstances, and causes all things to work together for our good so that we might become more and more like Christ (**Romans 8:28-30**). No challenge that a believer can ever face will be independent of the sovereign control of God over their circumstances.

The relationship between grace and peace is important. There is no peace until there first is grace. That is why Paul mentions grace first. Wherever there is grace, peace inevitably results. The grace of God in a life prepares the way for the peace of God to flood a heart. Grace is the root, and peace is the fruit. Put another way, grace is the cause, and peace is the result. These two spiritual blessings are like twins. Wherever you see grace, there you will find peace.

G. Walter Hansen: **Grace** is Paul's adaptation of the “greetings” at the beginning of Greek letters of his day. **Peace** echoes the common Jewish greeting (Shalom). Paul's combination of the Greek and Jewish greetings reflects the intersection of Greek and Jewish cultures in Paul's expressions. This greeting, *grace and peace to you*, is used in all of Paul's letters. Often referred to as a common formula or social convention in Paul's letters, this phrase of greeting is anything but an empty cliché for Paul. In fact, it expresses in condensed form the **essence of his theology**. His message is one of grace and peace: grace, the unmerited, undeserved saving work of God in Christ Jesus brings

believers into peace, harmonious relationships with God and with each other. The opening grace note is heard again in the last line of his letter: *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen* (4:23). And the opening greeting of peace (*Shalom!*) is heard again in his promise of the *peace of God* and the *God of peace* (4:7, 9). All that Paul says in this letter is encompassed within this double emphasis on grace and peace. All of the outworking of salvation depends upon the gracious initiative of God, who *works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose* (2:12-13). All who totally depend upon the grace of God will be protected by the peace of God and will enjoy the presence of the God of peace (4:6-9).

David Garland: “*Grace and peace*” are not ordinary good wishes from a friend but blessings effected by the new spiritual reality wrought by Christ’s death and resurrection (cf. **Ro 5:1; 15:13; Eph 2:14; Col 1:20**). Paul offers a wish-prayer that will be fulfilled jointly by God our Father, who graciously forgives, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who bestows peace on his disciples (**Jn 14:27; 16:33; 20:21**). “*Grace*” is the source of Christian life, and “*peace*” is its consummation.

2. Source of Blessings

“from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Gordon Zerbe: Here at the outset, then, Paul specifies the full titles of both God and Messiah, something he will do again at the end of the letter (4:20, 23) and at major points along the way (of God, 2:11; of Messiah, 2:11; 3:20; cf. 3:8).

Messiah Jesus is emphatically the central reference point of all three elements of the opening prescript. Paul’s opening thereby conjures up a triangulated relational dynamic: a mutual relationship of sender and recipients, intimately correlated in and through Christ Jesus. They are more than dearly beloved friends. Messiah Jesus is pronounced at the outset as the fundamental premise and relational bond of the letter. Jesus is referred to a total of 90 times in this 104-verse letter (if one adds up particular uses of the name [in whole or part], pronominal references to Jesus, and clauses where Jesus is the subject). By contrast, God is referred to only 23 times in the letter. The word *Christos* (Anointed, Messiah, Christ) occurs more frequently (as a ratio of total words) in Philippians than in any other letter of Paul.

I. (:3-6) FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL SPARKS JOYFUL THANKSGIVING

A. (:3a) The Object of Our Thanksgiving = the God who Cares for Us so Personally

“I thank my God”

God is not just an abstraction or theological proposition.

Moises Silva: Paul’s thanksgiving in this letter is distinguished by emphatic repetitions and emotional intensity. The apostle’s joyful gratitude flows from an appreciation of his

converts' consistent support of his ministry and care for his needs, from the very beginnings of their Christian experience to the most recent contribution, which in effect occasioned the present letter. Yet Paul is careful to interpret their gifts, not as intended for him personally (contrast $\mu\omicron\iota$, *moi*, *to me*, **4:15**), but rather **for the advance of the gospel**.

B. (:3b) The Occasion for Our Thanksgiving Should be Our Memories of Fellowship with the Saints

"in all my remembrance of you,"

Speaking of the total picture; no sour notes;
(rather than remembrances being an occasion for bitterness or hard feelings)

James Boice: For both the root meaning of the words (used for prayer) and the example of Paul teach us that our prayers should be filled with thanksgiving. And more than this, they should be filled with thanksgiving for spiritual things.

C. (:4) The Offering of Our Thanksgiving = Consistent Petition with Joy

"always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all,"

root word for *prayer* = "*I need*"

G. Walter Hansen: Paul's prayers focus on **specific needs**. The Greek word translated by TNIV as *prayers* ... pray occurs twice in **verse 4** and denotes an "urgent request to meet a need." The same word also refers to the prayers of the Philippians for Paul's deliverance (**1:19**). And it is translated as **petitions** in Paul's exhortation to the Philippians to turn from anxiety by combining their petitions with thanksgiving (**4:6**). Paul follows his own counsel in his prayers for the Philippians: his urgent requests are combined with thanksgiving to God. Paul's prayers are not a way of escaping or denying reality. The emphasis on thanksgiving does not mean that prayers included only positive items and excluded any mention of problems. The **real needs** of the Philippians drove Paul to his knees to make urgent requests to God on their behalf.

Characterized by a Joyful Spirit -- "*with joy*" - emphatic by position

John MacArthur: A good **definition of joy** is this: it's the flag that flies on the castle of the heart when the King is in residence. Only Christians can know true and lasting joy.

Ben Witherington: The **vocabulary of joy** appears some fifty times in the undisputed Paulines, making it a characteristic of the Pauline letters. The objective source of this joy is surely Christ, and the subjective means of the believer's joy is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit's fruit in a Christian life. **Phil. 4:4-5**, in an echo of a psalm, says that the spatial nearness of God should prompt rejoicing. The world can neither give nor take away this joy because it is generated by the living presence of the Lord in the believer's life, and "*greater is he who is in us than anything in the world.*" At the same time the Lord is the object of Christian joy as well as its source, and, as **Bockmuehl**

suggests, there may be a hint in this discourse of believers sharing in Christ's joy by imitating Paul and Christ. In **1:4**, then, Paul speaks of making petitions with eschatological hope, confidence, and excitement, knowing what God can do. That this is in his mind is shown clearly in **1:6**. Joy is so characteristic of Paul's vision of the Christian life that one can say that a joyless Christian makes no more sense than a waterless ocean.

John MacArthur: **Lack of joy** reveals itself in three ways: in negative thoughts and talk about others, in a lack of concern for their welfare, and in the failure to intercede on their behalf. Joyless believers are self-centered, selfish, proud, and often vengeful, and their self-centeredness inevitably manifests itself in prayerlessness. . .

What robs believers of biblical joy?

1. First, and by far the most important, is false salvation.
2. A second factor that hinders joy is the influence of Satan and his demons.
3. A third factor that robs believers of joy is an inadequate understanding of God's sovereignty.
4. A fourth negative element that steals joy is prayerlessness.
5. A fifth cause of joylessness is the emotional low that frequently follows a spiritual high.
6. A sixth way believers lose their joy is by focusing on circumstances.
7. A seventh negative element that robs believers of joy is ingratitude.
8. An eighth cause of lack of joy is forgetfulness.
9. A ninth factor in loss of joy is living by uncontrolled feelings, living by the flesh instead of by the Spirit.
10. A tenth and final reason for lack of joy is unwillingness to accept forgiveness.

Grant Osborne: He adds in **verse 4** three further aspects of his prayer life:

1. Its frequency—Thanksgiving, Paul says, takes place “*in all my prayers*” as an ongoing response to his deep friendship with this church. It must be understood that “*always*” (Greek: *pantote*) does not mean unceasingly but rather denotes in this context **regular prayer**. Remembering the Philippians was a part of his daily prayer life.

2. Its focus—His prayer was regularly “*for all of you.*” He kept the Philippians always in his mind and heart and so prayed for each one as often as he could. Paul was more than a general prayer warrior; he was a personal prayer warrior who frequently brought the members of this congregation and their needs to God's attention.

3. The joy with which he prayed—Even though the church of Philippi had many problems, as we will see, Paul was filled with joy as he reflected on the many good things God was doing among them and on all the good they were doing for him. The grace note of joy reverberates through the letter, surfacing fourteen times; it was the primary emotion Paul felt when he thought of these believers, and that is reflected in his prayers. The Christian life is by definition a life of joy, but often individual situations are filled with grief and pain (**Heb 12:11**). However, when we recognize the sovereign

hand of God in our lives (**Rom 8:28**) all trials lead to joy (**Jas 1:2; 1 Pet 1:6**). This is how Paul felt about the Philippians. He experienced sorrow when he reflected on their problems (**3:18**) but rejoiced because God was in charge of even these painful areas.

Richard Melick: Three ideas support Paul's main statement in the opening verb: “*I always pray with joy*” (**1:4**), “*being confident of this*” (**1:6**), and “*It is right for me to feel this way*” (**1:7**). Following these structural components, the text reveals that Paul's thanksgiving was joyful (**1:4–5**); it was confident (**1:6**); and it was proper (**1:7–8**).

D. (:5) The Orientation of Our Thanksgiving and Petition is Fellowship in the Gospel

“in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.”

Includes sharing in the spiritual blessings of eternal life and union with Christ; as well as sharing in the work of the ministry -- both through their own active proclamation and through supporting missionaries

D. A. Carson: The heart of true fellowship is self-sacrificing conformity to a shared vision.

Gordon Zerbe: The *koinōnia* word group in Paul is best translated with the language of **partnership**. The word does not designate fellowship in a narrowly religious sense, especially as interpersonal “sharing” over tea. Rather, the key notion is “participating together” in something, which is the original meaning of fellowship, “the state of being fellows.” It connotes having a share in something, holding in common, and more specifically, partnering with someone in something. In Paul’s time, the *koinōnia* word group could variously refer to a political alliance or league, a community or social association, a business or marriage partnership, shared coeducation, property held in common, or a charitable contribution for the common good.

John MacArthur: In his commentary on Philippians, the noted commentator **William Hendriksen** lists eight aspects, or types, of Christian *koinonia* (see New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Philippians [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962], 51–53). His list is not meant to be comprehensive, and the eight aspects are not necessarily in order of importance. They are grace, faith, prayer and thanksgiving, love, service, contributing to the needs of others, separation from the world, and spiritual warfare. It is obvious that they overlap in varying degrees.

E. (:6) The Optimism (Confidence) for Our Thanksgiving and Petition = the Perseverance of God

“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.”

He is the one who enables us to labor together until Christ returns.

Gal. 3:3 uses same two words talking about sanctification (not the continuance of their monetary gifts)

Gordon Zerbe: The emphasis on final completion (consummation) anticipates Paul's exhortation on striving to reach the final goal, not resting complacent with present arrival (**1:9–11; 3:10–15**). It may also specifically hint at Paul's hope that their further involvement in mutual aid (good work) will soon be completed.

Steven Lawson: Salvation is not a matter of our working for God's acceptance, but it is God working for us and in us. None of us can work our way into earning God's favor, nor can any of us through our work maintain God's ongoing favor. God already did the work for us in the death of Christ upon the cross. Further, he graciously applied this work of Christ in us by the Spirit. Salvation is not by human achievement, but by divine accomplishment through the finished work of Jesus Christ upon the cross. This free gift was applied to our lives by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. From beginning to end, salvation is entirely a divine work of grace. If God has caused you to be born again, you can be assured that he will complete this work until "*the day of Christ Jesus*." As a believer in Christ, you are as certain of heaven as though you have already been there ten thousand years. God finishes what he starts.

James Boice: God Finishes What He Starts --

Philippians 1:6 is perhaps one of the three greatest verses in the Bible that teach the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, the doctrine that no one whom God has brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ will ever be lost...

Men lack **perseverance**. Men start things and drop them. As men and women you and I are always beginning things that we never actually find time to finish. But God is not like that. God never starts anything that He does not finish. **God perseveres**. Has God begun something in your life? Have you been born again by the Spirit of God? Then you need not fear that you will ever be lost. Your confidence should not be in yourself, neither in your faith nor in your spiritual successes in earlier days, but in God. It is He who calls us as Christians, He who leads us on in the Christian life, and He who most certainly will lead us home. (cf. **John 10:27, 28** and **Romans 8:38, 39**)

Frank Thielman: Paul's second reason for joyful thankfulness to God is his confidence that God will complete the good work he has begun in the Philippians (v. 6). This work, which must be identified with the Philippians' salvation, will reach its consummation only at "*the day of Christ Jesus*." It is a work that God alone accomplishes, but the notion that it is not yet complete shows that it involves a progressive transformation of the lives of believers. The "good work" of salvation, then, includes God's gift to believers both of the will and of the ability to do good works. The presence of these good works in turn provides evidence of real belief—evidence that God has begun and will complete the work of salvation in the person who displays them. Thus Paul says in **1:28** that the Philippians' steadfastness in the midst of persecution serves as a sign of their future salvation, and in **2:12–13** that whereas the Philippians should "*work out*" their "*salvation with fear and trembling*," God is the effective power behind this work. This thought also lies behind Paul's confession in **3:12**, that he presses on "*to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me*." It is only because God in his grace has

taken hold of believers and works within them to produce a life consistent with the gospel that they can in any sense “take hold” of salvation on “the day of Christ Jesus.” In other words, those who will be saved in the future live holy lives in the present, but the holiness that characterizes their lives is God’s work from beginning to end.

II. (:7-8) JOYFUL THANKSGIVING IS APPROPRIATE BECAUSE FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL SPARKS INTIMATE BONDS OF

- (:7a) PERSONAL INTIMACY
- (:7b) CLOSE UNITY
- (:8) DEEP AFFECTION

John MacArthur: The present text reveals five specific things for which Paul diligently prayed on behalf of the Philippians: their spiritual progress in love, excellence, integrity, good works, and in glorifying God. Those are the God-ordained spiritual essentials for which all Christians should pray on behalf of each other. Because of their indwelling sin and human frailty, believers cannot perfectly accomplish those spiritual objectives. But they are to be the unwavering goals of every child of God, especially those whom He has called into leadership in His church.

A. (:7a) Joyful Thanksgiving is Appropriate Due to Personal Intimacy

“For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart,”

Grant Osborne: a declaration showing the **depth of his feelings** for them. Paul, in Rome, may have been separated from them both by a great physical distance and by an even more difficult situation (he was on trial for his life), but nothing could dampen his great love for these faithful friends. Friendship is a precious commodity, and Paul more than any of us (being that he was in danger of an imminent death sentence) needed close companions.

Dennis Johnson: As we observe the **intensity of Paul’s love**, we also need to recognize that his feelings have **solid foundations in reality**. Paul’s love, like Christ’s, takes its stand on truth, as he implies in commenting on his confidence that God had begun a good work in these believers: “*It is right for me to feel this way about you all*” (**Phil. 1:7**). In our ears the word *feel* (ESV; NIV; NASB) connotes emotion, but Paul’s Greek word has a strong mental component. He uses this word frequently in this little letter. He will insist that the unified “*mind*” with which Christians regard each other (**2:2; 4:2**) must reflect the “*mind*” of Christ (**2:5**). The mature must “*think*” as Paul does, pressing on toward the goal of perfection in Christ (**3:15**), in contrast to those whose “*minds*” are set on earthly objectives (**3:19**). Paul feels great confidence as he thinks about the Philippians, but his feelings have a foundation in the fruit that he has seen the gospel produce in their lives. This fruit is the way in which these believers have stood with Paul as partners in grace “*both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel*” (**1:7**). Paul cherishes these Christians warmly, and he has good reason to do so.

B. (:7b) Joyful Thanksgiving is Appropriate Due to Close Unity of Partnership in the Grace of God – Extends to Both Imprisonment and Gospel Ministry

*“since both in my imprisonment
and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel,
you all are partakers of grace with me.”*

Both can be technical legal terms for the courtroom; probably thinking of the recent aspects of his trial

Moises Silva: We should also note carefully how that ministry is defined: the qualification—*“both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel”*—is of special importance in grasping the reason Paul values so highly the support of the Philippians. If we take ἀπολογία καὶ βεβαιώσει (*apologia kai bebaiōsei*) in the technical sense, *“legal defense and proof,”* then Paul would be referring to activity coordinate and linked with his imprisonment (so **Hawthorne** and many others; cf. **Acts 25:16; 2 Tim. 4:16**). But it seems much preferable to see a contrast between the two prepositional phrases, in which case the words in question (which, contra **Vincent**, may well constitute a hendiadys) would retain their general sense: *“You have supported me not only during those times when I have been able to set forth openly the defense that confirms the gospel, but even during this period of confinement”* (cf. **Acts 22:1; 1 Cor. 9:3; 2 Cor. 7:11; 1 Pet. 3:15**; see also **Phil. 1:16**). The Philippians, who had no way of knowing that this confinement had opened new avenues for the spread of the gospel (**vv. 12–14**), had shown their constancy and commitment to the apostolic ministry by supporting Paul even when, to the best of their knowledge, he was not “producing.”

C. (:8) Joyful Thanksgiving is Appropriate Due to Deep Affection Attested by God

*“For God is my witness,
how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.”*

G. Walter Hansen: The literal meaning of the Greek word translated *affection* by the TNIV refers to the physiological parts called the inward parts, entrails, or bowels. These inner body parts served as referents for the emotions of love, compassion, and affection. Paul is saying that his longing for his friends is empowered by the strong emotions of the love of Christ Jesus for them. Paul’s life in Christ Jesus brings all his relationships within the sphere of Christ’s love. Paul’s relationships were never only on the human level — human person with human person. No, they always involved the coinherence of Christ living within Paul, Paul living within Christ, Christ living within the church, and the church living within Christ.

David Garland: Paul appeals to God to vouch for the sincerity of his love for them (cf. **Ro 1:9; 2Co 1:23; Gal 1:20; 1Th 2:5, 10**). He longs for them with the *“affection [splangchna] of Christ Jesus.”* The noun *splangchna* (GK 5073) refers to the nobler viscera—the heart, lung, and liver. One could say that he has a visceral compassion for them, but in Paul’s usage the word refers to the total personality at the deepest level (cf.

Phm 20). His love, then, is not simply a personal inclination but the result of his being in Christ (cf. **TDNT** 7:555). He has the love of Christ, which grips him in his very depths because he lives in Christ and Christ lives in him. **Lightfoot**, 85, says Paul's pulse beats with the pulse of Christ and his heart throbs with the heart of Christ. **Craddock**, 18, comments that this love is not one that simply reacts to the initiative of another but is an initiating love. Paul does not simply love them because they are partners who send him gifts; his love puts their needs first.

III. (:9-11) FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL SPARKS PURPOSEFUL PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL MATURITY (ABUNDANT LOVE EXERCISED IN WISDOM YIELDING THE FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH GLORIFIES GOD)

Dennis Johnson: The order of Paul's prayer report is straightforward.

- First he indicates what he wants God to give his friends (**Phil. 1:9**).
- Then he explains why he wants this gift for them, mentioning three outcomes that will result from the gift (**1:10–11**).
- While profiling those outcomes, Paul indicates how God gives the gift of abounding love (**1:11**).

Gerald Hawthorne: And his prayer, though brief, is profound in its implications; it is a prayer for a Christian community

- (1) that it might overflow in an intelligent and perceptive love,
- (2) that it might have the ability to recognize and choose the truly essential things of life,
- (3) that it might be pure and never the means of hurting others,
- (4) that it might allow Jesus Christ to generate through it all kinds of good deeds, and
- (5) that thus it might become a community committed to honoring and praising God, and at the same time the occasion of God's being honored and praised by others.

A. (:9) Request – Abundant Love Exercised in Wisdom

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment,”

They already were evidencing much love;
Love needs knowledge or it will be misdirected; knowledge alone puffs up and is worthless without love.

Frank Thielman: Paul's basic request for the Philippians, in other words, is that they might express their love in ways that show both a knowledge of how to obey God's will generally, and, more specifically, of how to make moral decisions based on God's will in the give-and-take of everyday living.

Grant Osborne: The sphere within which communal love abounds is “*knowledge and depth of insight*.” The underlying idea is **3:10**, “*I want to know Christ*.” Beyond intellectual comprehension, Paul had in view an **experiential knowledge** that begins with a living relationship with Christ. This is seen in his use of the Greek term *epignōsis*, which not only indicates the mental grasp of God’s (and life’s) truths, but also encompasses the concrete application of those truths in everyday living. “*Depth of insight*” (literally, “*all insight*”) stresses the moral aspect and stems from Proverbs (where it appears twenty-seven times); the term connotes **practical discernment of the right thing to do in a given situation** (see also **Col 1:9**). So Paul wanted the Philippians’ love to increase within the sphere of their experience of Christ’s love. This would result in moral discernment regarding life in the community.

B. (:10a) Reason -- Make Wise Choices

“so that you may approve the things that are excellent,”

Don't let the good be the enemy of the best.

R. Kent Hughes: Life for everyone, and especially believers, is a series of choices. What we choose day to day will shape the course of our lives. Foolish choices will leave us unprepared for the coming King. It is the little choices that determine our spiritual vitality because they in turn govern bigger choices. Most of us have little trouble distinguishing the big issues. We know that theft and murder are wrong and that generosity and justice are right. But in the gray area, choices involve a range of options that are not so clearly moral or clear cut. It is here that we find difficulty in discerning the best. What confused lives so many Christians lead because they do not have the wherewithal to discern what is best.

C. (:10b-11) Result -- Manifesting the Fruit of Righteousness Which Glorifies God

*“in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;
having been filled with the fruit of righteousness
which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”*

G. Walter Hansen: Paul’s repeated references to the *day of Christ* (**1:6, 10; 2:16**) demonstrate his **future orientation**. The day of Christ’s return cast its light over all of Paul’s life and illuminated his prayers as well as his actions. His prayer expresses his desire for the church to grow in love each day until that day when Christ *will bring everything under his control and transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body* (**3:21**). That vision of Christ’s triumph gave Paul hope to pray for growth in love even in the severe trials of the present. The ultimate future transformation by Christ’s power assured him of the present work of Christ in the community.

D. A. Carson: Put the priorities of the gospel at the center of your prayer life... It takes only a moment's reflection to see that all these petitions are gospel-centered. These are gospel prayers. That is, they are prayers offered to advance the work of the gospel in

the lives of the Philippian believers. And, by asking for gospel fruit in their lives, the ultimate purpose of these petitions is to bring glory to the God who redeemed them.

Richard Melick: Discerning what is best develops character. A growing love provides for character development and completion. As Paul prayed, his thoughts moved to the day of accountability. He prayed that the Philippians would live in such a way that they would be without blame at that time.

John MacArthur: The passions of a person's heart will come out in his prayers. If you examine what you pray for and find you are praying only for your needs, problems, questions, and struggles, that is an indication of where your heart is. If you pray infrequently, briefly, and in a shallow manner, you have a cold heart because prayer is not an inner desire. The call to the duty of prayer will not overcome a cold heart because prayer is an internal compulsion not fulfilled by conformity to an external standard. Lack of prayer doesn't mean that a person is merely disobedient; it indicates selfishness because of a cold heart....

Paul prayed that the Philippians would pursue five essentials: love, excellence, integrity, good works, and the glory of God. They are all sequential, meaning that each essential in Paul's list produces what follows it. And even though we'll never arrive at perfect love, perfect excellence, perfect integrity, complete good works, or perfect glorification of God, those five essentials represent what every Christian is to pursue in his or her life.

G. Walter Hansen: The context, however, supports an interpretation of righteousness as a definition of the **nature of the fruit**. In this interpretation, righteousness has an ethical sense and refers to righteous behavior. Righteousness is the content of this fruit. These are people whose lives are filled with the fruit of attitudes and actions that reflect the attitudes and actions of Christ (**2:5-8**). That kind of fruit is defined as righteousness.

Robert Gromacki: These fruits (plural) doubtlessly include

- the fruit (singular) of the Spirit (**Gal. 5:22-23**),
- the fruit of soul-winning (**Rom. 1:13**),
- the fruit unto holiness (**Rom. 6:22**),
- the fruit of good works (**Col. 1:10**),
- and the fruit of thanksgiving (**Heb. 13:15**).

Moises Silva: Paul's ultimate goal focuses not on the believer but on "*the glory and praise of God*" (v. 11). We may notice here a fundamental correspondence with the Lord's Prayer. By making the first petition the hallowing of God's name, our Lord taught us to place every other request within the framework of our desire to glorify God. This pervasive biblical principle (cf. the prayers of Moses and Hezekiah, **Exod. 32:11-13** and **2 Kings 19:15-19**) finds clear expression in Paul's theocentric view of the believer's sanctification (cf. **Ridderbos** 1975: 258-65).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When you think of the Christian leaders you have known personally, does the character trait of *servanthood* fit them? In what ways do the leaders of your local church model servanthood and challenge you to walk in that path?
- 2) What is the "*day of Christ Jesus*" in your thinking? What prominence does this perspective have in your thinking? How does the doctrine of the perseverance of God with the saints relate to the goal of this coming day of Christ Jesus?
- 3) How would you describe the necessary balance between *love* and *discernment* (knowledge)? In what ways are these often portrayed as mutually exclusive instead of co-dependent? How is the church harmed by emphasizing one of these to the exclusion of the other?
- 4) How do sins of selfishness (like bitterness and envy and self-consciousness) keep us from growing in our knowledge of God? What is the connection between the moral condition of our heart and our ability to get to know God more intimately?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Walvoord: The words '*grace*' and '*peace*,' wonderfully significant of the Christian's relationship to God, beautifully express the content of Christian salvation and the triumph of Paul in suffering, which is the theme of **chapter 1**. In grace, the unmerited favor of God toward those who have trusted in Christ is revealed, and with it the whole sustaining power of God for the Christian is embraced. The result is '*peace*,' peace with God through Jesus Christ, and the peace of God, the inner, supernatural tranquility which is produced as the fruit of the Spirit (**Ro 5:1; Phil 4:7; Gal 5:22**). . .

The depths of Paul's concern and love for the Philippians, and the high standard of conduct and experience here described, succinctly express the true goals in life for any Christian. Love with discernment and perception, distinguishing the good from the bad, sincerity of motive and purity of life, and abundance of the fruits of righteousness produced by the grace of God are the hallmarks of spiritual attainment, both for the Philippians and for us.

F. F. Bruce: This love, he trusts, will be accompanied by true knowledge and perfect judgment. Paul was not blind to the dangers of emotion uncontrolled by intelligence. He was resolved, by his own account, to pray and sing '*with my spirit, but ... also with my mind*' (**1 Cor. 14:15**), and he was equally concerned that he and his converts should love in spirit and mind alike.

It is love that fosters the growth of true knowledge and discernment or spiritual perception. Knowledge, divorced from love, *'puffs a person up with pride,'* whereas *'love builds up'* (1 Cor. 8:1). But if love is indispensable, true knowledge and perfect judgment are necessary. The truth of the gospel is liable to be subverted where ignorance and faulty judgment provide a foothold for the unsound teaching against which the Philippians are put on their guard in **chapter 3**.

Warren Wiersbe: In spite of his difficult circumstances as a prisoner in Rome, Paul is rejoicing. The secret of his joy is the single mind; he lives for Christ and the Gospel. (Christ is named 18 times in **chapter 1**, and the Gospel 6 times.) *'For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain'* (1:21). But what really is 'the single mind'? It is the attitude that says, 'It makes no difference what happens to me, just as long as Christ is glorified and the Gospel shared with others.' Paul rejoiced in spite of his circumstances, because his circumstances strengthened the fellowship of the Gospel (1:1-11), promoted the furtherance of the Gospel (1:12-26), and guarded the faith of the Gospel (1:27-30)...

Paul uses three thoughts in 1:1-11 that describe true Christian fellowship:

1. I have you in my mind (vv. 3-6),
2. I have you in my heart (vv. 7-8),
3. I have you in my prayers (vv. 9-11).

Doug Jeffries: The tone of Paul's letter to them indicates that the Philippian church was achieving a high level of Christian experience. None of the churches with which he was associated gave Paul less trouble than the church at Philippi. That church can certainly serve as a role model ...

John Piper: Yes, Paul was filled with thanks and joy because the Philippians were partners with him in the gospel. But there was a deeper foundation for his joy than these outward-yet precious-displays of concern for the gospel and for him. This practical partnership in the gospel was the symptom of something greater--it pointed to a deeper reality, it was the result of and evidence that something mysterious and wonderful was taking place. Their partnership in **verse 5** gave rise to Paul's *'I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.'*

Phil. 1:6 is one of the greatest and most often quoted promises in the Bible. And well it should be. The fact that God is at work in his people, changing the thought patterns and preference of our sinful nature, so that we love what He loves, retooling the grooves in our brain, knitting together the complex strands of our emotional wounds with infinitely greater skill than the world's foremost micro-surgeon--there's no greater promise than this. It is nothing other than the New Covenant promise of **Ezekiel 36**. *'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you, I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes.'*

Ben Witherington: We can speak then of some five major themes in this exordium:

1. the Philippians' gift and ongoing participation in Paul's ministry;

2. God's work in them that has prompted this gift and that has been sanctifying them as well, helping them press on toward the goal of full conformity to the image of Christ when he returns;
3. the discernment and right attitude to know what is good and what sort of behavior pleases God and aids the community of Christ to be united, brought by this same sanctifying work in them;
4. the enormous mutual affection that exists between Paul and the Philippians, which in turn prompts both great concern for each other, especially when the other suffers; and
5. Paul's defense of the gospel and his persisting in ministry even while in chains.

John MacArthur: Quote regarding the value of **intercessory prayer**:

William Barclay noted that **George Reindrop** in his book No Common Task tells how a nurse taught one man to pray and in doing so changed his whole life.

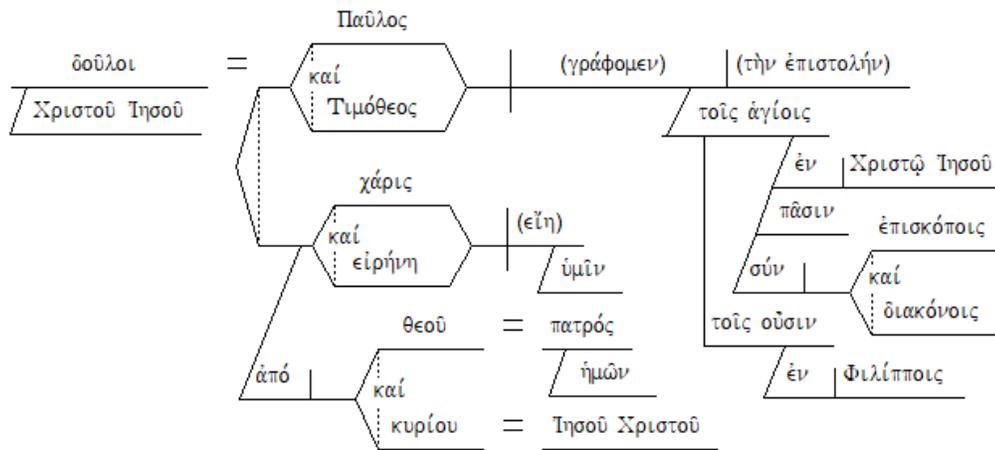
‘A dull, disgruntled, and dispirited man became a man of joy. Much of the nurse's work was done with her hands, and she used her hand as a scheme of prayer. Each finger stood for someone. Her thumb was nearest to her, and it reminded her to pray for those who were closest and dearest to her. The second finger was used for pointing and stood for all her teachers in school and the hospital. The third finger was the tallest and it stood for the V. I. P. s, the leaders in every sphere of life. The fourth finger was the weakest, as every pianist knows, and it stood for those who were in trouble and in pain. The little finger was the smallest and the least important and to the nurse it stood for herself’
(The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, rev. ed.
[Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975], pp. 13-14).

Tony Merida: Paul's thanksgiving emphasizes joy, gospel partnerships, assurance, and affection. His skin is chafed from being chained to a Roman guard, but his heart is filled with thanksgiving because of these things. He's the happiest man in Rome, and he doesn't have a posh life. If you could bottle up Paul's joy, you could sell it to the world. Yet it's available for free.

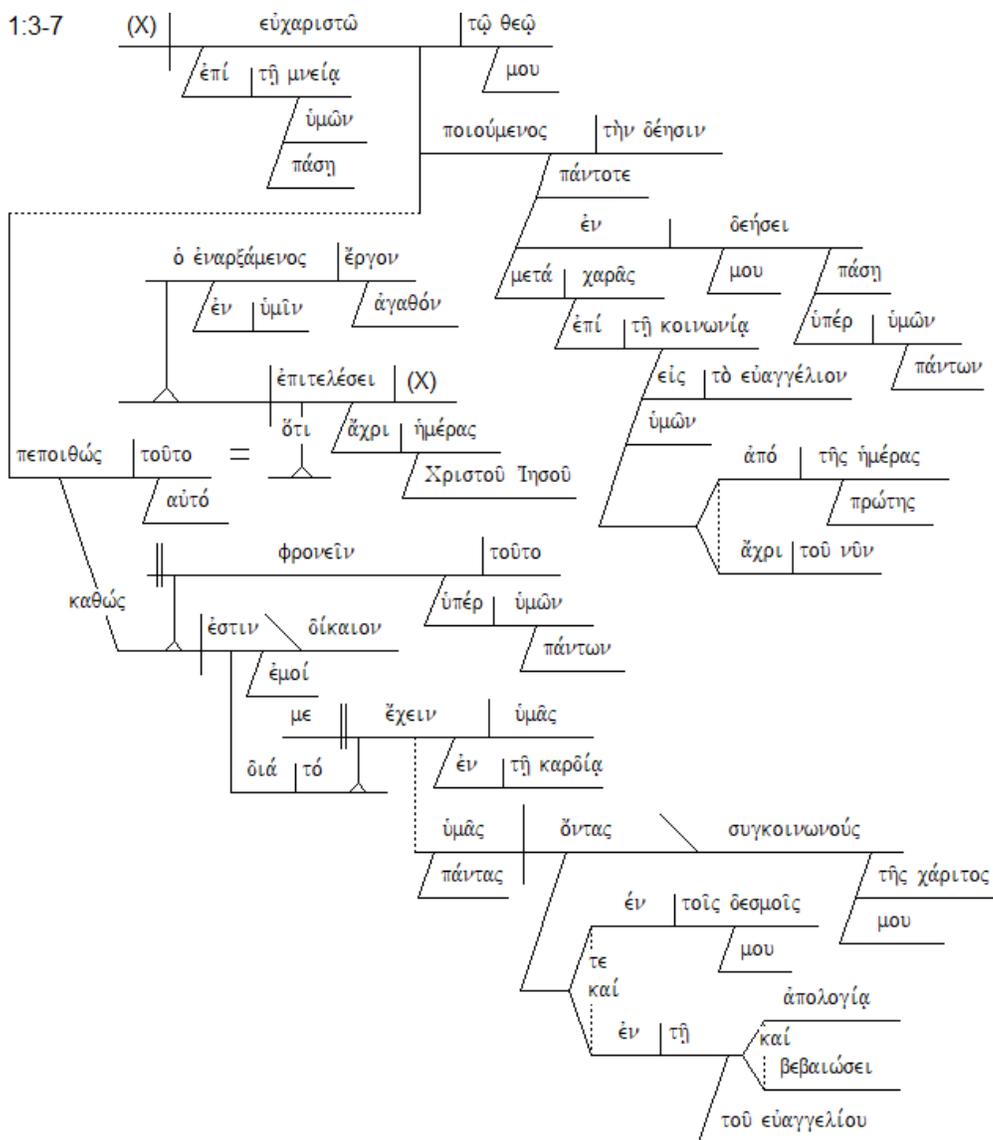
What will rob you of this type of joy? If you are Christ-less, you won't find joy. If you are prayer-less and ungrateful, you won't find joy. If you don't have gospel partnerships, you won't find joy. If you don't have assurance of salvation, you won't have joy. If you don't have affectionate relationships, you won't have joy. So, let us look to Jesus, who went to the cross for us, bearing our sin and punishment, so that we may be reconciled to God and enjoy Him forever.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

Phi 1:1-2



Phi 1:3-7



TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18

TITLE: THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL

BIG IDEA:

THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL CAN ACTUALLY BENEFIT FROM DIFFICULT PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES:

BY SHOWING UNBELIEVERS THE REALITY OF OUR RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST;

BY SHOWING BELIEVERS OUR EXAMPLE OF JOY AND FAITHFULNESS (WHICH GIVES THEM COURAGE TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL)

INTRODUCTION:

What is our primary goal in life? What is our passion? What do we live for? For Paul the answer was easy: "*For me to live is Christ*" The advancement of the Gospel was foremost in his thinking. He was totally wrapped up in living out his divine commission to be the apostle to the Gentiles in proclaiming the good news of salvation in Christ. His personal circumstances or comforts in this life were not his primary concern.

We saw the importance of fellowship in the Gospel -- but how can some people have any impact for Christ given their other responsibilities or difficult circumstances in life? What chance do you have to advance the gospel when you work a fulltime job? When you are busy at home raising three children? When there is poor health or poverty or other hardships in your life?

Paul certainly didn't have what we would judge to be the most advantageous circumstances-- no big salary, no fancy office, no radio and TV ministry, no publishing house distributing his letters, no flock of servants to wait on him hand and foot. Instead, he was under house arrest in Rome and it appears that the pressure of his situation has been turned up a few notches with the immediate events surrounding his trial. He was concerned that believers such as his faithful supporters back in Philippi might misinterpret his difficulties and become disillusioned and discouraged. "*I want you to know, brethren*" (Note the importance of our personal testimony -- our silence can be taken the wrong way)

THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL CAN ACTUALLY BENEFIT FROM DIFFICULT PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES:

BY SHOWING UNBELIEVERS THE REALITY OF OUR RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST;

BY SHOWING BELIEVERS OUR EXAMPLE OF JOY AND FAITHFULNESS (WHICH GIVES THEM COURAGE TO

PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL)

cf. times of persecution throughout church history -- these have also been the times of most effective growth of the church -- not just in numbers but in depth of knowing God and fruitfulness in serving Him;
cf. the church today in China

I. (:12) STATEMENT OF HIS THESIS: THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE GOSPEL CAN ACTUALLY BENEFIT FROM DIFFICULT PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

A. The Apostle Paul's Personal Circumstances Looked Bleak

"the things relating to me" -- trace his sufferings from Acts 16 when God began a good work in their hearts to the present; What difficult circumstances are you facing today?

cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-27; Acts 20:6 - 28:31

Paul did not focus on his personal difficulties and he did not want others to be burdened down in a wrong sense either; he knew how to focus on living for Christ and how to live above his circumstances

Transition: *"have fallen out rather"* -- the result of his difficult circumstances is unexpected from the natural perspective

B. These Difficult Circumstances Have Promoted the Advancement of the Gospel

word originally denoted making headway in spite of blows, and so depicted progress; verb is used in the sense of to promote, to further in the sense of prosperity and progress

Gromacki: "It was a military term, used of engineers who would prepare a road for the advancing army by removing obstructions such as rocks and trees. Paul did not view difficulty with self-pity. He was not concerned how circumstances affected him; rather, he asked the question: How can this problem be used to proclaim the gospel in a distinctive way? Paul saw a beginning in what some called an end, and he walked through open doors which others concluded to be closed and locked."

rooted here in a conviction of a Sovereign God who is working out His divine plan in history; able to transform seemingly bad circumstances into good results from the perspective of eternity

people are actively promoting all sorts of worthless causes:
"everybody seems to have a cause for which to speak;
loudly from the rooftops they proclaim the thing they seek;
often for a needless cause and often to deceive;
Should not we who know the Lord declare what we believe"

our materialistic culture is very interested in personal
advancement (job promotions, self-help courses, etc.);
but who has a heart for promoting God's interests?

same word in 1:25 '*progress in the faith*'

Do we have the same goal that Paul had? Can we look back over
the varied paths of our circumstances to see how God has been using
us to advance the gospel?

II. (:13-18) TWOFOLD EXPLANATION -- TWO POSITIVE RESULTS FROM HIS DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

What were these 2 Positive Results?

A. Showing Unbelievers the Reality of His Relationship to Christ

(not just by his words but by his life -- his attitude, how he
conducted himself, his concern for others as being more important
than himself, his humility -- cf. all of the positive Christian
traits Paul speaks of in this letter -- he was living them out)

"so that" -- introduces results

1. His bonds were an instrument of freedom and opportunity and
rejoicing rather than enslavement and limitation and bitterness

"bonds" -- sums up all of his varied difficult circumstances

2. His bonds were plainly seen by all to be in fellowship with
Christ and in His service rather than on account of any
wrongdoing -- his life was evident and clearly blameless;
His relationship to Christ was deep and real

1:1 Paul was first a bond-servant of Jesus Christ; nothing
could happen to him that was not under the control of His
Sovereign Master -- he never had the sense of desparation that
comes when you feel your life is out of control

3. The scope of his testimony was unlimited
 - a. the strategic palace guard (praetorian guards)
 - b. all other unbelievers as well throughout Rome and the empire

B. Showing Believers His Example of Joy and Faithfulness Which Gave Them Courage to Proclaim the Gospel

1. The gospel advances more effectively through the testimony of many than just through the testimony of one superstar

importance of the body functioning in healthy fashion

value of multiplying your ministry

2. There is a natural fear of witnessing that needs to be overcome in order for us to advance the gospel
3. The right response to difficult circumstances can mobilize the ministry of others by encouraging them to step out in faith
4. People might proclaim the gospel from either good or bad motivations
 - a. out of a sense of competition and personal ambition
envy speaking more of the internal emotions and *strife* of the resulting outward conflict
 - b. out of a genuine love and sense of good will

Turner: “As horrible and ungodly as this kind of thinking is, it should not surprise us that, living in the seat of power of the most powerful government on the face of the earth, some brethren could, and did, get caught up in the pursuit of power, striving out of envy for preeminence among the brethren.”

MacArthur: “Paul said his detractors were thinking to cause him distress during his imprisonment (v. 17). They weren't concerned with the church--with the purity of its doctrine or its growth. They just wanted to hurt Paul so they could be on top. ‘Thinking’ refers to planning and scheming. They came up with various ways to aggravate Paul's already distressing situation. By attacking his integrity, credibility, faithfulness, and character, they knew they would hurt him--and that, sad to say, was their objective.”

5. We should rejoice in the proclamation of the gospel regardless of the motives of the proclaimers or their

good or bad intentions towards us personally

(Note: not condoning their bad motivation, but emphasizing his primary goal of the advance of the gospel. The Holy Spirit can use the truth in the lives of others even where the spirit of the messenger is faulty.)

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What circumstances do you face that you feel limit your opportunity to preach the Gospel effectively to others? Maybe you sit at a desk job all day and have minimal contact with others. Maybe you are a housewife taking care of young children all day. How can you trust God to work in your situation to make you effective where you are for the spread of the Gospel? Do we look at obstacles at opportunities for God to do something special?
- 2) How has the bold example of other Christians in certain situations helped to give you courage and boldness to step out in faith? Where have you been an encouragement to others in this regard?
- 3) What level of cooperation should exist among those individuals and groups that are proclaiming a Gospel message that is orthodox in content? Why do we need to be careful about trying to expose impure motives on the part of others?
- 4) Do we rejoice in every instance where we see the true message of Christ and the true Gospel proclaimed? Or do we find it necessary to pick apart other ministries and point out all of the areas in which they differ from us?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Boice: "Think how Paul must have lived to have this effect upon a corps of tough Roman soldiers. One prisoner looks much like another. The chain itself tells nothing, but the man himself does. Here was a man who had every right to be thinking about himself, but instead his talk was all of another. He spoke of Christ, even in prison. And even soldiers listened."

Gromacki: "In his analysis of the self-motivated preachers, Paul came to two conclusions. First, regardless of their motivation, the content of their message was orthodox. They did preach Christ (1:14, 15, 16, 18). Some have tried to identify this

group with the Judaizers, whom the apostle later condemned (3:1-2, 17-19). The Judaizers, however, preached a false gospel of salvation through legalistic works (II Cor. 11:13-15; Gal. 1:6-9). They preached another Christ, one whom Paul did not proclaim (II Cor. 11:4). There would be no way that he could have rejoiced over the erroneous content of the legalists. But this group, though wrongly motivated, was theologically correct in the doctrines of Christology and soteriology...

Second, Paul could rejoice over the proclamation of their message... He could not rejoice over their faulty motivation, but he could rejoice that their gospel was sound in content, that Christ was magnified, that sinners were regenerated, and that they themselves were saved brethren."

Motyer: "One factor had, in reality, controlled the past. As he looks back he can see it and it is something that is always true. It happens not just for apostles and special people. It is true for every believer, for in each and every case *'he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ'* (1:6). God rules. The pressures of life are the hands of the Potter who is also our Father; the fires of life are those of the Refiner. He does not abandon the perfecting process to others; nor is he ever, in his sovereign greatness, knocked off course by the malpractice of evil men or by the weakness of good men. *'God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should repent. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it?'*"

Wiersbe: "Paul uses an interesting word in verse 16 -- *contention*. It means 'to canvass for office, to get people to support you.' Paul's aim was to glorify Christ and get people to follow Him; his critics' aim was to promote themselves and win a following of their own."

Walvoord: "Paul's entire experience recognized the wisdom of God in permitting Paul to suffer. Divine revelation offers the only satisfactory explanation as to why there is suffering in the world as a whole, and why even the godly suffer. Paul was in prison as a means of increasing his testimony, as an effective way to evangelize Rome, and to prepare him spiritually to write the prison epistles.

Although the reasons for suffering may not always be immediately apparent, by faith a Christian can assume *'that all things work together for good to them that love God'* (Ro 8:28). Many a great Christian was molded in character in the crucible of suffering, matured in loneliness, and prepared for greater usefulness in God's hands than if untouched by the storms of life."

Carson: "Put the advance of the gospel at the center of your aspirations."

Racer: "A Secure Call Amid Spiritual One-upmanship ... Rejoicing in Hardship is the overall theme of the section ... The Gospel minister must be secure in his calling and not worry about what others think of his ministry ... Paul was able to stir up and encourage others to minister in places where he was unable to go ... The Hallmark character of Gospel Ministry involves: Trusting in the Lord, Courage, Preaching from Good Will, from Love and from Pure Motives ... requires a heart of compassion that is

broken over the plight of lost people ... The troublemakers are most likely not Judaizers (unsaved) but insecure ministers of the true gospel message who desire a following of disciples that are loyal to themselves ... Humility is the key (cf. Christ's command forbidding a spirit of exclusivism in ministry – Luke 9:37-50) ... The end of the matter of Paul: Whatever the method, whatever the motive, as long as Christ is truly preached, I'll rejoice. We will each give an account of our own ministry to the Lord. Security is found in seeking Christ's approval alone."

MacArthur: "Paul lived to see the gospel proclaimed--he didn't care who received the credit. That's to be the attitude of every pastor, teacher, elder, deacon, leader, and layperson in the church. In all that he suffered Paul didn't quit, lash out, break down, or lose his joy. That's because the cause of Christ was being furthered and His name proclaimed. It was all he cared about. That's an attitude the grace of Christ instills in all who would be godly. Trials and slander are unendurable if handled in the flesh, but those in the Spirit need never lose their joy because of them."

TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 1:19-26

TITLE: THE FOCUS OF THE GOSPEL = EXALTING CHRIST

BIG IDEA:

**FOCUS ON EXALTING CHRIST AND YOU CAN COUNT ON
SUPERNATURAL BOLDNESS IN FRUITFUL MINISTRY --
ONE THAT WILL GLORIFY CHRIST
AND EFFECTIVELY IMPACT OTHERS**

**I. SUPERNATURAL BOLDNESS IN FRUITFUL MINISTRY COMES FROM
FOCUSING ON EXALTING CHRIST (:19-21)**

A. The Power of Intercessory Prayer and the Help of the Holy Spirit
Give Confidence that We Will Persevere in the Faith (:19)

Our own perseverance in the faith must be the foundation for any
ministry that will impact others

"*This*" -- must refer to the same antecedent as the "*this*" in v.18;
the fact that Christ is being proclaimed and exalted and the gospel
is making great progress as a result of Paul's difficult personal
circumstances

the proclamation of Christ whether from good motives or from bad
motives (to try to cause Paul distress) which in either case causes
Paul to rejoice

(cf. **Pentecost** and **Kent** -- reference to the general circumstances
of his imprisonment in Rome -- "this imprisonment experience")

"*Salvation*" --

1) most translations read "deliverance" as a reference to some type of
physical deliverance from prison for Paul.

cf. **Lenski** -- saved from the possibility that during the rest of
his trial before the imperial court he might disgrace Christ and the
gospel

cf. **Ryrie** -- "Paul's trial had probably begun. He was confident
that either release or death would advance the cause of Christ.

Dearborn argues that this cannot refer to his physical release
because he did not know what the outcome of his trial would be (but
he certainly expects to be released);

2) cf. **J. H. Michael** who argues persuasively for reference to his
ultimate vindication in court based on the same Greek wording in the
LXX of Job 13:16 -- he is confident that whether acquitted or
convicted, his stand for Christ will be vindicated (signifies

victory in a contest for what is right)

"The progress of the gospel on account of my imprisonment will lead to my ultimate vindication thru the power of intercessory prayer and the help of the Holy Spirit"

3) Paul consistently uses this word to refer to ultimate salvation, whether in its present or future (consummated) aspect. cf. 2:13 and similar emphasis on perseverance in 1:6. Difficulty lies in seeing connection between progress of the gospel and Paul's final salvation. Perhaps Paul was confident that the Philippians would recognize the evil motives of those preachers who were trying to exalt themselves at the expense of Paul and would respond by increased intercessory prayer that would help him persevere in his faith and in his testimony on the path to his ultimate salvation

B. Supernatural Boldness is the Key to a Ministry that Glorifies Christ (:20b)

C. Focusing on Exalting Christ is the Key to Being Able to Count on Such Supernatural Boldness in Ministry (:20a,21)

MacArthur: 'The extent of Paul's confidence may be seen by his use of the Greek word apokaradokia, translated 'earnest expectation.' It's 'a picturesque word, denoting a state of keen anticipation of the future, the craning of the neck to catch a glimpse of what lies ahead' (Ralph P. Martin, New Century Bible: Philippians [Greenwood, S.C.: Attic Press, 1976], pp. 75-76). Paul rejoiced that he would never be put to shame before the world, the court of Caesar, or God Himself because he knew God would be glorified in his life."

II. THE PURPOSE OF THIS LIFE IS FRUITFUL MINISTRY -- ONE THAT GLORIFIES CHRIST AND BENEFITS OTHERS (:22-26)

A. The Opportunity for Continued Fruitful Ministry Counterbalances Our Desire to Escape the Difficulties of This Life and Enter Glory (:22-24)

cf. being caught between a rock and a hard place
Christian is caught between 2 great alternatives: eternal glory and fruitful ministry in this life

(**Hendriksen**)

REMAINING
temporary residence; tent

VS.

DEPARTING
permanent abode in heaven

suffering mixed with joy
suffering for a little while
absent from the Lord physically

the fight
realm of sin
oppty to live by faith and
have fruitful ministry

joy unmixed with suffering
joy forever
at home with the Lord
(no purgatory or soul-sleep)
the feast
realm of complete sinlessness
living by sight; receiving
rewards for fruitful ministry

Pentecost: "The apostle who has such a vision of glory before him is perfectly content to forego his entrance into glory, not because he is afraid of death, but because he has a proper perspective of his ministry growing out of a proper perspective of the place the Lord Jesus Christ has in his life. You wouldn't have to urge the Apostle Paul to pursue the ministry given to him. Why not? Because Christ is life to him. You wouldn't have to exhort the apostle to be faithful to the privilege entrusted to him. Why not? Because Christ is the center of his life. You wouldn't have to warn Paul about the danger of defection. Why not? Because Christ is the center of his life. You wouldn't have to warn Paul about the danger of temptation. Why not? Because Christ is the center of his life. When Christ becomes the center of a man's life here and now, all areas of his life fall into proper place; he assumes the privileges and opportunities God affords him--willingly and gladly and sacrificially, because living is Christ. ... Christian living is finding the proper center and then letting life revolve around that center."

B. Fruitful Ministry Involves Fellowship in the Gospel that Furthers the Gospel (effectively impacts others) and Focuses on Exalting Christ (:25-26)

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is our practice of self-denial in our Christian life primarily focused on our own spiritual advancement or on the impact of our ministry and testimony on others? Are we driven by choosing to do that which is *"more necessary for your sake"*? What value do we place on producing fruit for Christ as opposed to our own comfort in living?
- 2) Can we have this same expectation of *no shame* and *boldness* in proclamation that Paul experienced? What are some of the prerequisites and mindsets to achieve this?
- 3) You have heard it said that "a person is not really ready to live until he is ready to

die." How did Paul exemplify this sentiment? What is our perspective towards death?

4) How does this passage refute the Roman Catholic notion of some disciplinary state of purgatory or some transitional unconscious state in between our death and our enjoyment of fellowship with the Lord?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

MacArthur: Review

I. JOY IN SPITE OF TROUBLE (vv. 12-14)

II. JOY IN SPITE OF DETRACTORS (vv. 15-18)

III. JOY IN SPITE OF DEATH (vv. 19-21)

IV. JOY IN SPITE OF THE FLESH (vv. 22-26)

Carson: Re summary of Chapter 1

1. Put the fellowship of the gospel at the center of your relationships with believers.
2. Put the priorities of the gospel at the center of your prayer life.
3. Put the advance of the gospel at the center of your aspirations.
4. Put the converts of the gospel at the center of your principled self-denial.

Bruce: "Paul's deep desire and hope is not for his own safety but for the progress of the gospel, the perseverance of his converts, and the accomplishment of God's redeeming purpose."

Gromacki: "Most people want life without death rather than life with death. The natural desire of humans is to live, not to die. Those who choose death over life usually want relief from suffering or depression. The case of Paul, however, was much different. He had to determine where he wanted to live. Today, people make choices about living in the city or in the country, and about residing in the north or in the sun belt. The apostle debated the advantages and disadvantages of living on earth with living in heaven; thus, his approach toward death was unique."

Martin: "He is confident that he can count upon two kinds of aid at this time, human (*your prayer*) and divine (*the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ*). Nothing is more impressive of Paul's large humanity than his constant appeal for the prayers of his converts (see Rom. xv.30; 2 Cor. i.11; Col. iv.3; 1 Thes. v.25). He shows, too, his dependence upon the Spirit who dwelt so richly in Jesus Christ (cf. Acts xvi. 7, RV)."

Mounce: "The apostle's expectation was twofold: that he would not be *ashamed* (i.e., be disappointed by the failure of divine help), and that Christ would *be magnified* ... in his body (the natural sphere for the outward expression of the inner man)."

Motyer: "Examination will show that his certainty belongs to the realm of ambition: he knows what he is heading for; uncertainty belongs to the realm of out-working: he is not sure just how things will work out..."

Christian hope makes the outcome certain but leaves open both the time of fulfillment and the means by which the goal is reached...

When a Christian dies all the uncertainties and dangers lie behind: the uncertainties and dangers whether of camp-life or of temporary stay in a foreign port. All the certainties and safeties lie ahead in the presence of Christ. And this, in the second place, is the blessedness of Christian death. The Christian goes to be with Christ. Scripture leaves so much about life after death undescribed, but on this central fact there is not hesitation: the Christian dead are *'with Christ.'*"

MacArthur: 'Paul's great desire was to serve and glorify God, wherever that might be and whatever the cost to himself. Yet such singlemindedness often characterizes those building earthly kingdoms more than those who ought to be building God's kingdom. The Puritan Thomas Brooks said, 'Be ashamed, Christians, that worldlings are more studious and industrious to make sure of pebbles, than you are to make sure of pearls' (The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations, I.D.E. Thomas, ed. [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977], p. 258). Is your life given to serving and glorifying God in the way that so many in this world are given to serving and glorifying themselves? ...

Philippians 1:12-26 shows a man content to be where God placed him. He would have been as content to go and be with Christ as to stay and serve the needs of Christ's church. That's because Paul's heart and mind were set on heaven and fulfilling the desires of heaven's master; his contentment was a by-product of his focus. Yet often we find ourselves discouraged and discontent because of our circumstances. Thomas Watson wrote, 'Spiritual things satisfy; the more of heaven is in us, the less earth will content us.... Fly aloft in your affections, thirst after the graces and comforts of the Spirit; the eagle that flies above in the air, fears not the stinging of the serpent; the serpent creeps on his belly, and stings only such creatures as go upon the earth' (The Art of Divine Contentment [Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, n.d.], pp. 97-98). Consider what your heart and mind are set on. If they're set on the right things, you'll be content with the circumstances in which God has placed you."

Racer: "Bold Living in Troubled Times ...

Introduction – Beltway Sniper shootings causing people to live in fear ... where is our security? We don't want to live in bondage to fear.

How do we live a bold life?

- must have a life consecrated to God – fully submitted to Lordship of Christ
- must be living a servant life
- must have conviction of work that yet remains to be finished – sense that I am indestructible until my work here on earth is done; Commit ourselves to fully LIVE until we die; some people DIE before they actually die"

TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30

TITLE: THE TYPE OF LIFE THAT IS WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL

BIG IDEA:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST SHOULD INSPIRE SPIRITUAL UNITY AND SUPERNATURAL COURAGE AS WE STRIVE TOGETHER TO FURTHER THE GOSPEL (WHILE ACCEPTING THE INEVITABILITY OF PERSECUTION)

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: Having completed the news about his circumstances, Paul now addresses the needs of the Philippians, beginning with the persecution and suffering they were experiencing (1:27–30) and then turning to the importance of Christian unity and humility (2:1–18). The gospel is central to both sections and draws them together. The Philippians were “*partners in the gospel*” with Paul (1:5). All of his experiences, including his chains, had served to advance the gospel (v. 12). Now Paul exhorts them that in all they are going through they should conduct themselves in a way “*worthy of the gospel*” (v. 27). The core of this passage is **ethical exhortation**. Paul presses the Philippian believers to live the Christian life to the full and to make certain that in all their difficulties they are living like Christ and working together in unity.

Gerald Hawthorne: Using a word of special relevance to those who lived in a Roman colony (Acts 16:12, 21), Paul recalls their citizen life in an outpost of the empire and applies this term to their life—together with a higher allegiance to God’s (Christ’s) kingly rule as his servants and citizens. This is the heavy, theological, ecclesiological, and ethical freight contained in his quasi-political term: “*let your life in the polis of God’s realm be worthy of your allegiance to the good news,*” that is, the work of Paul as preacher and church leader under God (Phil 1:5, 12, 27 [2x]; 4:3, 15). The “*worthy life*” (a theme picked up in Pol. Phil. 5:9, which uses both the verb and the adverb, and developed more extensively in Diogn. 5.9: Christians “pass their time upon earth, but . . . have their citizenship in heaven”) is seen in two commendable and necessary virtues: **courage and unity**. The link between good citizenship and unity is made by **Dio Chrysostom** (A.D. 40–120). **Augustine** was influenced by this terminology of “worthy citizenship” (see **Bockmuehl**).

First, Paul’s readers are to conduct themselves in a hostile world with confidence that God is with them to drive out their fear (Phil 1:28). The church’s salvation, meaning their welfare and integrity, as in 2:12 at the conclusion and enforcement of the christological section, is in higher hands than those who would destroy them. Paul turns the tables on the persecutors with a well-known moral maxim: “Destruction to the destroyer” (see 1:28; see 1 Cor 3:17 for a clear example applied to failing professed Christians). In the light of this confidence, let the Philippians take courage and close ranks (Phil 1:27).

The call, however, is not simply on grounds of prudence and common sense, reminding them that they would be easy prey if they fell apart in disarray—and so incidentally Paul’s own work as church founder would go for nothing (2:16). Significantly, Paul provides a theological reason for his assurance that all will be well. He is not in the business of handing out simple bromides to boost faltering faith. Rather, he offers a theodicy (1:29) as a tonic to lift drooping and nervous spirits and sets the suffering of the Philippians within the framework of God’s all-embracing providence, as he viewed his own—and Christ’s—fate in terms of God’s gracious provision (1:29: “*it has been granted in grace*”; cf. 2:9: “*bestowed in grace*”).

Joseph Hellerman: 1:27–30 forms a discrete unit, a single sentence, with one main vb., πολιτεύεσθε (v. 27a). Asyndeton begins a new subject but one closely related to what has gone before:

- (a) εἴτε ἐλθὼν καὶ ἰδὼν ὑμᾶς εἴτε ἀπόν (v. 27) recalls Paul’s reflections about his future circumstances in vv. 25–26;
- (b) the account of Paul’s own circumstances, and the fact that they served to advance the gospel (vv. 12–26), serve as the basis of his authority to challenge the Philippians in vv. 27–30 (Hansen 93; O’Brien 145; Reumann 287). . .

Repeated ideas within the passage include

- the gospel (v. 27 [2x]),
- suffering (vv. 28a, 29c),
- the Christian life as a struggle or athletic contest (vv. 27d, 30a),
- and the centrality of Christ in faith and hardship (vv. 27a, 29).

George Hunsinger: For Paul, faith and suffering are two sides of *koinōnia* with Christ, though it is promised that this suffering will not occur without a measure of comfort. Knowing Christ means knowing him in two respects: “*the power of his resurrection*” and “*the fellowship of his sufferings*” (Phil. 3:10 NKJV, adapted). It means sharing abundantly in his afflictions, and through him also abundantly in comfort (2 Cor. 1:5). The point of faith is not to avoid suffering at all costs but to “*let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ*” (*axiōs tou euangeliou tou Christou politeuesthe*).

Because suffering for the sake of Christ is to be expected, evading it (in the wrong way or at the wrong time) would be unworthy. Suffering therefore does not need to be sought. It will arrive in due course—that is, in the normal course of bearing witness to Christ. Suffering will then be used by grace in spite of itself. It will be accompanied by spiritual consolation and the hope of deliverance. It will be used to deepen the soul, fostering spiritual growth and reliance on God.

Dennis Johnson: When people find themselves surrounded and outnumbered by an unsympathetic or even hostile dominant culture, they tend to react in various ways. They might get feisty and lash out like a cornered wolf. Or they might get timid and pull back like a turtle into its shell. Then again, they might get sneaky and blend into their surroundings like a chameleon. Or they might get frustrated and turn on each other like a pack of pit bulls, venting hostility internally that they dare not show to their

oppressors. To put it another way, when the whole world is against us, some of us become bold but abrasive, whereas others become humble but timid. Then again, we might display an unhealthy combination, cowering timidly toward those outside and arguing abrasively among ourselves. The mind-set of those who become bold but abrasive is: “They are the enemy; we are in the right, pure, and therefore persecuted. Someday they will get what’s coming to them.” The humble but timid, whether they withdraw or blend in, meekly try to persuade the dominant majority, “Please just leave us alone; we won’t make waves—we promise!” And sometimes those who bow deferentially toward the unsympathetic outside world then turn around and assault fellow believers, whom they should treasure in times of trial.

But the apostle Paul, writing from the chains of imprisonment, calls his fellow followers of Jesus in Philippi to respond to the surrounding society’s hostility in a way that does not come naturally. He does not underestimate the gravity of the opponents’ evil. In fact, he states soberly that their aggression toward Christ’s people is a signal that those opponents are on their way to eternal destruction. But Paul summons the Philippian believers and us to respond to those who despise our faith and our Savior with a distinctive blend of **boldness and humility**, neither intimidated nor belligerent, neither fearful of those outside nor frustrated with those inside the church. We must show **courage** that does not blink when opponents confront us, along with concern for fellow Christians with whom we stand, **shoulder to shoulder**. This new way of responding to the pressures of a society that has no sympathy for our faith is grounded in a deepening appreciation for the privileged status that Christ has conferred upon us by his grace.

Frank Thielman: In **1:27–30** Paul compares his own struggle against inimical outside forces, just recounted in **1:18b–26**, with the Philippians’ struggle against outside opposition, a theme that will reappear in **2:15–16a** and 4:4–9. He also introduces the theme of the Philippians’ unity, a concern that reappears in **2:6–18** and **4:2–3**. This paragraph, then, allows the themes of the previous section to mingle with the themes of subsequent sections, providing a skillful transition between these two major parts of the letter.

I. (1:27a) THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST SHOULD BE THE INSPIRATION FOR OUR LIFESTYLE

"Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ"

What value do we place on the gospel?

What type of a benchmark does the gospel provide for our lifestyle?

Opposition should not discourage us or tone down our level of commitment.

R. Kent Hughes: At the center of the treasure is the fact that “*Only let your manner of life*” under-translates the Greek, which better reads, “*Only let your manner of life as citizens be worthy of the gospel of Christ.*” The Greek verb is *politeuesthai*, which shares its root with the cognate noun *polis* or “*city*” as well as with another noun,

politeuma, which is translated “citizenship” in **3:20** (“*But our citizenship is in heaven*”). So here in **verse 27** it means “*live as citizens*.” Thus Paul purposely uses language evocative of citizenship because he has in mind the ultimate citizenship of the Philippians. As **Gordon Fee** explains, “Paul now uses the verb metaphorically, not meaning ‘live as citizens of Rome’—although that is not irrelevant—but rather ‘live in the Roman colony of Philippi as worthy citizens of your heavenly homeland.’” **Fee** adds, “As Philippi was a colony of Rome in Macedonia, so the church was a ‘colony of heaven’ in Philippi, whose members were to live as its citizens in Philippi.”

Steven Lawson: This verb "*conduct*" needs to be broken down in order to understand what it requires.

1. First, in the Greek "*conduct yourselves*" is in the **present tense**. This means that they must live every moment of every day in the manner prescribed.
2. Second, this verb is in the **middle voice**, indicating that it is incumbent upon each believer to assume this charge.
3. Third, it is a second person plural verb, revealing that this conduct is prescribed

4. Fourth, this is in the imperative mood—a command from God himself with binding authority upon their lives.

Combining all four of these aspects, Paul is saying, Live consistent with the gospel always. Take action with this, all of you—and that is God’s command. This command is for everyone, always.

The implication is that how we live must be consistent with what we believe; otherwise we will be a walking contradiction in terms. A disciple of Christ is responsible for conducting themselves in a way that matches and showcases the gospel they believe. As believers, we must never become passive in pursuing holiness. We must walk in a godly manner of life. Are you a citizen of the kingdom of God, a believer in Christ? If so, this command is directed to you. We must answer this call to "only" conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel.

Max Anders: God was in control of the situation. Paul could be released from prison or killed by the Romans. Just as he wanted to maintain his testimony for Christ, he longed for the Philippians to remain faithful, too. They would show faithfulness by living a life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Such a life would not just be legalistic, obeying moral laws. It would show forth the spirit and love of Christ in every human relationship. Paul had faced opposition to his efforts for the cause of Christ without fear. He exhorted the Philippians to do the same even as they faced opposition. They could do so but only if they did so together. The world must see a united front defending and proclaiming the gospel. No longer would divided motives of love and selfishness do. The church must face the world in one spirit. A fearless, unified church will astound the world. They will see the truth of the gospel. Opposing the gospel, the world faces God's destruction. Proclaiming the gospel, the church waits for God's salvation.

Gordon Fee: With the modifier, “*worthy of the gospel of Christ*,” Paul defines both the parameters and the nature of the new “polis” of which they are citizens and to which they have obligation. As noted above (vv. 5, 7, 12), the gospel is the crucial matter. He and they have had a long-term participation together in the cause of the gospel (1:5), for the confirmation and defense of which Paul is now in prison (vv. 7, 15), an imprisonment which in its own way has fallen out for the “*advance of the gospel*” (v. 12). What was anticipated in the prayer (vv. 9–11) is now spelled out by way of imperative. Whatever they do or suffer in Philippi, they must live in a way that is “*worthy of the gospel of Christ*.” The phrase presupposes that the gospel had known ethical content, and that “*selfish ambition, vain conceit, grumbling, and disputing*,” for example, are not in keeping with their heavenly citizenship, since they do not reflect the ethical character of the gospel. In God’s time Paul will return to Philippi for their own “*advance*” in “*the faith*” (= the gospel); for now he writes to encourage the same. Thus, if Paul’s “*affairs*” are all about Christ and his being glorified, so he now urges the same on them, that whatever else, for them, too, “*to live is Christ*.”

Steven Lawson: **What does behavior befitting a citizen of heaven actually look like?** Paul invokes the “soldiering” imagery to introduce the two key qualities that distinguish heaven’s citizens. On the battlefield, survival and victory depend on **unity** with one’s

fellow soldiers and **courage** when confronting the enemy. Likewise, the main features of heavenly citizen-soldiers are

- (1) a selfless humility that fosters unity, and
- (2) a courageous confidence that withstands suffering.

Paul introduces the importance of unity in **Philippians 1:27**, and he will spell out the details in **2:1–4**. In most of the text before us (**1:28–30**), his stress falls on how the Philippians must respond to their opponents with **unflinching confidence**, grounded in their union with Christ by faith. Cultivating this odd combination of humility and courage, says Paul, will enable his friends at Philippi to stand in solidarity against the pressure of the surrounding society.

John MacArthur: What truly mattered was their consistent, holy conduct. *Monon* (*only*) is placed at the beginning of the sentence in the Greek text for emphasis. Above all, Paul wanted their lives to reflect worthily on the gospel of Christ. It is a truth the apostle reiterates implicitly throughout the letter and explicitly in the next chapter, admonishing them: “*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, 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*” (**2:15–16**). . .

To live in a manner *worthy of the gospel of Christ* is to live a life consistent with God’s revealed Word. That includes living a life that corresponds to the divine truth Christians profess to believe, preach, teach, and defend. In other words, it means living with **integrity** in every facet of life.

Tony Merida: Paul is making one very important, serious, and comprehensive point, and we should pay attention to it. What is it? He exhorts the Philippians to live “*worthy of the gospel of Christ*.” Believers are making a statement about the gospel not only with their lips but also with their lives. The gospel is about love; therefore, we should be known as loving people. The gospel is about justice; therefore, we should be justice-seeking people. The gospel is about life; therefore, we should display visible vitality and joy in our gatherings and in our relationships. The gospel is about liberty; therefore, we should not live as stuffy legalists. The gospel is about humility; therefore, we should be a humble people, gladly serving others.

II. (1:27b) THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST SHOULD INSPIRE SPIRITUAL UNITY

A. Motivation = Encouraging Our Spiritual Leaders

"whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you"

Not only because this lifestyle is consistent with the gospel, but such loyal solidarity is expected and meets with the approval of spiritual leaders.

B. Method = Pursuing Loyal Solidarity = True Unity

1. One Spirit

"that you are standing firm in one spirit,"

Grant Osborne: “*Steadfast*” -- standing firm for Christ in the midst of struggle and severe persecution.

Gordon Fee: Paul himself uses this very language (“*in one Spirit*”) in another Prison Epistle (**Eph 2:18**; cf. **4:4**) as well as in **1 Cor 12:13** to describe the **Holy Spirit**, precisely in passages where the emphasis is on believers’ common experience of the one Spirit as the **basis for unity**. No one would imagine in these cases that “*in one Spirit*” refers to the esprit de corps of the community. Paul’s point is that their being one in Christ is the direct result of the one Spirit’s presence in their individual and community life. So too in this case. . .

That he should qualify the Spirit as “*the one Spirit*” emphasizes the **source of their unity**. Only by standing firm in the one and only Spirit can they hope to contend as “one person” for the gospel against their opposition. We should therefore not be surprised that this is the first thing said in the long appeal for unity (**1:27 – 2:18**) that begins with this sentence.

David Garland: The command to “*stand firm in one spirit*” is a military metaphor that pictures the Philippians as resolute soldiers standing their ground. In ancient hoplite (armed foot soldier) warfare, troops fought as a densely packed phalanx, eight ranks deep, that moved together against their opponents. Maintaining the cohesion of the massed military formation with shields overlapping and spears extended was more important than individual virtuosity with weapons. This cohesive body of troops won battles. Soldiers therefore needed to stay in formation, whether attacking or retreating, and defeat could follow if one soldier broke ranks and allowed the enemy to pour through. Paul connects the exhortation to stand firm to his statement about coming and seeing them, or remaining absent and only hearing reports about them. **Krentz** (“Military Language,” 118–19) observes that in ancient warfare generals did not hunker down in far-off command posts but fought alongside their troops. Julius Caesar’s account (Gallic War 2.25) of a desperate battle in 57 BC describes him in a critical situation advancing into the front line, calling centurions by name and encouraging the troops; his arrival “refreshed the embattled troops’ spirits with every man wanting to do his best in the sight of his general.” Paul’s captivity meant his absence from them, but he encourages them as one who promises to return.

Alternative View:

John MacArthur: the context of the present passage, which focuses on **believers’ attitudes**, seems to indicate that he is speaking of the believer’s human spirit.

Richard Melick: The word “*spirit*” is used in parallel with the word “*soul*” (**1:27b**; “*as one man*,” NIV), and thus refers to the attitude that should characterize the church. It naturally cannot refer to the Holy Spirit, nor does a combination of the Holy Spirit working to strengthen the human spirit satisfy the parallel constructions. Paul drew on the imagery of persons to describe the function of the body of Christ. It is unnecessary to distinguish between “*spirit*” and “*soul*” here. They both explain the **immaterial part**

of persons, and the point Paul made was that the church was to unite inside and out. Both “one spirit” and “one soul” mean that there was **no divisiveness**. The differences between the words are minimal.

2. One Mind

“with one mind”

George Hunsinger: He wants them not only to live at peace among themselves but also to be resolute in their witness to the outside world. His remarks seem to reflect not only a measure of discord from within but also a certain wavering under pressure from the outside. Paul encourages the faithful to be “*of one mind*” (*mia psychē*), so that they may strive together with him (“*side by side*”) in pursuit of their high common calling (“*the faith of the gospel*”). He calls them to display a maturity that prevails against their adversities regardless of whether he can come to them personally or must remain absent.

C. Mission = Gospel Advancement

"striving together for the faith of the Gospel"

David Garland: Paul reinforces the need for them to form one concordant body that can present a united front to frightening and powerful opponents.

G. Walter Hansen: A well-trained army presents a united front and fights as a single unit when the soldiers are fighting side by side as one person. **Aristotle** used the phrase “one soul” to portray unanimity in friendship: “Friends have one soul between them; friends’ goods are common property; friendship is equality.” Paul’s image of striving together with one soul conveys the ideal of such unity among Christians that they are no longer striving as separate individuals but striving together as one person. . . . When Christians focus on proclaiming the gospel and living by the truth of the gospel, they will be soul mates, striving together with one soul.

John MacArthur: He is emphasizing the attitude not of taking advantage of another for one’s own benefit, but rather of sacrificing one’s own welfare to promote the welfare of others. The idea of contending against is implied, but only in the sense that the church must also be **striving together** against sin and the common enemy, Satan and his demon hosts.

Paul stresses here the positive relationship of believers with each other. More than one athletic team with many outstanding players has failed to win a championship because most of those players concentrated on their own success rather than the team’s. A less talented team can often win against one that is more talented because the weaker team works efficiently together to achieve a common objective. A player with outstanding talent may be temporarily sidelined or even put off the team, because, impressive as his individual efforts might be, he does his team more harm than good. **Striving together** in the church means playing as a team to advance the truth of God.

R. Kent Hughes: “*Striving side by side*” is the **teamwork** vocabulary of athletes or soldiers. It is at the heart of winning teams. **Stephen Ambrose** in his book *Comrades*, which includes the story of Lewis and Clark, describes this as the secret of their epic accomplishments: “What Lewis and Clark had done, first of all, was to demonstrate that there is nothing that men cannot do if they get themselves together and act as a team.”

III. (1:28-30) THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST SHOULD INSPIRE SUPERNATURAL COURAGE WHILE ACCEPTING THE INEVITABILITY OF PERSECUTION

A. (:28) Empowered to Display Supernatural Courage

“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.”

- What it signifies about the ultimate destiny of your opponents
- What it signifies about your ultimate destiny

(cf. **2 Thess. 1:4-6** – “*This is a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment*”)

Gordon Fee: Such a united front in spreading the gospel in Philippi, by people whose eschatological certainties give them uncommon boldness, will mean that those who oppose them can in no way intimidate them; indeed, such a disposition will serve as an omen with regard to the opponents of their destruction.

David Garland: The “*sign*” or “*proof*” given to the foe is not a dramatic announcement of their impending doom writ large in the clouds or a thundering voice from heaven that strikes fear in their hearts. The sign is simply Christians not being frightened but standing firm together and battling shoulder to shoulder for the faith. The unity of the church and their refusal to cower in the face of persecution become the proof of their own salvation and the perdition in store for their enemies. They are to become a model for how persons from different cultures and ethnicities get along because they know they all belong to Christ. They can demonstrate how the Christian hope casts out fear. Salvation (*sōtēria*, GK 5401; NIV, “*saved*”) is connected to not acting shamefully in the face of external threats (as in **1:19**). Destruction (*apōleia*, GK 724; NIV, “*destroyed*”) is the necessary opposite of salvation, if salvation is to have any meaning, and refers to the result of judgment on the day of Christ.

G. Walter Hansen: The certainty of salvation rests not on human striving but on God. All of their salvation evidenced by their standing and striving is by God and “*from God*.” God is the source of all aspects of their salvation — of their ability to stand firm in the one Spirit, their striving together as one soul to declare and live by the gospel, and their courageous persistence when threatened with destruction by their opponents. Their courage was rooted in their faith that destruction by their opponents could not overturn the certainty of their salvation by God.

B. (:29) Predestined to Experience Persecution for Christ's Sake

*“For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake,
not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,”*

The Source of the Conflict is the same as the Source of Salvation.

David Garland: This assertion would challenge any who mistakenly assume that grace is only connected to receiving mercy and forgiveness. True, but it has also been graciously given to Christians to suffer. Suffering is not a sign of their abandonment by God but a sign of special grace granted to them.

In the biblical model, to be chosen by God does not protect one from suffering for God. It is a call to suffer. One is not delivered **from** suffering but given the strength to **pass through it**. The election is for contending with and for God, seen in the very etymology of the name Israel, “*a limping people*” (**Holmes Rolston, III**, “Does Nature Need to Be Redeemed?” *Zygon* 29 [1994]: 220). Most, if not all, of the Philippian Christians were converted from a pagan background in which the deities did not require devotees to endure suffering for their religious allegiance. These converts quite naturally would be unsettled by Paul’s and their own suffering, since nothing in their religious background linked worship of a god to suffering for that god. Religion was tied to the search for happiness: I sacrifice to a god so that he or she will bless me more and give me what I want. Paul’s primary concern, however, is not to explain why suffering is part and parcel of Christian life but to insist that these believers be **united under persecution**.

G. Walter Hansen: The suffering in view here is not everyday headaches and heartaches. Suffering on behalf of Christ is caused by public identification with Christ in a world hostile to Christ.

R. Kent Hughes: Paul’s point was that he and the Philippians were all recipients of grace as they had been given the gifts of salvation and suffering. Their mutual *agôn* was a testimony to the grace of God. Listen to **John Calvin**’s passionate application:

“Oh, if this conviction were fixed in our minds, that persecutions are to be reckoned among God’s benefits, what progress would be made in the doctrine of godliness! And yet, what is more certain than that it is the highest honour of the Divine grace, that we suffer for His name either reproach, or imprisonment, or miseries, or tortures, or even death, for in that case He decorates us with His insignia. But more will be found who will order God and His gifts to be gone, rather than embrace the cross readily when it is offered to them. Woe, then, to our stupidity!”

The understanding that suffering and salvation are both gifts of grace is essential to discipleship and perseverance. Sadly, the misunderstanding or rejection of this has led to the spiritual demise of not a few.

Richard Melick: Christians should remember that general suffering sometimes comes because they live in a world which suffers as a result of sin, that Christians are called to a unique Christian suffering because of their identification with righteousness in an evil world, that it is a divinely given privilege to be involved in this battle, and that the struggle becomes redemptive in attesting the grace gift in their own experience. The Philippians were, therefore, to take heart if they were called to suffer. Their steadfastness would demonstrate the reality of their relationship to God.

Tony Merida: Paul rounds out this paragraph by touching on the **nature of Christian suffering**. What he says may surprise some believers. Most Christians understand salvation as a gift from God (**John 1:12-13; Eph 2:8-9**), but Paul points out that **suffering for Christ's sake is also a gift**. Suffering for the sake of Christ is a privilege. Paul's words are worth a careful, prayerful reflection. Do you recall how Peter rebuked Jesus for saying that He, the Christ, was going to die on a cross? At that time, Peter's gospel didn't have a cross in it, so he was rattled by this notion. Jesus then effectively told Peter, "*You must follow Me to the cross*" (see **Mark 8:31-38**). Peter had a hard time accepting this basic fact about following Jesus. How much more do we who live in relatively safe environments lose sight of this reality?

To be clear, we don't suffer in the same way as Jesus; His death was an atoning death. But our symbol for life and ministry is a cross, not a recliner, not a flat screen, not first-class tickets on the airplane, and not plush golf courses. You may have those things, and they may be enjoyed appropriately at times, but let's not forget that the call to follow Jesus is a call to follow Him down the Calvary road. And Paul adds this: It's a gift to suffer for Him like that!

How exactly is suffering for Christ a gift? According to the previous verse, it provides a sense of assurance that we belong to Jesus. **Suffering also brings you closer to Jesus**. Paul relates this idea in **3:10-11**. This attitude regarding suffering appears throughout the book of Acts. At one point, after the apostles had been beaten, Luke says, "*Then they went out from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonored on behalf of the Name*" (**Acts 5:41**). They did not just tolerate suffering, they rejoiced in it! They saw it as a gift.

You will enjoy a **special intimacy with Jesus** as you identify with Him through courageous Christian witness. Suffering for the sake of the mission doesn't mean He is abandoning you; rather, suffering is a sign that He is with you. Jesus calls us all to obey Him, and that will lead to varying degrees of conflict. You may face a mild form of opposition, like being mocked, insulted, or ignored. You may face severe opposition, like being tied up by Islamic extremists. In every situation, see your suffering as a privilege. We get to suffer for His name.

C. (:30) Privileged to Experience Fellowship in Suffering
*"experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me,
and now hear to be in me."*

G. Walter Hansen: Suffering can more easily be accepted as a gracious gift from God when we see how it is a gift of God's grace in the life of someone we love. Paul reminds his friends of his experience of suffering so that they will have his example to follow in their own affliction. Their partnership with Paul brought them into the same struggle Paul had.

George Hunsinger: Again, Paul stresses that the Philippians are not alone in their conflicts. He especially wants them to see that they exist with him in a solidarity of suffering. They share in the same *conflict (ton auton agōna)*, because of the same loyalties, and with the same hopes. For they are all bound together in one Lord. Their consolation, both now and forever, is found in Christ alone.

John MacArthur: When they suffer for the Lord's sake, Paul goes on to tell his readers, they are *experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me. The conflict which you saw in me* refers to the hostile opposition and persecution he and Silas faced when they were imprisoned in Philippi (**Acts 16:16–40**). *And now hear to be in me* refers, of course, to the apostle's present imprisonment in Rome, which he has already mentioned (vv. 12–18).

CONCLUSION:

James Boice: How does the matter of Christian unity stand with you? Are there divisions that ought not to exist? Are there hard feelings? Are there rationalizations for divisive, non-Christian conduct?

How does our lifestyle measure up to these glorious blessings of the Gospel?
2 characteristics should be evident:

- spiritual unity (loyal solidarity)
- supernatural courage

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What types of attitudes threaten the unity and solidarity of our local assembly? Are we secure enough in our unity together that we can be aggressive in reaching out to others with the gospel and contending for the faith or are we primarily passive and focused on protecting ourselves? What difference is there between union and unity? Think of the parallel to a soccer team ... what types of attitudes make for a good player vs. a player who actually hurts the team?

2) Is our conduct the same whether authority figures (like the apostle Paul) are present to observe us or absent? Are we the same person in every situation in life or do our responses and lifestyle vary depending on whom we are with at the time?

3) Do we look at persecution and suffering for the gospel as part of our divine calling or as some type of unexpected aberration?

4) How can we be of the "*same mind*" while still thinking independently and not being puppets that automatically subscribe to whatever is being voiced from the pulpit?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Homer Kent: Exhortation to Unity and Courage in View of External Foes --

Failure of the church to be intimidated by enemies was a token of the ultimate failure of the enemies of God. The adversaries may not have recognized this, but it was nonetheless a sign that their attacks were futile and that the church would prevail ... it was a sign to them of two things: their ultimate destruction and the salvation of the believers.

James Boice: If believers will conduct themselves in a manner that leads to Christian unity, then they will find that this also leads them to strive together to advance the Christian Gospel. And the result will be an aggressive Christianity. The Christians at Philippi knew what it meant to stand fast as Romans at the frontiers of the Roman world. They knew the obligation that was theirs to advance Roman rule in the face of barbarism. In the same way, Paul would have them united for an aggressive advancement of the faith.

How we need to recover an **aggressive faith** today! For the most part Christianity in our day has retreated into spiritual ghettos, and believers seem content to have it that way so long as they are safe and their children never wander beyond the barricades.

William Barclay: But on this occasion Paul uses a word which he very seldom uses to express his meaning, and to paint his picture. Normally the word which Paul uses for to behave oneself or to conduct oneself in the ordinary affairs of life is *peripatein*, which literally means to walk about; here he uses the word *politeuesthai*, which means to be a citizen; *polites* is the Greek for a citizen. Paul was writing from the very centre of the Roman Empire, from Rome itself; it was the fact that he was a Roman citizen that had brought him there at all. Philippi was a Roman colony; and Roman colonies were little bits of Rome planted throughout the world. In Roman colonies the Roman citizens never forgot that they were Romans. They spoke the Latin language, wore the Latin dress, called their magistrates by the Latin names, insisted on being stubbornly Roman, however far they might be from Rome. So what Paul is saying is this, "You and I know full well the privileges and the responsibilities of being a Roman citizen. You know full well how even in Philippi, so many miles from Rome, you must still live and act as a Roman does. Well then, remember that you have an even higher duty than that. Wherever you are you must live as befits a citizen of the Kingdom of God; you must never forget the privileges and the responsibilities of citizenship, not this time of Rome,

but of the Kingdom of God.” So, then, a Christian must ever remember the Kingdom of which he is a citizen, and his conduct must befit his citizenship.

Robert Gromacki: The Philippians lost some of their joy when they heard about the arrest and the subsequent imprisonments of Paul. Their joy was further lessened when they heard about the terminal sickness of Epaphroditus (2:26-28). They were totally unaware that Paul was rejoicing in the midst of his adversity. They wanted the apostle to have joy; but instead, they themselves were in need of it.

The apostle, of course, could not have total joy as long as the church was marked by sadness. In addition, when believers are not rejoicing in the Lord they will be marked by divisiveness, pride, and selfishness. To correct the situation, Paul issued a direct command: “*Fulfill ye my joy*” (2:2).

John Piper: Which is why Paul defines living worthy of the gospel as living in unity with each other and living in fearlessness toward opponents. Living worthy of the gospel means that “*to live is Christ*” --and so he becomes the center of our life and our unity; living worthy of the gospel means that “*to die is gain*” -- and that promise takes away our opponents' last weapon (death) and takes away our last fear.

Unified striving together for the gospel and fearlessness before our opponents are the two ways that Paul says are at the heart of living worthy of the gospel.

And since they show the worth of the gospel so powerfully, Paul calls them in v. 28b a sign from God. When we live in unity and when we stand courageously and unafraid and humbly and lovingly before our opponents this is a sign that the gospel is indeed true and that therefore those who believe it are saved and those who don't believe it are perishing.

So there are many reasons for a series like this. But perhaps the most important one is that we are called to live worthy of the gospel. We are called to live in a way that shows the worth and value of the gospel--that we prize the gospel more than anything in the world. We are called to show that our treasure is not in this world, our hope is not in money and earthly security, our satisfaction is not in power and prestige, our contentment is not in the approval of other people, our happiness is not in avoiding criticism and slander.

Instead, our treasure and hope and satisfaction and contentment and happiness are in Christ and his promises: to live is Christ and to die is gain. Unity in Christ and fearlessness before our opponents make the worth of the Gospel clear. So the call to courage in these messages is a call to magnify the worth of the Gospel and glorify the all-satisfying value of Christ.

Turner: The Philippians had been granted grace or favor in that they were not just allowed to believe in Christ, but to suffer for Him also. After the apostles had been condemned and beaten by the council, it is said, “*So they departed from the presence of*

the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41). And Peter wrote, “But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, {you are} blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled” (I Peter 3:14). Christians ought to think it an honor when they are permitted to suffer for the name of Christ.

Brian Racer: Days of suffering are coming for the Western Church. Imperative that we stay and bear fruit rather than seek path of escapism. Must view suffering as a high calling. Discipleship will cost you something; it is expensive; but the rewards are great.

Dennis Johnson: Surrendering to God’s grace in Christ produces in us an unusual reaction to opposition and our marginalized position in society. Grace makes us **confident** and **humble** at the same time. In *The Reason for God*, Pastor **Timothy Keller** of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York confesses:

“When my own personal grasp of the gospel was very weak, my self-view swung wildly between two poles. When I was performing up to my standards—in academic work, professional achievement, or relationships—I felt confident but not humble. I was likely to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. When I was not living up to standards, I felt humble but not confident, a failure. I discovered, however, that the gospel contained the resources to build a unique identity. . . . The Christian gospel is that I am so flawed that Jesus had to die for me, yet I am so loved and valued that Jesus was glad to die for me. This leads to deep humility and deep confidence at the same time. It undermines both swaggering and sniveling.”

Here Paul applies this power of the gospel to a group of people who feel the pressure of being marginalized by the society around them, people who might be tempted to retreat in fear, or to lash out in retaliation, or to vent frustration on each other. But Jesus offers another avenue of response: confidence grounded in God’s grace that frees you to react to opponents with calm kindness, and to failing fellow believers with humility and forgiveness.

Citizens of heaven, behave in ways befitting the character of your King, who rules now and will return in glory. By his transforming grace, show courageous humility, bold gentleness, and selfless solidarity, calmly enduring all that this decomposing culture can throw at you. All the while, invite the very people who would intimidate you to share in the gifts of the King’s grace, to join you in believing in him and in suffering for his sake.

TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4

TITLE: THE SECRET TO PURSUING UNITY AND HUMILITY

BIG IDEA:

THE CHURCH COMMUNITY MUST PURSUE UNITY AND HUMILITY TO ENJOY FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION:

Most valuable secrets involve something people long to know and try their hardest to discover. Unless someone carefully conceals such a secret it reproduces rapidly until it cannot be labelled a secret any longer. Here we have two secrets that God is trying to reveal, but no one seems to want to discover or put it into practice.

Gordon Zerbe: Is it possible to console and to confront at the same time? Amazingly, Paul attempts to do exactly that in one long Greek sentence (2:1–4). He first draws attention to the givens of divine and communal consolation, love, compassion, and partnership, thereby continuing to support and encourage his friends in their distress (2:1). Paul draws attention to both the resources that support a community in struggle and the virtues they exhibit in that solidarity. But where one might expect Paul to continue with words of consolation, he redirects, coming back to the issue of maintaining unity within the ordeal, thereby resisting fracture and even defeat (2:2–3a).

In Greek, 2:1–4 is one long sentence with an “if-then” structure, grammatically a “true-to-fact” conditional sentence construction, such that the if here has the sense of “because.”

Ben Witherington: It is clear enough that 2:1-4 is very carefully composed, having a definite three-part structure. Four conditional clauses, each beginning with “if,” speak to the **grounds of Philippian unity**. They are followed by a chiasmic structure (ABBA) in v. 2 in which the first and last clauses focus on the same subject from slightly different angles (being of one mind and having the same aim) as do the two middle clauses (maintaining the same love, sharing a harmonious common life). Thus Paul has dealt with the **root causes or attitudes that produce unity**. Then in vv. 3-4 an ABAB pattern contrasts what the Philippians are and are not to do. Selfishness is contrasted with self-sacrificial behavior, and focus on one’s own interests is contrasted with concern for the interests of others. Thus in this verse the **appropriate outward behavior** that manifests the commitment and disposition to unity and harmony is broached. . .

2:1-4 is a fine example of **rhetorical amplification and accumulation**, repetition of the same thought in various similar ways for the sake of emphasis. Therefore, attempts to find small shades of difference in meaning between “*being of one mind*” and “*being soulmates*” and “*thinking the one thing*” are probably misguided. The point is to hammer home the **need for internal unity** in the community (cf. 1:7; 2:5; 3:15, 19;

4:20). Fee rightly stresses that “in this kind of rhetoric, precision is a lesser concern than is the **persuasive effect** created by the accumulation of phrases.”

Charles Swindoll: “**What’s the secret to a great life?**” People have pondered this question for millennia —since long before there was a self-help section at a bookstore . . . or twinkle-eyed preachers trading in shallow “believe in yourself” platitudes . . . or cabinets full of supplements and drugs to increase our energy or enhance our effectiveness.

The Bible’s answer to that question isn’t long, convoluted, or complex. As already indicated, we can sum it up in two words: **selfless humility**. Not the kind we conjure through mantras or summon through meditation or instill through methods of behavior modification. This is a supernatural kind of selfless humility that has its source in our identification with and imitation of Christ. It results in love, fellowship, affection, compassion, unity, service, and joy. Of all the virtues Christ embodied, selfless humility seems to sum up well His overall character. Jesus Himself said as much to His disciples: “*Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (**Matt. 20:26-28**). . .

The requests in **2:2** mirror the positive assertions in **2:1**.

Because these are true:		by doing these:
encouragement in Christ consolation of love fellowship of the Spirit affection and compassion	then make my joy complete	being of the same mind maintaining the same love being united in spirit being intent on one purpose

John MacArthur: Paul’s concern here is not about doctrines, ideas, or practices that are clearly unbiblical. It is about interpretations, standards, interests, preferences, and the like that are largely matters of personal choice. Such issues should never be allowed to foment controversy within the body of Christ. To insist on one’s own way in such things is sinful, because it senselessly divides believers. It reflects a prideful desire to promote one’s personal views, style, or agenda. Believers must never, of course, compromise doctrines or principles that are clearly biblical. But to humbly defer to one another on secondary issues is a mark of spiritual strength, not weakness (cf. **Rom. 14:1 – 15:7**). It is a mark of maturity and love that God highly honors, because it promotes and preserves harmony in His church.

This unity that the Word so highly exalts is inward, not outward; it is internally desired, not externally compelled. It is spiritual, not ecclesiastical; more heartfelt than creedal. It is not grounded in sentimentalism but in careful, thoughtful, and determined obedience to God’s will. It is the Spirit-motivated and Spirit-empowered bonding of the hearts,

minds, and souls of God's children to each other. And preserving unity in the church is not an option (cf. **Eph. 4:3**).

Nijay Gupta: The point seems to be that Paul wanted to bring them back to the very cornerstone of their being and identity—the love of God in Christ Jesus and the Spirit. They were given a great and gracious gift, but the gift expects the living out of a new life; or, to put it into the language of the first chapter, a new body politic. He expresses that his own joy would find its deepest fulfillment if he could witness their unity and cohesion, as if they acted together as members of one body (**2:2**). But what prevents a community from such cohesion and cooperation? One could easily guess the answer—selfishness, jealousy, pride, the unusual suspects. Specifically Paul mentions *eritheia*, which means “*rivalry*.” Why would fellow Christians get caught up in rivalry? We have to remember that in the Roman world, everyone was constantly engaged in the act of seeking honor, and this often came at the cost of competing with each other. (Again, think about the common practice of “mudslinging” in politics.) But Paul would have none of that. A “whatever-the-cost” pursuit of honor hurts the body of Christ, and therefore it hurts Christ. So also *kenodoxia*, what I translate as “self-glorification empty of substance.” This empty glory is the hunt for status without any substance. Trophies without effort, grades without achievement, titles without experience. Empty glory might look good on the outside, but, just like an idol, is useless. Instead, Paul writes, Christians should be guided by humility (**2:3b**). Humility (*tapeinophrosynē*) does not involve “door-mat” self-esteem. In a context where rank and reputation are everything, Paul turns it upside-down by telling them to treat each other as “superior” in status. This might seem unfair, but if everyone defers to the other, it subverts a stratified system where everyone pushes to be “first.” In **2:4**, Paul makes the issue clear: Christians should never say “not my problem” to someone else. Humans naturally protect their own interests, but the whole nature of the gospel defies this thinking—the self-giving God made it a priority to care for sinners, and we are called to carry out a ministry of care for others (as if they were our family members or our own selves).

Richard Melick: In **1:27** he exhorted them to unity, and here he continued that thought. The passage unfolds in three parts: the basis of Paul's appeal to unity (**2:1**); the essence of unity (**2:2a**); and the expression of unity (**2:3–4**). In actuality, these three are part of another long sentence in the Greek text, and there is one basic command: “*Make my joy complete.*”

I. (:1-2) THE PURSUIT OF UNITY

David Garland: The terms “*encouragement*,” “*comfort*,” “*fellowship*,” “*tenderness*,” and “*compassion*” relate to “the **corporate life of the church**,” not to the life of the individual (**Bockmuehl**, 105). For Paul, life in Christ is life in a Christian community, and believers will have experienced these things in the Christian community because they distinguish it from any other association.

A. (:1) The Encouragement for Unity

R. Kent Hughes: Paul is so emotionally compelling here. He has taken the Philippians back to the graced memories of the supernatural work of Christ in their souls at salvation. He has activated their spiritual camcorders. They all had experienced encouragement and comfort in Christ. They remembered the consolation of Christ's love when they became his. They, through Christ, had found fellowship in the Spirit. And the compassion and sympathy of Christ had not only graced their souls but had flowed from them to others. Thus, with all of this freshly replaying on their inner screens, the Philippians must heed the exhortation through their beloved apostle to maintain unity and mutual care in the church. And so must we. This is necessary if we are to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ.

1. Encouragement from Being United with Christ

"Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ,"

Called alongside to aid; comfort and strengthening especially needed in context of suffering;

It is part of the prophet's task to bring comfort (**Is.40:1**);

Ben Witherington: The word *paraklēsis* can mean "encouragement" or "comfort," but also "exhortation." One could render the clause "*if there is any exhortation in Christ ...*," which would prepare us for what follows in **vv. 5-11**. In fact Lightfoot argues cogently that both *paraklēsis* and *paramythion* should be understood in their rhetorical sense here: "*if then your experiences in Christ appeal to you with persuasive eloquence, if love exerts any persuasive power on you...*" He points to **1 Thess. 2:11-12**, where we find these words in tandem with such a sense (but cf. **1 Cor. 14:3; 1 Thess. 5:14**).

Kenneth Wuest: Translation of 2:1

"In view of the fact that there is a certain ground of appeal in Christ which exhorts, since there is a certain tender persuasion that comes from divine love, in view of the fact that there is a certain joint-participation with the Spirit in a common interest and activity, since there are certain tenderheartednesses and compassionate yearnings and actions."

Gordon Fee: Just as they are presently suffering on behalf of Christ, in the midst of their struggle there is also "encouragement in Christ," in the sense of "comfort." As the preceding clause makes clear, and the "therefore" implies, that "comfort in Christ" is shared by him and them together. Thus, while the focus is primarily on what Christ has done—or in this case, will continue to do—for them, the appeal presupposes that he and they share this comfort just as they do the struggle and the suffering.

2. Encouragement Derived from Love

"if there is any consolation of love,"

(these first 2 are synonyms)

Christ is spoken of as "*the consolation of Israel*" (**Lk. 2:25** -- fulfillment of Messianic

hope with all that involved)

cf. **1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1; Rom. 15:4-5; 2 Cor. 1**

Grant Osborne: The primary question is **whose love is meant**—Christ’s, Paul’s, or the church’s? I agree with those who see all three sources at work here. It would appear that Paul deliberately avoided using a qualifying term, intending this to be construed in the broadest possible way. Christ’s love was the basis, and out of his love stemmed the believers’ experience of Paul’s love, as well as of their love for each other. The point here is that the church’s experience of love, on all three levels, was being threatened by dissension and false teaching.

Gordon Zerbe: They have the same love (**2:2**) with each other, a love without rivalry and hierarchy, a love not constrained by social position (**2:3–4**). Recall that love is the chief virtue in Paul’s intercessory prayer for them (**1:9**).

3. Encouragement from the Fellowship Generated and Maintained by the Holy Spirit

“if there is any fellowship of the Spirit,”

- Subjective Genitive = *fellowship produced by the Spirit*
- Objective Genitive = *fellowship with the Spirit* -- an actual participation in the Spirit and in all of His benefits (which would have to be produced by the Spirit as well)

Gordon Fee: Thus, just as the comfort from being “*in Christ*” and the solace of experiencing God’s love serves as the ground for his appeal to their unity in Christ, so too (especially) with their common “*participation in the Spirit*.”

Grant Osborne: Paul is stressing our sharing in the Spirit, but it is a common sharing (as the NIV indicates); we are heirs together of the Spirit (**Eph 1:13, 14; 4:30**) and thereby share the Spirit with each other. The result of our sharing with one another is a Spirit-fellowship in which the Spirit dwells within us and enables us to overcome our differences and experience a common bond in Christ. This is the answer to the problem of dissension that underlies this section of Philippians. The Spirit brings us together in oneness and removes the very basis for conflicts and power struggles among us.

4. Encouragement from Affection and Compassion

“if any affection and compassion,”

2 Cor. 1:3; Col. 3:12

Grant Osborne: The Greek terms (*splanchna kai oiktirmos*) look to the body’s inner parts, particularly the intestines, which were thought to contain the emotions of a person (hence the KJV’s “*bowels and mercies*”). Once again, by not adding “*of God*” or “*of Christ*,” Paul suggests a general experience of tenderness and compassion. Still, it seems likely that he was thinking primarily of **divine sympathy**, as in the many Old

Testament passages that speak of God’s mercy and compassion (for example, **Neh 9:19, 28; Pss 24:6; 145:9**). Paul’s first three “*if*” statements in **Philippians 2:1** center on the **actions of the Triune Godhead**, and it is probable that this last one does as well. As before, the church’s experience of divine blessing also is connoted. Christ’s compassion sustains the cares and mercies of the church for its members.

B. (:2a) The Plea for Unity

“make my joy complete”

John MacArthur: To so reward a faithful servant of the Lord is a legitimate goal for believers to have. The New Testament makes it clear that churches are to love, honor, respect, and appreciate their human leaders. Paul admonished the Thessalonians, “*We request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work*” (**1 Thess. 5:12–13**). The writer of Hebrews commands: “*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you*” (**Heb. 13:17**). To love, honor, and appreciate pastors and other church leaders is perfectly consonant with loving, honoring, and being grateful to the Lord. Because both are divinely commanded, the former is one way of expressing the latter.

George Hunsinger: The Philippians, already worried about Paul’s well-being in prison, are reminded of how much a spirit of unity in their common life would mean to him. News of dissension could only add to his burdens, while unity, concord, and peace would serve to “*complete [his] joy*” (*plērōsate mou tēn charan*).

C. (:2b) The Secret to Pursuing Unity

John MacArthur: The spiritual blessings Paul has enumerated demand a proper response. In this single verse Paul gives four essential marks of spiritual unity. . .

In this one verse the apostle presents a full circle of unity—from one mind, to one love, to one spirit, to one purpose, which, as just noted, basically refers again to the mind. These four principles are complementary, overlapping, and inseparable. The same basic idea is expressed in four ways, each with a somewhat different but important emphasis.

Dennis Johnson: These four descriptions focus on two dimensions of unity:

- unity of conviction and
- unity of affection.

1. Like-Mindedness

“by being of the same mind,”

Grant Osborne: The call here in **2:2** is for every member of the church to set aside any quarrels and center their minds on Christ. Certainly this does not mean they have had to

agree on everything or become carbon copies of one another. Rather, they were to have the same mindset regarding the essentials, primarily the things of Christ.

2. Mutual Love

“maintaining the same love,”

Ben Witherington: The phrase *“having the same love”* means more than having the same interests. Rather it is another way of expressing the idea of sharing a singular life orientation, **a common life**. What would really bring joy to Paul is for his converts not only to be intentionally united in heart and mind, but out of that unity to present a united front of good witness to the world, living lives worthy of the gospel, which is to say worthy of the story of Christ and the pattern of his life. What these first two verses suggest is that even the Philippians must give their full attention and orientation to the unity Paul has in mind. It does not happen by accident or osmosis.

3. Shared Attitudes

“united in spirit,”

Grant Osborne: This concept is expressed in Greek with a single word, *sympsychoi*, which means to experience harmony, to be united in spirit, to be “soul brothers.” Consequently, it points not to the Holy Spirit but to the human spirit. This spiritual oneness removes any discord or conflict within the church.

John MacArthur: *Sumpsuchos* (united) literally means “one-souled” and is used only here in the New Testament. It has the same emphasis as the *“one spirit”* spoken of in **1:27**. To be united in spirit is to live in selfless harmony with fellow believers. By definition, it excludes personal ambition, selfishness, hatred, envy, jealousy, and the countless other evils that are the fruit of self-love.

4. Common Focus

“intent on one purpose.”

Max Anders: The power of love and humility is the message of **Philippians 2**. Here we learn that whenever people love humbly and unselfishly, especially in the midst of strained relationships, they promote unity and spread joy.

II. (:3-4) THE PURSUIT OF HUMILITY

Gerald Hawthorne: But unity is impossible if Christians are out for themselves, promoting their own cause, and seeking their own advantage. Thus in vv **3–4** Paul emphasizes certain attitudes and actions that must stop as well as those that must continue.

A. (:3a) The Enemy of Humility to Avoid = Self-Centered Mindset

1. Selfish Ambition

"Do nothing from selfishness"

John MacArthur: **Selfishness** is a consuming and destructive sin. The first and inevitable casualty is the person who manifests it, even if no one else is harmed. Because this sin, like every other, begins in a sinful heart, anyone can commit it—regardless of whether there is an opportunity for it to be outwardly expressed. Even when not outwardly manifested, selfishness breeds anger, resentment, and jealousy. No church, even the most doctrinally sound and spiritually mature, is immune from the threat of this sin, and nothing can more quickly divide and weaken a church. Selfish ambition is often clothed in pious rhetoric by those who are convinced of their own superior abilities in promoting the cause of Christ.

2. Vanity, Empty Conceit

"or empty conceit"

Robert Gromacki: Someone has said that vainglory is the disease whereas strife is the symptom. The former is inward and the latter is outward.

Moises Silva: The true obstacle to unity is not the presence of legitimate differences of opinion but **self-centeredness**. Shifting attention away from ourselves becomes the challenge: “*regard one another as better than yourselves, look out for the interests of others*” (the verbs *hēgeomai* and *skopeō* continue to emphasize the mental disposition; **Schenk** [1984: 183] views *skopeō* as a contextual synonym for *phroneō*). Not surprisingly, Paul expresses similar concerns when writing to the most blatantly schismatic of his churches, Corinth. As a capstone to his discussion of Christian liberty Paul says, “*Let no one seek his own good, but that of others*” (**1 Cor. 10:24**). And the love referred to in **Phil. 2:2** is described in **1 Cor. 13:5** as one that “*does not seek its own.*”

Grant Osborne: “*Vain conceit*” is the flipside of “*selfish ambition.*” The Greek term, *kenodoxia*, describes a worthless or empty desire for glory—a mindset that cares only to enhance an inflated view of self. Such vanity is self-promoting and ends up with a meaningless self-glorification that ends up helping no one and accomplishing nothing beyond satisfying the ego. Such people often become famous and quite wealthy, but when their lives are examined closely, no one but themselves have emerged better off through their efforts. We have all met people like this—attention-seekers who cannot get enough of the limelight and who are willing to ride roughshod over anyone who threatens to get in their way. Nothing good ever comes from such a motivation.

George Hunsinger: **Rivalry** meant arrogating esteem to oneself at the expense of others. It meant overstepping one’s limits. Mutual respect is enjoined as the solution. One should avoid looking solely to one’s own interests, Paul urges, but each should take seriously the views of others, and each one should be ready to put others above oneself.

Markus Bockmuehl: Instead of pursuing their own prestige, that strangely addictive and debasing cocktail of vanity and public opinion, the Philippians are called to humility (*tapeinophrosune*), the ‘*lowliness of heart*’ which agrees to treat and think of others preferentially. . . . The biblical view of humility is precisely not feigned or groveling, nor a sanctimonious or pathetic lack of self-esteem, but rather a mark of moral strength and integrity. It involves an unadorned acknowledgement of one’s own creaturely inadequacies, and entrusting one’s fortunes to God rather than to one’s own abilities or resources.

B. (:3b-4) The Secret to Pursuing Humility

Max Anders: Biblical love is **selfless**. The opposite of this kind of love is selfishness. Humility does not mean putting ourselves down but rather lifting others up.

Looking out for our own interests comes naturally. We need, and receive, no instruction for that. We are instructed to look out for the interests of others. We are to keep an eye out to discover ways we can help others even when they do not see they need such help.

1. (:3b) Make Others Great in Our Perspective by Valuing Them More Highly than Ourselves

"but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;"

R. P. Martin: This consideration of the excellencies in another's character, and especially the picture of One who was '*meek and lowly (tapeinos) in heart*' (**Mt. xi. 29**) will check any tendency to '*vainglory*', i.e. pride in our own moral attainments, on the one hand, and merciless fault-finding with someone else's failings, on the other hand.

Dennis Johnson: So what must replace selfish ambition and vain conceit as the driving force of our desire? The alternative is the most unnatural attitude imaginable: “*in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*” The Greek word rendered “*humility*” is, literally, a “*lowly mind-set*” (*tapeinophrosynē*). It is not an unrealistically dour inferiority complex, which at bottom is as self-centered as glib pride is. It is, rather, a readiness to forget oneself and to exalt others both with respect and with concern. It is to have the grace of the Holy Spirit so turn our hearts inside out that we eagerly honor and care for others, as we instinctively do for ourselves. . .

The others-embracing, others-serving mind-set of Christ is so unnatural to our self-preserving instincts. Yet when God’s grace grasps us deeply, it begins to develop into our deepest, strongest desire. We begin to care for all our brothers and sisters in Christ with the same passionate intensity that we so automatically and easily lavish on our own comforts and concerns. We learn to give as much weight to their opinions as we do to our own. We start feeling their disappointments and pains and grief as intensely as we do our own. We put their needs before our own.

Such **counterintuitive humility** is the prerequisite to a profound Christian unity that can weather the storms of external opposition and internal disagreements. It is the fountain from which flows a oneness of conviction and affection that gives joy to Paul's heart and gives glory to Jesus. But how can our hearts be turned inside out, to love selflessly like this? It is not a matter of teeth-gritted discipline, ruthlessly suppressing our every selfish thought. That only breeds further resentment against those whom we are called to love, and resentment toward the God who demands such unnatural affection. The only solution is to have our hearts overwhelmed with wonder at the fact that we have received such unnatural, supernatural, selfless love from the Creator of the universe, the triune God who pours out his manifold grace on us in encouragement, love, comfort, partnership, and tender compassion. Therefore, Paul opens his summons to unity through humility with this irresistible, irrefutable rationale (**Phil. 2:1**).

2. (:4) Make Others Great in Our Pursuits
by Making the Prosperity of Others a Higher Priority than Our Own Prosperity
*"do not merely look out for your own personal interests,
but also for the interests of others."*

Steven Lawson: To "*look out for*" others means to keep an eye out for their needs. We must be on the alert for the welfare of others. We should be sharp in our focus upon the needs of others. We must not live without regard for others. If we as believers are primarily focused upon God and his glory, we will automatically be concerned for serving the needs of others, especially those in his family.

John MacArthur: Among other things, *looking out for the interests of others* requires believers to "*rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep*" (**Rom. 12:15**), to continually "*pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another,*" to not "*eat meat or . . . drink wine, or . . . do anything by which [a] brother stumbles*" (**14:19, 21**), and to "*bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves*" (15:1). It is to "*bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ*" (**Gal. 6:2**).

G. Walter Hansen: The Greek text does not contain the word *interests*. That word has been added twice to make some sense of the text: *not looking each one to the ... of your own, but also each one to the ... of the others*. **Martin** suggests that the object of looking is not the interests of others, but the "good points and qualities in one's fellow-Christians." The clue to this interpretation, according to **Martin**, is that the verb *look* is used by Paul to mean "*regard as your aim*." The same verb is employed by Paul when he urges his friends to follow his example and to keep your eyes on those who live as we do (**3:17**). And Paul uses the cognate noun with the sense of goal when he expresses his commitment to press on toward the goal (**3:14**). According to **Martin's** interpretation, **2:4** calls us to regard the good example of others as our aim. When we fix our sight on others, we will "not be so preoccupied with our own concerns and the cultivation of our own spiritual life that we miss the noble traits to be seen in others." Since the Christ-like qualities in others reflect the glory of Christ himself, our high regard for the good example of others who follow Christ leads us to follow the supreme

example of Christ himself. Paul's advice to regard others (2:4) prepares the way for the portrayal of the supreme example of Christ (2:5-11). Humility gained by looking up to the good example of others must always look past others to worship on bended knee before the Lord, who humbled himself to die on the cross and whom God exalted to the highest place.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What makes pride so "empty"? Why is the pursuit of selfish interests characterized as "vainglory"? How are the Pharisees a good example of the pursuit of religious activities from a motivation of "*selfishness and empty conceit*"? Do we take time to allow the Lord to search our hearts to expose our selfish motivations?
- 2) How did the Roman citizens of Paul's day view this Christian concept of "*humility of mind*"? How do our friends and co-workers mis-interpret this spirit? Why can't they see straight in this area?
- 3) How would we use our time and money and resources and talents differently if we truly regarded our brothers and sisters in our local church as "*more important*" than ourselves?
- 4) How can parents use verse 4 with their children to help foster a spirit of unselfishness in the home? What are some practical ways younger children can implement this truth?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Warren Wiersbe: The humble person is not one who thinks meanly of himself; he simply does not think of himself at all! (I think **Andrew Murray** said that.) Humility is that grace that, when you know you have it, you have lost it... the believer's eyes are turned away from himself and focused on the needs of others."

F. F. Bruce: Quoting **James Montgomery**:

'The bird that soars on highest wing
Builds on the ground her lowly nest,
And she that doth most sweetly sing
Sings in the night, when all things rest.
In lark and nightingale we see
What honor hath humility.

The saint, that wears heaven's brightest crown,
In lowliest adoration bends;

The weight of glory bends him down
Then most, when most his soul ascends;
Nearest the throne of God must be
The footstool of humility."

Alec Motyer: But Paul's joy is not in the wellbeing of the church in general, but specifically in a church living the gospel life of unity in mind, heart and will, devoted to the task of unselfish mutual care.

R. P. Martin: The ethical terms used here expose the spiritual malaise at the heart of the church, and point to the all-sufficient remedy. *Strife, eritheia* (RV, 'faction') is the same word as in **i.16** where it is rendered 'contention', and used to describe the inimical intention of Paul's enemies. Of the Philippians it is used of party squabbles and petty conceits. We might translate it 'quarrelsomeness', although that does not quite convey the hint of self-seeking which the word contains.

Dwight Pentecost: Until Jesus Christ is formed in Paul's spiritual children, he is not happy or content. Beloved of God, until the love of Christ does its transforming work, takes us off the pedestal and puts Christ on it; until the love of Christ does its transforming work to the point we are no longer the center of our own interest but the brethren become the center -- until then, we have not reached the likeness of Christ.

Brian Racer: **Unity** doesn't mean we all are robotically cookie cutters; unity is built on foundational things of Christian connection; in times of persecution, doctrinal distinctives get pushed down to proper order of priority ... you can't afford to be too nit-picky. You can work together towards some more general common objectives from a platform of fundamental unity even though you have doctrinal distinctives that are going to determine which church you promote.

- The Mindset of Unity – can't do anything from perspective of selfishness
- The Ministry of Unity – actively performing certain functions that further the interests of others; ministering in a way that meets their needs

Humility does not have to do with thinking too highly or lowly of self; rather it is to not think of self at all; Perfect quietness of heart where you expect nothing, you wonder at nothing done to you; you are content with the Lord despite troubling circumstances all around; you are at peace and rest in your soul.

Steven Lawson: For a believer, **humility** is the most foundational of all Christian virtues. No one struts through the narrow gate that leads into the kingdom. No one high-steps their way down the narrow path. We are sheep, not peacocks; servants, not sovereigns. If Christ is to fill our lives, we must empty ourselves. If Christ is to increase, we must decrease. Paul wrote to the Colossian church, "*As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him*" (**Colossians 2:6**). We received him in humility. Therefore, we must walk in ever-increasing humility. The more we mature spiritually, the more humble we must become.

This virtue of humility is the central theme that runs through **Philippians 2:1-11**. The actual word "*humility*" is found in **verse 3**, but the concept is seen throughout this entire section. Paul calls upon the believers in Philippi to put on humility (**v 3**) as they carry out their ministry (**v 4**) in order to preserve their unity (**v 1-2**). In order to show us how to do so, the apostle will point to the Lord Jesus Christ as the supreme example in understanding true humility (**verses 5-11**).

Tony Merida: Only when we possess the grace of humility will we serve others with spiritual sensitivity. A humble person thinks of others. An arrogant, self-absorbed person thinks only of himself.

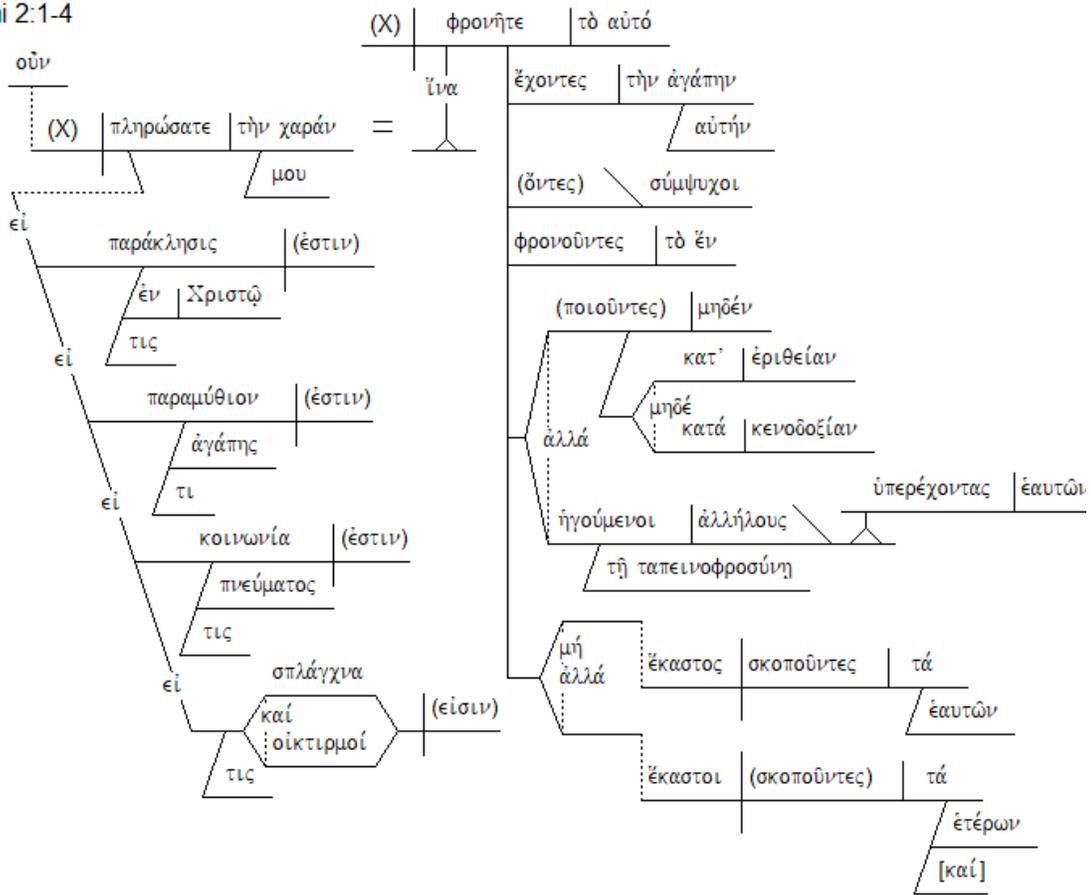
In light of the importance of humility, **John Stott** says, "At every stage of our Christian development and in every sphere of our Christian discipleship, pride is the greatest enemy and humility our greatest friend" ("*Pride, Humility and God*," 2-3). Therefore, for the good of our own souls, for the unity of the church, and for the good of our witness before a watching world, we should want to know how to grow in humility. Drawing from other passages of Scripture, allow me to list a few disciplines necessary for cultivating humility. I'm not listing them as one who has mastered the art of humility; I list them as one who needs this grace as much as anyone!

- Grow in humility by reflecting on the cross of Christ.
- Grow in humility by reflecting on the glory of Christ
- Grow in humility by reflecting on God's Word, which reveals to us Christ's humility and exaltation.
- Grow in humility through prayer.
- Grow in humility through servicing others.

R. Kent Hughes: The conductor of a symphony orchestra was once asked what is the most difficult instrument to play. He responded, "Second violin. I can find plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who can play second violin with enthusiasm—that is a problem. And if we have no second violin, we have no harmony."

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

Phi 2:1-4



TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

TITLE: CHRIST OUR PATTERN

BIG IDEA:

THE PATTERN FOR BOTH HUMBLING OURSELVES AND BEING EXALTED BY GOD IS JESUS CHRIST

INTRODUCTION:

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time." 1 Peter 5:6

Otherwise, if we try to exalt ourselves, God must come along and humble us.

Remember the Greek people were a proud people and the Jews were filled with nationalistic pride.

Dennis Johnson: This passage is, as we have observed, a majestic mountain peak, towering over the surrounding countryside. It is a pinnacle of theological truth, piercing the heavens and probing the mystery of the incarnation. Its dramatic movement traces the inverted arc of Christ's redemptive mission from divine glory down into humiliation and death, and then up again to heaven's heights in resurrection splendor. These seven verses may have generated more scholarly comment and theological reflection than the other ninety-seven verses of Philippians put together, and for good reason. This brief and beautiful text is one of the fullest, most explicit descriptions in the New Testament of the identity of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Steven Lawson: The greatest display of humility that the world has ever witnessed was the incarnation of Christ, which led ultimately to his crucifixion. Here Jesus demonstrated what it looks like to truly be humble. He himself declared that he *"did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many"* (**Mark 10:45**). From a sovereign to a servant—this was the lowly role that Jesus assumed.

Gordon Fee: Thus the narrative summarizes the **centrality of Christ** in Pauline theology. His death secured redemption for his people; but at the same time it serves as pattern for their present life in the Spirit, while finally we shall share in the eschatological glory and likeness that are presently his. And all of this *"to the glory of God the Father."*

In the final analysis, therefore, this passage stands at the heart of Paul's understanding of God. Christ serves as pattern, to be sure; but he does so as the one who most truly expresses God's nature. As God, Christ poured himself out, not seeking his own advantage. As man—and not ceasing to be God—he humbled himself unto death on the cross. That this is what God is like is the underlying Pauline point; and since God is in process of recreating us in his image, this becomes the heart of the present appeal. The

Philippians—and we ourselves—are not called upon simply to “imitate God” by what we do, but to have this very mind, the mind of Christ, developed in us, so that we too bear God’s image in our attitudes and relationships within the Christian community—and beyond.

Robert Gromacki: Paradoxically, he illustrated exhortation with doctrine, whereas most preachers try to make their doctrinal sermons practical.

G. Walter Hansen: Although there is widespread agreement that **Philippians 2:6-11** is a poem or a hymn, debate regarding the specific details of its literary form continues unabated. **Ernst Lohmeyer**’s analysis provides a good starting point in this discussion. In his description of the literary form of the passage, he sets forth the Greek text in six stanzas, with three lines in each stanza. . .

(1) *The one existing in the form of God
did not consider it an advantage to exploit
to be equal to God,*

(2) *but he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
becoming in the likeness of human beings;*

(3) *and in appearance being found as a human being,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient unto death — even death on a cross.*

(4) *Therefore also God highly exalted him
and gave to him the name
that is above every name,*

(5) *that in the name of Jesus
every knee will bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

(6) *and every tongue will acknowledge that
Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Like threads in a beautiful tapestry, the lines in this poem are carefully woven together to form a complete picture. In the six stanzas of three lines each, the first three stanzas depict the attitudes and actions of Jesus on his journey from his original glory of equality with God all the way to his death on the cross; the last three stanzas proclaim the actions of God resulting in the universal worship of Jesus to the glory of God. Thus, the hymn portrays a divine parabola of descent from eternal glory to the cross and ascent back again to eternal glory. As a narrative poem, beginning and ending in eternity, it is complete in itself.

Gerald Hawthorne: The Christ-hymn (**Phil 2:6–11**) presents Jesus as the supreme model of the humble, obedient, self-sacrificing, self-denying, self-giving service that Paul has just been urging the Philippians to practice in their relations one toward another (**vv 1–4**). Hence, although this hymn (1) is unquestionably a christological gem unparalleled in the NT, (2) may be considered soteriological, or better, kerygmatic, in character (yet with parenetic enforcement brought out in 2:12 as a call to obedience; there is no dichotomy between the two, as **Martin**, *Hymn of Christ*, lxxii–lxxiv, seeks to show), and (3) may have been originally composed for christological or soteriological reasons, Paul’s motive in using it here is not theological but ethical. Yet this disjunction may be granted to be chimerical since Paul’s ethics are always theological ethics; i.e., the call is to act because God in Christ has acted in the first place (see **Martin**, *New Testament Foundations*, 2:11–13). Paul’s grounding of Christian ethics is in the work or event of Christ, with the call being “Become in practice what you already are in Christ,” just as Christ, the heavenly one, became Lord only by way of self-abnegating surrender of his “form” and receiving his title to lordship as a consequence (**v 9**: διὸ καί, “as a consequence, therefore”) of his obedience and elevation to cosmic authority. The Philippians are “*in Christ*” (**v 5**). Let them live it out (**v 12**). Paul’s objective is not to give instruction in doctrine but to reinforce instruction (parenesis) in Christian living. And he does this by appealing to the event of Christ.

Tony Merida: Main Idea: In this amazing passage, Paul magnifies the humility and exaltation of Jesus, which should lead us to emulate Jesus’ example and adore Him as Lord of all.

I. The Mind of Christ (2:5)

II. The Humility of Christ (2:6-8)

- A. His humble renunciation (**2:6**)
- B. His humble incarnation (**2:7**)
- C. His humble crucifixion (**2:8**)

III. The Exaltation of Christ (2:9-11)

- A. His exalted position (**2:9**)
- B. Everyone’s adoration and confession (**2:10-11**)

I. (:5-8) THE PATTERN FOR HUMBLING OURSELVES IS JESUS CHRIST

A. (:5-7) Humbling in Mind –

Christ's Chose Service to Others Over Personal Rights

1. (:5) Christ Modeled Humility in His Mindset

"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus."

Speaking of that inner disposition to seek the welfare of others.

Ben Witherington: V. 5 is a crucial **transitional verse** that sets up how the hearer is to interpret the hymn and in what frame of reference it is to be understood. *Touto* (“this”) could be either retrospective (the mindset already described in 2:1-4) or prospective (the mindset of Christ about to be described), or it could be both, but it is most likely retrospective. Certainly the reference to mindset echoes what was said in v. 2, and Paul has already described briefly in vv. 1-4 the sort of humble unitive mindset he has in mind.

John MacArthur: Yet as profound and unfathomable as this passage is theologically, it is also **ethical**. As the introductory words (*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus*) make clear, it is primarily designed to motivate Christians to live like their Lord and Savior. Paul was not merely describing the Incarnation to reveal its theological truths, magnificent as those are. He presents the supreme, unparalleled example of humility to serve as the most powerful motive to believers’ humility. The Incarnation calls believers to follow Jesus’ incomparable example of humble self-denial, self-giving, self-sacrifice, and selfless love as He lived out the Incarnation in obedient submission to His Father’s will (cf. **Luke 2:49; John 3:16–17; 5:30; 12:49; 15:10**).

Grant Osborne: So this is an imperative statement, commanding that all interpersonal relationships be dominated by Christlike thinking. Throughout this challenge **verses 2–4** are in mind. There can be no humility until Christ’s thought-life permeates and guides our every thought. This idea connotes a strong ethical quality, demanding that our relationships with others among God’s people reflect Christ at every point. He is indeed the **archetypal model** for the kind of mindset that produces oneness and makes relationships possible. The phrase “*in Christ*” means that his mindset must become the sphere within which our thought processes are governed. Only then can we attain the “humble-mindedness” of **verse 3**.

2. (:6) Christ Relinquished Personal Rights Related to His Equality with God
"who, although He existed in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped"

Jesus' existence did not begin in the manger in Bethlehem or even in the womb of Mary.

John MacArthur: *Morphe* (*form*) refers to the outward manifestation of an inner reality.

George Hunsinger: God’s eternal mode of being is a matter of self-existence, not preexistence. “Preexistence” (when used to interpret this passage) comes too close to suggesting that being in “*the form of God*” is just a “prelude” to an earthly “existence” that is somehow more basic. Nothing could be more basic, however, than God’s self-existent being from and to all eternity. **Divine self-existence represents a uniquely sovereign and eternal mode of being.** Strictly speaking, it is neither “preexistent” to something else nor merely “pretemporal,” as if it were little more than an unaccented syllable. **God qua God is eternal, sovereign, and self-existent. . .**

We turn now to the vexing term “*to be grasped*” (*harpagmon*), which has generated so much discussion while remaining so obscure. Does it mean “using something for one’s own advantage”? Does it mean “clinging” to something or “grasping” at it? Does it mean regarding something as “robbery”? What about “demanding one’s own rights”? Or even “retaining something by force”? Based on the interpretation offered here—whereby being “*in the form of God*” and being “*equal to God*” are thought to be semantically the same—a paraphrase is suggested.

If what is at stake is a transition from one mode of existence to another—the one glorious, the other ignominious—then the core idea would be that of “**relinquishment.**” Christ Jesus does not consider his glorious mode of existence as something that cannot be relinquished. He can relinquish it without ceasing to be who he is. Indeed he is never more fully who he is than in the act of relinquishing it. He relinquishes his glorious mode of existence without ceasing to be God. He does not refuse to act selflessly, at cost to himself, for the good of others. We may say the change to which he subjects himself is “existential” rather than “ontological.” Without ceasing to be God, he relinquishes the ordinary exercise and enjoyment of the prerogatives of his divine mode of existence.

The term “*to be grasped*” (*harpagmon*) thus means that he does not count his glorious mode of existence, along with the exercise of its prerogatives—“*equality with God*”—as something that cannot be relinquished in a particular sense. He relinquishes two things—both his outward glory and the normal exercise of his prerogatives—without surrendering his divine essence. The relinquishment of his prerogatives is thus severe without needing to be absolute.

Dwight Pentecost: If these Greeks should think they have a superior vantage point, how much superior was the vantage point of the Son of God, for He was not the most exalted among men, He was the eternal Son of the eternal God. If any had a right to consider Himself, a right to express His own rights, it was Jesus Christ.

Robert H. Mounce: Though in His pre-incarnate state he possessed the essential qualities of God, he did not consider his status of divine equality a prize to be selfishly hoarded.

morphe, form, in **verses 6 and 7** denotes a permanent expression of essential attributes, while *schema, fashion* (v **8**), refers to outward appearance that is subject to change

Our Lord was in the form of God. Thus the outward expression of His inmost being was as to its nature the expression of the divine essence of Deity.

Context is speaking of the outward expression (not the inward possession) of the divine attributes.

John MacArthur: It is that attitude of selfless giving of oneself and one's possessions, power, and privileges that should characterize all who belong to Christ. They should be willing to loosen their grip on the blessings they have, which they have solely because of Him. Christians are set apart from the world as children of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. Yet they must not clutch those privileges and blessings. Instead, like their Lord, they must hold them loosely and be willing to sacrifice them all for the benefit of others.

3. (:7) Christ Emptied Himself to Function as a Human Servant

"but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men."

Christ did not empty himself of His Deity, but of the rights and privileges and full manifestation of that Deity.

Richard Melick: The hymn moves from attitude to actions. Two verbs describe successive actions as Jesus gave himself for humanity: "*He made himself nothing*" and "*he humbled himself.*" Each has a phrase modifying it.

Robert H. Mounce: Unlike the first Adam, who made a frantic attempt to seize equality with God (**Gen 3:5**), Jesus, the last Adam (**1 Cor. 15:47**), humbled himself and obediently accepted the role of the Suffering Servant.

Active process of humbling himself began with the Incarnation but extended much further.

John MacArthur: The Son of God emptied Himself of five divine rights.

1. First, He temporarily divested Himself of His divine glory.
2. Second, Jesus emptied Himself of independent divine authority.
3. Third, Jesus emptied Himself of the voluntary exercise of some of His divine attributes, though not the essence of His deity. He did not stop being omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, or immutable; He chose not to exercise the full limit of those attributes during His earthly life and ministry. He did, however, exercise some of them selectively and partially.
4. Fourth, Jesus emptied Himself of His eternal riches. "*For your sake He became poor,*" Paul explains, "*so that you through His poverty might become rich*" (**2 Cor. 8:9**).
5. Fifth, He emptied Himself temporarily of His unique, intimate, and face-to-face relationship with His heavenly Father—even to the point of being forsaken by Him. To fulfill the divine plan of redemption, the Father "*made Him who knew*

no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

George Hunsinger: When the eternal Son “*empties himself*” to become human, entering into humiliation and death, he does not cease to be God. He is free to conceal his glory and majesty, along with restraining his prerogatives, without absolutely relinquishing them. What he relinquishes is possessing his majesty in only one modality, or in only its heavenly form. His eternal glory is upheld, but ineffably, in a complex and inconceivable way. It is retained in the midst of earthly abasement. God’s glory becomes ignominious without ceasing to be glorious. God is glorious in abasement while also remaining high above it. In assuming flesh to himself, the Son assumes the cross and its shame into his very person. His glory does not cease but is secretly present under the form of its opposite. It is not the shame that diminishes his glory, but his glory that is augmented by the shame, which abolishes it. The assumption of abasement is real, but the glory prevails. God’s power is made perfect in weakness.

Robert Gromacki: Christ surrendered the independent exercise of His divine attributes. In the incarnation, he yielded His will to that of the Father. He was God manifest in the flesh. Therefore He possessed the attributes, but He used them only under the control of the Holy Spirit and within the will of the Father for His earthly life.

Max Anders: Scholars refer to this important statement as **kenosis**, from the Greek word. By becoming a man, Jesus did not lay aside his deity. **Charles C. Ryrie** sheds light on this event: “Christ didn’t become any less God, but he chose not to use some of his divine attributes. This involved a veiling of his preincarnate glory (**John 17:5**) and the voluntary nonuse of some of his divine prerogatives during the time he was on earth (**Matt. 24:36**). For God to become a man was humbling enough, but he was willing to go even further. Christ could have come to earth in his true position as King of the universe. Instead, he took the role of a servant. The Creator chose to serve his creatures.

Gordon Fee: In Christ Jesus God has thus shown his true nature; this is what it means for Christ to be “*equal with God*”—to pour himself out for the sake of others and to do so by taking the role of a slave. Hereby he not only reveals the character of God, but from the perspective of the present context also reveals what it means for us to be created in God’s image, to bear his likeness and have his “mindset.” It means taking the role of the slave for the sake of others, the contours of which are what the next clause will spell out.

David Garland: Jesus refused to exploit his divine status or use it as an opportunity for self-aggrandizement. He took up the cross, not the crown. For him equality with God meant giving up privileges, emptying himself, serving as a slave, spending himself, obeying God, and dying a slave’s death on a cross. Being equal to God meant making himself nothing and giving rather than getting, and his giving of himself revealed the true nature and love of God.

Steven Lawson: Jesus, the Son of God, assumed all of the limitations of finite humanity. While he remained fully and truly God, he became fully and truly man. Like any other person, Jesus grew weary and tired. He hungered and thirsted. He felt all of the throbbing pain of a human body. He subjected himself to the indignities of human pressures, temptations, and sufferings. Paul will reiterate this fact in the next verse: that Jesus was "*found in appearance as a man*" (v 8). He is keen to stress and repeat this truth because it is foundational, wonderful, and awesome. It should move us to praise and joy. Your God is the God who walked this earth as a man.

Tony Merida: Indeed, there have been many alternative positions through the years. Ebionism denied the divine nature of Christ. Arianism denied the fullness of the deity of Christ. Docetism denied the humanity of Jesus. Apollinarianism denied the full humanity of Jesus. Nestorianism denied the unity of the natures in one person. Eutychianism denied the distinction of the natures. In AD 451, leaders in Chalcedon wrote a creed affirming both Jesus' full humanity and His full deity, united in one person. In so doing, they rejected all six of these Christological heresies. In every generation, we must contend for the biblical view of the person and work of Christ. We still hear things like "He was a prophet," "He was a good man," "He was a fine example," "The idea of Jesus is what matters." Like Athanasius, we must boldly defend the glory of Christ. We must also teach these things to our children, who are growing up in a world that is fine with a phantom Christ, Christ as a mere man, or Christ as a funny, religious sage. In the spirit of **Deuteronomy 6**, as you sit down, walk, and lie down, teach your kids about the person and work of Jesus.

B. (:8) Humbling in Action – Christ's Obedience Was Absolute and Humiliating

1. Action of Humbling Himself

*"And being found in appearance as a man,
He humbled Himself"*

Dennis Johnson: Yet the Christ who is everlastingly, ever-livingly divine became a mortal man. He added to his infinite, unchangeable deity our limited and mutable humanity, mysteriously uniting these two natures in his one person. That was the very purpose for which God the Son became our human brother, veiling his divine glory behind a slave's rags and human flesh, torn by Rome's cruel lash. It was the Father's plan, the necessary route to the redemption of his wayward children. So Christ "*humbled himself*" and became "*obedient to the point of death.*" His self-humbling defines the humility of mind that will enable the Philippians to count others more significant than themselves (**Phil. 2:3**). His obedience sets the pace for their ongoing obedience to the will of God (**2:12**). But his humility and obedience to death did more than set a noble example. As the Lamb of God, by his blood he "*ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation*" (**Rev. 5:9**). As Isaiah said in the famous Servant song, "*upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed*" (**Isa. 53:5**).

Grant Osborne: It is important to note the absolute contrast between the deep humility of Jesus depicted in this hymn and the arrogance Paul describes in **verse 2**. Against the backdrop of people filled with “*vain conceit*” and the desire for glory, Christ surrendered his glory and “*made himself nothing.*” The polar opposite of being consumed by “*selfish ambition,*” Jesus made himself a **slave** to serve every created being. Whereas people’s natural tendency is to focus on their own desires, Jesus thought only of others and their needs. They wanted it all, and Jesus died for them! There could be no greater model of humility in the history of this world.

2. Absolute Extent of His Obedience

“by becoming obedient to the point of death,”

"up to the point of" -- not obedient to death, for He remained the Master of all and willingly yielded up His spirit

substitutionary atonement for sin

John MacArthur: The Father did not force death upon the Son. It was the Father’s will, but it was the Son’s will always to perfectly obey the Father. He had a free choice. Had He not had a choice, He could not have been obedient. “*No one has taken [My life] away from Me,*” He said, “*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*” (**John 10:18**). He was commanded by the Father, but not compelled. As love incarnate, He became the perfect example of the truth He Himself had declared: “*Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends*” (**John 15:13**).

3. Abject Humiliation of His Death

“even death on a cross.”

R. Kent Hughes: The humblest man who ever lived is Christ himself, the God-man. Think of it:

- He was eternally humble in Heaven: “*though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped*” (**v. 6**).
- He was astonishingly self-humbling in the incarnation: “*but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men*” (**v. 7**).
- He was infinitely self-humbling in his death: “*And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*” (**v. 8**).

John Calvin: Even this was great humility—that from being Lord he became a servant; but [Paul] says that he went farther than this, because, while he was not only immortal, but the Lord of life and death, he nevertheless became obedient to his Father, even so far as to endure death. This was extreme abasement, especially when we take into view the kind of death ... For by dying in this manner, he was not only covered with ignominy in the sight of God, but was also accursed in the sight of God.

John MacArthur: Crucifixion is perhaps the most cruel, excruciatingly painful, and shameful form of execution ever conceived. It was originally devised by the ancient Persians or Phoenicians and later perfected by the Romans. It was reserved for slaves, the lowest of criminals, and enemies of the state. No Roman citizen could be crucified, no matter how egregious his crime. In his book *The Life of Christ*, **Frederick Farrar** describes crucifixion as follows:

A death by crucifixion seems to include all that pain and death can have of the horrible and ghastly—dizziness, cramp, thirst, starvation, sleeplessness, traumatic fever, shame, publicity of shame, long continuance of torment, horror of anticipation, mortification of intended wounds—all intensified just up to the point at which they can be endured at all, but all stopping just short of the point which would give to the sufferer the relief of unconsciousness. . . . The unnatural position made every movement painful; the lacerated veins and crushed tendons throbbed with incessant anguish. (Vol. 2 [New York: E. P. Dutton, 1877], 403–4)

Frank Thielman: Summary of vv. 6-8: Paul has described Christ’s deity in terms of his selfless denial of his rights. This selfless denial entailed two steps, making himself nothing (or emptying himself) by becoming a human being and a slave, and humbling himself by becoming obedient to the point of suffering a slave’s death, death on the cross.

II. (:9-11) THE PATTERN FOR BEING EXALTED BY GOD IS JESUS CHRIST

Frank Thielman: But what about **verses 9–11**? How does a description of Christ’s exaltation provide an example for the Philippians to follow? This passage is probably best understood as a pointer, again through Christ’s example, to the Philippians’ own future if they remain faithful. Just as God exalted Christ to the highest place in response to his obedience, so the Philippians, if they remain steadfast in the faith through enduring persecution and seeking unity with one another, will be glorified. This thought is consistent with Paul’s emphasis in **1:9–11** on the eschatological goal of the Philippians’ sanctification. There Paul prays that the Philippians “*may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that [they] may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.*” It is also consistent with his statement in **3:21** that those who follow Paul’s example rather than the example of the “*enemies of the cross of Christ*” will experience the transformation of their “*lowly bodies [lit., body of humility] so that they will be like [Christ’s] glorious body*” (**3:21**). As with Christ Jesus in **2:9–11**, their faithfulness amid hardship and their humble obedience will one day be transformed into glorification.

A. (:9) Ultimate Exaltation – [Past Exaltation] God has Exalted Christ to the Position of Absolute Supremacy

*"Therefore also God highly exalted Him,
and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name"*

George Hunsinger: The importance of the word “*therefore*” (*dio*) should not be overlooked. It is another sign that soteriology is at stake in what has gone before (**2:6–8**). Why indeed would Christ “*empty himself*,” why would he assume the incognito form of a slave, why would he so humble himself in extremis, why would he be so obedient even to the point of death on a cross? The word “*therefore*” suggests that this course of action is not undertaken for its own sake. It enacts the good of others. Christ puts the interests of others ahead of his own, and he does so at cost to himself. He subjects himself to a form of extreme degradation so that others might be delivered from theirs.

John MacArthur: Christ's exaltation was thus fourfold: **resurrection, ascension, coronation, and intercession**. He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. There He was seated on the throne of God to intercede as High Priest of His people. He sympathizes with us (**Heb. 4:15**); who is “*holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens*” (**Heb. 7:26**); and “*always lives to make intercession for [believers]*” (**Heb. 7:25**). Just as the descent of Christ into humiliation was in steps (He was in the form of God but willing to let that go; humbled Himself; became a servant; was made in the likeness of men; was found in fashion as a man; and was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross [**Phil. 2:5-8**]), so His resurrection, ascension, coronation, and intercession show the steps of His exaltation by God.

Tony Merida: It was his **lordship** and **Messiahship**—his messianic lordship—that was bestowed on him at his exaltation. Not that he wasn’t Messiah and Lord before his resurrection. He was. But he had not fulfilled the mission of Messiah until he had died for our sin and risen again. And therefore, before his death and resurrection, the lordship of Christ over the world had not been brought to full actuality. The rebel forces were yet undefeated, and the power of darkness held the world in its grip. In order to be acclaimed Messiah and Lord, the Son of God had to come, defeat the enemy, and lead his people out of bondage in triumph over sin and Satan and death. And that he did on Good Friday and Easter.

Grant Osborne: To clarify the meaning of Christ’s exaltation, the next line adds that at this event God “*gave him the name that is above every name.*” This shows the extent of his glorified status, signifying sovereign control over all creation. Adam’s naming of the animals in **Genesis 2:20** represented his dominion over the animal world. So here, the hymn proclaims Jesus’ **dominion over the cosmos**, as expressed in **Colossians 1:15–16** (“*firstborn over all creation*”; “*all things have been created through him and for him*”). In Philippi—a Roman garrison city that celebrated its close relationship to Caesar as Lord—it was a powerful (and quite dangerous) witness to declare that Christ Jesus, not Caesar, was the true Lord.

The consensus view is that the “*name*” given to Jesus is “**LORD**” (a common substitute for “*Yahweh*,” in order to avoid uttering the divine name). This alludes to **Isaiah 45:23–24**: “*Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, ‘In the LORD alone are deliverance and strength.’*” Yahweh had conferred on Jesus his own covenant name, as recognized in the “*I AM*” sayings of **John 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19**, echoing the “*I AM*” of **Isaiah 43:10; 47:8, 10.6** This is both a name and a title, indicating that Jesus is a member of the Triune Godhead named “*Yahweh*,” as well as Lord of all creation. **The Suffering Servant is now proclaimed to be the sovereign Lord.**

**B. (:10-11) Universal Submission and Confession – [Future Exaltation]
The Lordship of Jesus Christ Will Ultimately Be Recognized by Universal Submission to the Glory of God**

(cf. **Is. 45:23**)

1. Conduct of Worship – Universal Submission

*"that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth"*

Robert H. Mounce: The totality of created rational beings will pay due homage

Gordon Fee: The whole created order shall give him obeisance. The “*bowing of the knee*” is a common idiom for doing homage, sometimes in prayer, but always in recognition of the authority of the god or person to whom one is offering such obeisance. The significance of Paul’s using the language of Isaiah in this way lies with his substituting “*at the name of Jesus*” for the “*to me*” of **Isa 45:23**, which refers to Yahweh, the God of Israel. In this stirring oracle (**Isa 45:18–24a**) Yahweh is declared to be God alone, over all that he has created and thus over all other gods and nations. And he is Israel’s savior, whom they can thus fully trust. In **vv. 22–24a** Yahweh, while offering salvation to all but receiving obeisance in any case, declares that “*to me every knee shall bow.*” Paul now asserts that through Christ’s resurrection and at his ascension God has transferred this right to obeisance to the Son; he is the Lord to whom every knee shall eventually bow. There is in this language no hint that those who bow are acknowledging his salvation; on the contrary they will bow to his sovereignty at the End, even if they are not now yielding to it.

Gordon Zerbe: The close correlation of every knee bending and every tongue acclaiming—two aspects of one action—confirms that confessing is tantamount to declaring loyalty or making a pledge of allegiance.

2. Confession of Lordship

*"and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father"*

Implications for Gospel Invitations: no separation between Jesus as Savior and Jesus as Lord. You must receive Him for who He truly is – which includes His inherent Lordship.

John MacArthur: The lordship of Jesus Christ is a crucial issue. Many in our day seem to believe they can accept the work of Christ on the cross apart from worshiping Him as King. Nearly 100 years ago **Charles Haddon Spurgeon** wrote, “I cannot conceive it possible for anyone truly to receive Christ as Saviour and yet not to receive him as Lord. One of the first instincts of a redeemed soul is to fall at the feet of the Saviour, and gratefully and adoringly to cry, 'Blessed Master, bought with thy precious blood, I own that I am thine,—thine only, thine wholly, thine for ever. Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' A man who is really saved by grace does not need to be told that he is under solemn obligations to serve Christ; the new life within him tells him that. Instead of regarding it as a burden, he gladly surrenders himself—body, soul, and spirit, to the Lord who has redeemed him, reckoning this to be his reasonable service" (Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 56 [Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim Publications, 1979], p. 617). Take a moment now to acknowledge the lordship of Christ in your own life—it is only your reasonable service to do so.

Application: If each one would set aside self in the same way and humble himself, the church would achieve true unity and be effective in its proclamation of the gospel.

R. Kent Hughes: Confession with the tongue is the spoken counterpart to bowing the knee. So Paul concludes, “*and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (v. 11). Remarkably, the threefold declaration “*Jesus Christ is Lord*” is apostolic shorthand for the gospel (cf. **2 Corinthians 4:5**; cf. **Romans 10:9**).

1. First, “*Jesus*” (meaning “the Lord saves”), the name given to the Son of God at his incarnation, signifies that the Lord’s salvation came when Jesus was born. This is why Simeon swept baby Jesus into his arms and declared, “*Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation*” (**Luke 2:29, 30**).
2. Second, the title “*Christ*” (meaning “the Anointed,” “the Messiah”) speaks of his being the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy—“*that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures*” (**1 Corinthians 15:3, 4**).
3. Third, “*Lord*” is here understood to represent the divine name Yahweh, which is a public declaration of his sovereignty—“*I am the LORD, and there is no other*” (**Isaiah 45:5, 6, 18**; cf. **45:14, 22**).

This gospel triad, “*Jesus Christ is Lord*,” is what we confess today when we gather for worship and confession. That is a shadow and anticipation of what will be ultimately offered by all the universe. Soon every tongue of every rational being in all creation will confess that Jesus Messiah is Yahweh! Every believing heart will cry it at the top of its lungs in voice and song, and we, with the angels, will do it over and over for all eternity. Every unbelieving heart will confess it too, in dismal submission and despair.

William Hendrikson: He who stood condemned in relation to the divine law (because of the sin of the world which rested on him) has exchanged this penal for the righteous relation to the law. He who was poor has become rich. He who was rejected has been accepted (Rev. 12:5, 10). He who learned obedience has entered upon the actual administration of the power and authority committed to him.

As king, having by his death, resurrection, and ascension achieved and displayed his triumph over his enemies, he now holds in his hands the reins of the universe, and rules all things in the interest of his church (Eph. 1:22, 23). As prophet he through his Spirit leads his own in all the truth. And as priest (High-priest according to the order of Melchizedek) he, on the basis of his accomplished atonement, *not only intercedes but actually lives forever to make intercession for those who draw near to God through him (Heb. 7:25).*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some specific examples from your chronicles *of your own church interaction where a larger dose of humility and the mind of Christ* could have helped to smooth over some rough times?
- 2) In what ways can we *empty ourselves* and take on the task of being a servant to others in the church?
- 3) In what way is the "*name of Jesus*" exalted above every other name? How is the common use of the Lord's name in vain especially distressing?
- 4) How am I living in such a way that my life is professing the Lordship of Jesus Christ?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Alec Motyer: Concerning the state to which the Lord Jesus consigned himself, Paul makes three points.

- First, the intention of the great change was obedient service; he took the form of a slave.
- Secondly, the sphere in which the service would be discharged was that of a true humanity he was *born in the likeness of men*.
- Thirdly, his true humanity 'left room' for that other reality which he brought with him.

It was a **true humanity**: Paul uses again the word *form*, already discussed; but this time of the slave-state. The Son become the reality of a bondservant. None of this reality is taken away by the careful phrase *in the likeness of men*; this leaves room for the other side of his nature, the divine, in the likeness of which he did not appear. His likeness to men was real, but it did not express his whole self. . .

[Re the **significance of the Ascension**:] Therefore, before the eyes of chosen witnesses the Father gave visible demonstration of his estimation of Jesus: that he is Lord of all, heaven, earth and hell alike, that his deity is unquestionable, for he is worshipped in heaven where none can be worshipped but God only, and that he has now emerged from incognito into his full and acknowledged possession of the divine name and Lordship. The historical, physical event of the ascension is a moral and spiritual comment on Jesus.

James Boice: What do these verses contain? The answer is that they contain most of the **distinctive articles of the Christian creed**. They teach the divinity of Christ, His pre-existence, His equality with God the Father, His incarnation and true humanity, His voluntary death on the cross, the certainty of His ultimate triumph over evil, and the permanence of His ultimate reign. How foolish in the light of these statements are the views of scholars who attempt to dismiss the distinct doctrines of Christianity as late developments in the history of an historically conditioned and slowly evolving Church. There was no evolution of these doctrines. There were repeated attempts to clarify them. The history of theology is full of examples. There were often advances in the direction of a fuller understanding of their significance. Many teachers have brought additional insights. But the doctrines themselves were always known. Christianity is Christ -- this Christ. And these things were believed about Him from the beginning. . .

[Re the **Sovereignty of Jesus as God**:] Jesus rules as God rules. Today He controls even the smallest things of life. One day He will subdue His enemies forever...

The doctrine of the sovereignty of God or the sovereignty of Jesus Christ has sometimes been called fatalism by enemies of the Gospel. But it is not fatalism at all. A belief in fatalism or fate is found in the Moslem religion, where it is referred to as 'kismet,' which means fate. Fate is the impersonal force by which the universe is supposed by Muslims to operate. It is supposed to operate in ways that are totally insensitive to the needs or ends of the individuals. This is not the Christian teaching. The Bible teaches that the God who controls all things is not an impersonal deity, but a God who loves us and who orders the events of our lives to lead us forward in line with His perfect and desirable will. It is not meaningless or tragic when difficulties enter your life or when there are temptations. God knows about it. And He has even permitted it to come in order that He might accomplish something in you that will be for your good.

John Walvoord: How little our sacrifices, our acts of unselfishness, and our suffering the slights of men seem in the shadow of that cross. If Christ was willing to do this for us, what stands in the way of our forgiving others and having complete spiritual fellowship with all those of like mind in Christ? This eloquent portrayal of the example

of Christ as triumphant in His work and service must have had a telling effect upon the Philippian church and should today cut through the pride and foolish self-interest which often keeps Christians from having the mind of Christ.

William Barclay: Christian greatness and Christian fellowship alike depend on the **renunciation of self**, and are destroyed by the exaltation of self. Selfishness, self-seeking and self-display destroy our likeness to Christ and our fellowship with each other...

In the Philippian Church there were men whose one aim was to gratify a selfish ambition; the one aim of Jesus was to serve others, no matter what depths of self-renunciation that service might cost. In the Philippian Church there were those whose one aim was to focus men's eyes upon God. So the follower of Christ must think always, not of himself but of others, not of his own glory but of the glory of God.

D. A. Carson: Not for a moment can this passage be used to support universalism; that is, the view that every single person in the entire world will finally be saved... The text promises that Jesus has the last word, that he is utterly vindicated, that in the end no opposition against him will stand. There will not be universal salvation; there will be **universal confession** as to who he is.

Warren Wiersbe: The test of the submissive mind is not just how much we are willing to take in terms of suffering, but how much we are willing to give in terms of sacrifice.

John MacArthur:

Morphe expresses the essential character of something--what it is in itself. *Schema* emphasizes outward form or appearance. What *morphe* expresses never changes, while what *schema* represents can. For example, all men possess manhood. They possess manhood from the time they are conceived until they die. That is their *morphe*. But the essential character of manhood is shown in various *schema*. At one time a man is an embryo, then a baby, then a child, then a boy, then a youth, then a young man, then an adult, and finally an old man. The *morphe* of manhood remains the same, but the *schema* changes. In using the word *morphe* in **Philippians 2**, Paul was saying Jesus possessed the unchangeable essential nature of God. That interpretation of the first phrase of **verse 6** is strengthened by the second phrase, which says Jesus was equal with God. *Being in the form of God* speaks of Christ's equality to God. . .

The Greek word translated "equality" (*isos*) describes things exactly equal in size, quantity, quality, character, and number. The English word *isomer* comes from it. Isomers are chemical molecules that vary according to structure from each other, but are identical according to atomic elements and weights. We could say their forms are different while their essential character is the same. Isomorph (equal form), isometric (equal measures), and isosceles triangle (a triangle with two sides of equal measure), are all English terms descriptive of equality. Christ is equal to God, and existed in the form of God. A literal rendering of the Greek text into English is: "*He did not regard the being equal with God*"--a tremendous affirmation of the divinity of Christ.

The first step in the humiliation of Christ was that He did not hold on to equality with God. Yet though He did not cling to that equality, there is no question that Jesus claimed it and that the people who heard Him knew He claimed it. . . .

What did Christ empty Himself of?

A. He Remained God

Christ did not empty Himself of His deity. He is co-existent with the Father and the Spirit, and for Him to have become less than God would have meant the Trinity would have ceased to exist. Christ could not become less than who He truly is. Christ didn't exchange deity for humanity. Only God can die and conquer death, create, do miracles, and speak as Christ did. Christ retained His divine nature.

B. He Renounced His Privileges

1. Heavenly glory

However our Lord did give up His heavenly glory. As **C.S. Lewis** put it, He dove into the water and went all the way down through the black cold water to the slime and ooze of this world. That's why in **John 17:5** Jesus prayed, "*Glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.*" Christ gave up the glory of a face-to-face relationship with God for the muck of this earth. He gave up the adoring presence of angels for the spittle of men. He gave up the shining brilliance of heavens glories and emptied Himself. Every now and then on earth the glory of Christ peaked through, such as on the Mount of Transfiguration (**Luke 9:28-36**). There were glimpses of Christ's glory in His miracles, attitude, words, at the cross, at His resurrection, and at His ascension. But Christ emptied Himself of the continuous outward manifestation and personal enjoyment of heavenly glory.

2. Independent authority

Christ emptied Himself of His independent authority. He completely submitted Himself to the will of the Father and learned to be a servant. **Philippians 2:8** says He was obedient, and we see that illustrated when He said in the garden, "*Not as I will, but as Thou wilt*" (**Matt. 26:39**). "*He learned obedience from the things which He suffered*" (**Heb. 5:8**), and affirmed that He came to do His Father's will (**John 5:30**)--not His own.

3. Divine prerogatives

He set aside the prerogatives of His deity--the voluntary use of His attributes. He did not stop being omniscient or omnipresent. He remained omniscient--He knew what was in man (**John 2:25**). He was omnipresent--though not physically present, He saw Nathaniel under a tree (**John 1:45-49**). He didn't give up any of His deity but He did give up the free exercise of His attributes, limiting Himself to the point of saying that He did not know the time of His second coming (**Matt. 24:36**).

4. Eternal riches

He gave up His personal riches. "*Though He was rich, yet for [our] sake He became*

poor, that [we] through His poverty might become rich “(2 Cor. 8:9). Christ was poor in this world; He owned very little.

5. A favorable relationship

God "*made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf*" (2 Cor. 5:21). As a result our Lord cried out on the cross, "*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*"

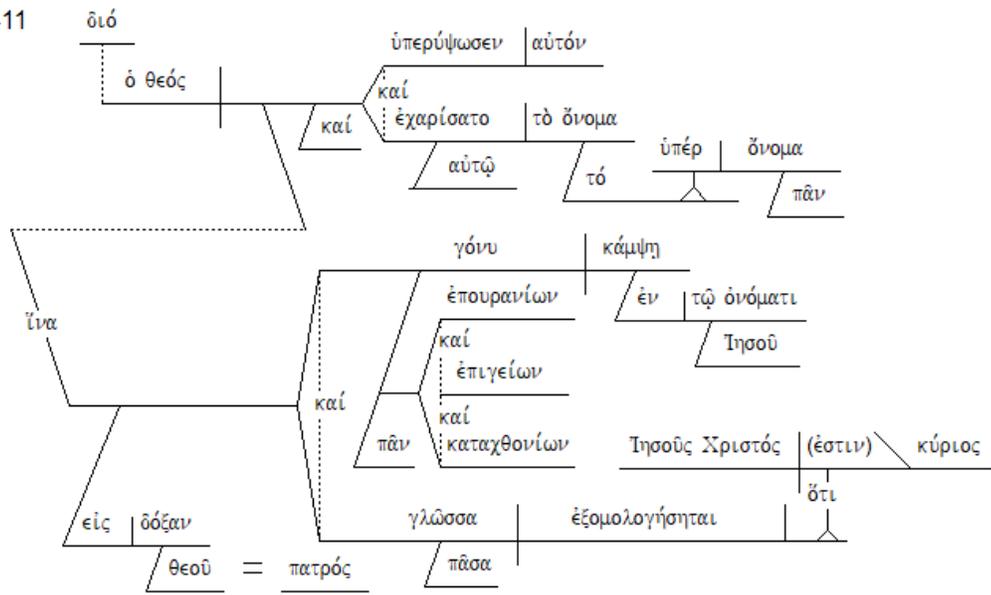
Dennis Johnson: Consider the fact that the divine Son did not regard his equality with the Father as a pretext for grasping but as a platform for giving. Consider how his perspective on privilege and power upends the scale of values that we often assume to be fitting and proper. As early as Eden, Satan has spun the lie that the Creator’s motives are suspect and selfish—that though God made us in his image, he is holding out on us, unwilling to share the best part of being like God, “*knowing good and evil*” (Gen. 3:5). Our first parents were told, and foolishly believed, that to be Godlike we have to grab what looks good to us, what we imagine will be good for us. Jesus reminded his disciples that societies still operate on the same self-serving assumption: “*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them*” (Matt. 20:25). That is the way the world works: people in power give orders and are waited on by subordinates who do their bidding. But Jesus says, “*It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant*” (20:26). Jesus has unique, unchallengeable authority to define leadership as servanthood because he, the Son of Man (destined to rule the whole world forever, Dan. 7:13–14), “*came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Matt. 20:28). In your home, in your workplace, in the church, when you are tempted to throw your weight around, to “pull rank” in order to get your way, pause and ponder the wonder of the mind of Christ—the mind that is becoming yours as you rest in him—the mind-set that exhibits the incomparable glory of God not in self-seeking grasping but in self-sacrificing giving.

Richard Melick: Christ acted selflessly to accomplish the will of God. He even died to provide salvation as a part of the divine plan. God chose to honor him, determining that Christ would be the focus of the Godhead in its interactions with creation. Because of Jesus' actions, the way to honor God is to honor Christ. Even so, the glory Christ receives is a glory given to the Father. Again, a shared servanthood works to the mutual benefit of all involved. The church had to learn this lesson. It would learn this lesson by focusing on Christ himself. Appropriately Paul employed a hymn to teach the lesson. Hymns were used in worship, and it was through worship that these attitudes would make their way from the mind to the heart and from attitudes to appropriate actions.

Gordon Zerbe: The Biblical Pattern of Humiliation/Exaltation

The pattern of humiliation as a prelude to exaltation (Phil 2:6–11; 3:4–11, 10–11, 21) and the reverse move from exaltation to humiliation (3:19) are themes that run throughout Scripture. The NT writers were especially inspired by this theme in the Hebrew Scriptures. There we find these themes in the Prophets (e.g., Isa 52:13–53:12; Ezek 17:24), wisdom writings (Job 22:29), and the Psalms (e.g., 37:9–15). Exaltation and humiliation are closely correlated. In nearly every use of the verb “*to elevate/exalt*”

Phi 2:9-11



TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18

TITLE: PROGRESS, SHINE AND REJOICE IN THE PATH OF HUMBLE SERVICE

BIG IDEA:

JOYFULLY PROGRESS IN HUMBLE SERVICE TO MAINTAIN A BLAMELESS TESTIMONY

INTRODUCTION:

The path of humble service -- seeking the prosperity of others above our own personal interests -- is not the path we would naturally choose. In fact we shrink back from such a challenge. How can such a life be possible?

Frank Thielman: Paul's purpose in these two paragraphs is to apply the story of Christ's humble self-emptying and exaltation specifically to the Philippian situation. Thus he begins the new section with the strong conjunction "*therefore*" and, echoing his reference to Christ's obedience in **2:8**, refers in the first sentence of this new section to the Philippians' obedience. The language and themes of the section also show that Paul is turning again to the themes of **1:27–30**. He is concerned in both passages that the Philippians live out the implications of their initial response to the gospel, and that they do this whether Paul is among them or absent from them (**1:27/2:12**). Both passages express concern that the Philippians be unified (**1:27/2:14**), and that this unity be visible to the unbelieving world outside (**1:28/2:15**). The two sections also share an interest in the final day (**1:28/2:16**) and in the experience of suffering for the gospel, which binds the apostle to his friends and apostolic charges in Philippi (**1:30/2:17**). The concerns of **2:12–18**, then, are woven tightly into the fabric of Paul's larger argument that the Philippians should "*conduct*" themselves "*in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ*" (**1:27**). . .

In **2:12–18**, then, Paul makes two primary points:

- Working against disunity is a crucial element in working out salvation before a watching world,
- and the struggle to work out salvation, since it is a sacrifice to God, should be a cause for rejoicing.

Ben Witherington: In three Greek sentences (**vv. 12-13, 14-16, and 17-18**) Paul builds toward an **outburst of joy**, joy over sacrifices made by Paul and his converts, climaxing the pathos of this section. Along the way he emphasizes negative examples (the grumbling Israelites) and positive examples (himself and his audience) as the deliberative force of the discourse continues.

Gordon Zerbe: Outline

- I. Active Participation in the Drama of Salvation, **2:12–13**
- II. A Community of Character and Mission, **2:14–16**
- III. Mutual Rejoicing in the Midst of Suffering, **2:17–18**

Moises Silva: The structure of **verses 12–18** is clear. We have first a general but powerful exhortation and encouragement to lead obedient lives (**vv. 12–13**). There follows a more specific instruction to avoid dissension in the community (**vv. 14–16**). Paul then concludes with an appeal to his own ministry (**vv. 17–18**). Thus the exegesis will be based on the following outline:

1. The believer's work (**2:12–13**)
2. Blameless children (**2:14–16**)
3. A personal appeal (**2:17–18**)

I. (:12-13) PROGRESS -- GOD ENABLES OUR PROGRESS IN HUMBLE SERVICE

John MacArthur: In **Philippians 2:12–13**, Paul presents the appropriate resolution between the believer's part and God's part in **sanctification**. Yet he makes no effort to rationally harmonize the two. He is content with the incomprehensibility and simply states both truths, saying, in effect, that, on the one hand, sanctification is of believers (**v. 12**) and on the other hand, it is of God (**v. 13**).

A. (:12) Our Role in Progress in Humble Service

1. Motivated by the Example of Christ

“So then, my beloved,”

Dwight Pentecost: “*Wherefore*” always introduces the logical application of a truth that has been presented = the example of Christ.

In total abandonment to the will of God for the good of those He loved, He gave up all the rights that He had as the eternal Son of God. He veiled His essential glory in human flesh, and He went to the cross, not for His own good but because He sought the good of those whom He loved.

John MacArthur: Everything in life requires **energy**. It takes energy to walk and to work. It takes energy to think and to meditate. It takes energy to obey and to worship God. The point of the present verse is that it takes spiritual energy to grow as a Christian, to live a life that is holy, fruitful, and pleasing to the Lord. The main verb in this verse, *katēgazomai* (*work out*), specifically calls for the constant energy and effort necessary to finish a task. In **2:12**, Paul's words suggest five truths that believers must understand to sustain such energy: their example; their being loved; their obedience; their personal responsibilities and resources; and the consequences of their sin.

George Hunsinger: With these words (*hōste agapētoi mou*) Paul returns to his concern that divisiveness be uprooted from the community. *Obedience* (*hypakoē*) is the theme that links the hymn just finished to the exhortation now resumed. The Philippians are not merely Paul's “converts.” They are his “*beloved friends*” (*agapētoi*). He wishes he could visit them, freed from his chains, even as they long to see him too. If he were

present in person, perhaps he could help straighten things out. Yet for the time being he has to be absent, with no guarantee that he will ever see them again. He urges them to be as diligent in resolving their quarrels as if he were on hand to help. Alluding to Christ's exemplary obedience, surpassing and grounding their own, he exhorts them to be obedient from the heart just as, he adds in encouragement, they have always been obedient. It is a matter of faithfulness, not to him but to God. It is a matter of being true to the gift of their salvation.

2. Patterned after a Life of Consistent Obedience

*"just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only,
but now much more in my absence,"*

Dwight Pentecost: In Paul's mind, if his presence would put pressure upon them, the example of the loving suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ ought to put even greater pressure on them. It was Paul's greatest desire to please a person. That was the motive in his personal life, and it was not necessary for that Person to be present.

The **extent of obedience** should always be **consistent** since our accountability is not to men, but to God. The degree of obedience of the child is not determined by what the child does when the parent is present, but by what he does when the parent is absent.

The Philippians did have a **good track record** in terms of obedience and Paul is quick to soften the impact of his exhortations with appropriate praise

Ben Witherington: The issues in Philippi are not such that Paul needs to offer a stern corrective and a demand for a dramatic change of course. Rather he can build on the positive foundation that exists and strengthen the unity they need to maintain. Paul is not calling them from disobedience to obedience, but rather to continue to live out their obedience to the gospel.

Grant Osborne: He appealed to their lengthy and glorious history of "obedience" to the gospel and the demands of the Lord; from the founding of the church until the present day they had been known for their Christian faithfulness. Most likely that included obedience to Paul's apostolic teaching. Christ was "*obedient to death—even death on a cross*" (2:8), and believers were to follow his paradigm in their own lives.

Steven Lawson: Paul explains that their obedience has been "*not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence.*" This is to say, Paul recognizes that he does not have to be in Philippi, at their side, in order for them to live their Christian lives effectively. Their primary dependence is not on Paul, but on the Lord Jesus Christ. The Philippians cannot use the absence of Paul as an excuse that they do not need, or that it is too hard, to obey the Lord. Though Paul is away from them, he commends them for "*always*" walking in obedience to God. These Philippians believers began walking in the word when Paul was with them and have continued now he is gone. Though he is not with them now, they must continue down that path of obedience.

3. Comanded as a Matter of Personal and Corporate Responsibility

“work out your salvation”

"keep working out the salvation of yourselves"

Not talking about works earning our salvation -- we know we are *"saved by grace thru faith and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast"*.

Lit. "to carry out to its intended goal, to carry to its ultimate conclusion; accomplish" -- speaking not of justification but of the path of sanctification that ultimately leads to glorification.

They could not depend on the Apostle Paul or even on their elders for their own progress in Christlikeness -- in a life of humble service ("*your own*" is emphatic by position)

Why suffer for loving others? Christ did it and so should we.

Don't give up when pressure or suffering come -- remember it has been granted to us not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for His sake.

William Hendriksen: Their salvation is a **process** ... in which they themselves, far from remaining passive or dormant, take a very active part. It is a pursuit, a following after, a pressing on, a contest, fight, race.

Charles Swindoll: The Philippians are to work out their salvation not in the sense of earning it, but expressing the reality of their salvation through their practical obedience and selfless humility. The emphasis is on sanctification (learning to live more righteously), not on justification (being declared righteous).

Grant Osborne: Some interpreters see the focus as individual salvation, centering on a person's Christian life as a whole, and others as corporate salvation, centering on the life of the church. The former view aligns with the meaning of salvation in Paul's other writings, but latter fits closely with the surrounding context in Philippians and the problem of church dissension. In recent years the corporate view has gained support. In secular Greek, *sōtēria* often could describe the health and well-being of a person or a group, and **1:27 – 2:18** is certainly a corporate context calling for unity and spiritual healing; moreover, the commands are plural, addressing all the believers at Philippi. On the other hand, there are good grounds for a personal thrust. In Paul's letters *sōtēria* nearly always means **spiritual salvation (Rom 1:16; Eph 1:13; Phil 1:28)**. While this does not refer only to the original conversion experience, it does refer to the working out of the believers' salvation vis-à-vis their ongoing Christian conduct. In the New Testament, *sōtēria* connotes the life in Christ as a whole, including sanctification as well as regeneration. So the plural commands here do not necessarily refer to the church as a whole but to all the people in the church.

In reality it is an error to make this an either/or; it is a both/and. Paul was instructing every member of the Philippian church to work out the implications of their own salvation or life with God by working with the other members to achieve peace and harmony within their church. It is essential for every believer to work at their Christian walk as part of the corporate body of Christ. Interpreters generally agree that there is an eschatological element in this—that believers are to live in the present in light of the future end of history, when Christ will return and abolish this age of sin and discord.

Tony Merida: **What does it mean to work out one's salvation?** Surely there are hundreds of implications of working out the life-changing salvation that God has wrought in our souls. But to work out your salvation simply means to **follow the example of Christ**. In the Christ hymn, Jesus has given us the pattern for obedience. He has shown us what humble, others-focused, God-glorifying obedience looks like. That's the kind of life that we are called to live as believers. Does your life look like **Philippians 2:6-8**? Are you praying and striving for growth in humility, personal holiness, selfless service, and sacrificial mission by the power of God's enabling grace?

We might wish we could find a shortcut, some special diet to grow in Christlikeness, but following in the footsteps of Jesus requires daily taking up our cross. My (Tony) son James once looked at the picture on a particular cereal box and asked me, "If I eat this cereal, will I become a football player?" I said, "You need a bit more than cereal to become an athlete." The fact is, there are no shortcuts to becoming a professional athlete. It requires discipline and long workouts. So it is with the Christian's growth in Christlikeness. We can't take a pill or eat kale and automatically turn into perfectly sanctified individuals. We must work out our salvation every day by the grace of God.

This is a challenge—a long obedience in the same direction. We live in a fast-paced, fast-food, microwave, Internet culture, but sanctification is a slow process. We are often drawn to mega conferences and flashy events, but God has called the Christian to the day-in, day-out process of growing in Christlikeness. It's easy to show a spark of enthusiasm at an event; it's quite another thing to live faithfully and consistently when no one is watching and when no one cares. May God rekindle in us a passion for **ordinary obedience, day to day, following the pattern of Jesus**.

George Hunsinger: In the present tense, while there is only one Saving Agent, there is more than one acting subject. God operates in the faithful, even as they also "cooperate" with his saving work, but only God, not the faithful, actualizes the grace of salvation. They cooperate with this grace by actively receiving or partaking of it, as well as by attesting and mediating it, but they do nothing to constitute or deserve it or even to make it possible. They are active in appropriating, but not in effecting, this grace. Every act of appropriation is itself a gift. God acts in and through the faithful, even as they act in and through him. But the status of their respective actions is not the same. While the faithful may be subsidiary acting subjects, cooperating with grace under grace, God alone is the Saving Agent by whom grace is made effectual. In the present tense he performs his work of grace in the faithful by moving them through their free consent "*in all spiritual wisdom and understanding*" (**Col. 1:9**).

4. Manifested with the Attitude of a Humble Servant
"with fear and trembling"

Possibly an idiomatic expression of the times
Cf. **1 Cor. 2:3; 2 Cor.7:15; Eph.6:5**

Cf. hostess wanting to make sure everything is just right for a distinguished guest.

Opposite of being high-minded and proud and arrogant and self-confident.

Gordon Zerbe: The phrase *with fear and trembling* (v. 12) implies reverent loyalty, not a nervous anxiety to do one's duty or a posture of cowering before some angry God. This phrase was idiomatic for an attitude of obedience (**2 Cor 7:15**) and humble service (**1 Cor 2:3**; cf. **Eph 6:5; Mark 5:33**).

Ben Witherington: These words suggest that God is present with them and observing their behavior, and so they should act as if God is in their midst and behave!

John MacArthur: Knowing that he serves a holy and just God, the faithful believer will always live with fear and trembling. *Fear* translates *phobos*, which describes fright or terror (cf. **Matt. 14:26; Luke 21:26; 1 Cor. 2:3**) as well as reverential awe (cf. **Acts 2:43; 9:31; 2 Cor. 5:11; 7:1**). *Trembling* is from *tromos*, which refers to *shaking* and is the word from which the English word *tremor* derives. Both of those are proper reactions to the awareness of one's own spiritual weakness and the power of temptation. The Lord seeks such an attitude in His children, as His words in **Isaiah 66:2** indicate: "To this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word."

An important Old Testament truth is "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*" (**Ps. 111:10**; cf. **Prov. 1:7; 9:10**). This is not a fear of being doomed to eternal torment, nor a hopeless dread of judgment that leads to despair. It is rather a **reverential fear**, a holy concern to give God the honor He deserves and avoid the chastening of His displeasure. Such fear protects against temptation and sin and gives motivation for obedient, righteous living.

B. (:13) God's Role in Our Progress in Humble Service

John MacArthur: 5 essential realities concerning **God's part in sanctification:**

1. His Personhood
2. His Power
3. His Presence
4. His Purpose
5. His Pleasure

1. Sovereign Initiative

“for it is God who is at work in you,”

Gives us hope and assurance

D. A. Carson: God is not working merely to strengthen us in our willing and acting. Paul’s language is stronger than that. God himself is working in us both to will and to act: he works in us at the level of our wills and at the level of our doing. But far from this being a disincentive to press on, Paul insists that this is an incentive. Assured as we are that God works in this way in his people, we should be all the more strongly resolved to will and to act in ways that please our Master.

2. Sovereign Enablement

a. Graciously grants the **DESIRE** to live a life of humble service
in harmony with God's good pleasure

“both to will.”

b. Graciously grants the **POWER** to carry out that desire

“and to work for His good pleasure”

word = "*effective energy*" -- only used of supernatural power in the NT

D. A. Carson: God's continuous, gracious, sovereign work in our lives becomes for us an incentive to press on with fear and trembling.

Frank Thielman: Paul perhaps recognized the danger, nevertheless, that someone would take his statement to mean that believers cooperate with God in the process of salvation and that if they did their part, God, meeting them halfway, would do his. So in **verse 13** Paul explains that **salvation comes entirely at God’s initiative** and that God provides both the will and the ability to accomplish “*his good purpose.*” Paul’s emphatic way of putting this (“*it is God who works in you*” rather than simply “*God works in you*”) and his care in pointing out the divine origin of both the ability and the very will to put this ability at God’s service show how concerned he is that his statement in **verse 12** not be misunderstood. Although the Philippians must work out their salvation, their salvation does not come at their own initiative. They should work out their salvation with a seriousness appropriate to those who look forward to salvation on the final day, but they should remember at all times that the whole process leading to their acquittal on that Day is theirs neither to initiate nor to complete. It is God’s from first to last (cf. **1:6**).

Moises Silva: The point is that, while sanctification requires conscious effort and concentration, our activity takes place not in a legalistic spirit, with a view to gaining God’s favor, but rather in a spirit of humility and thanksgiving, recognizing that without Christ we can do nothing (cf. **John 15:5**) and so he alone deserves the glory. Perhaps the finest interpretive summary of **Phil. 2:12–13** comes from **John Murray** (1961: 148–49):

“God’s working in us is not suspended because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of cooperation as if God did his part and we did ours so that the conjunction or coordination of both produced the required result. God works and we also work. But the relation is that because God works we work. All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God’s working in us. . . . We have here not only the explanation of all acceptable activity on our part but we also have the incentive to our willing and working. . . . The more persistently active we are in working, the more persuaded we may be that all the energizing grace and power is of God.”

George Hunsinger: In any case grace operates in the hearts of the faithful (*en hymin*) in such a way that they appropriate God’s effectual willing and working in and with their own receptive willing and working. Grace, as Paul sees it, enables them not only to overcome all rivalry and conceit among themselves but also to withstand any persecution from the outside world. It frees them for love and obedience in times of adversity, even as Christ was loving and obedient in adversity, not only for their sakes but also for the sake of the world.

II. (:14-16) SHINE -- MAINTAIN A BLAMELESS TESTIMONY AS A CHILD OF GOD

Paul advocates 6 Keys to maintaining a blameless testimony:

A. (:14) Good Attitude -- Do Not Spoil Your Testimony or Undermine Your Unity *“Do all things without grumbling or disputing;”*

Danger lies in wait to ruin our testimony

"Do all things" -- everything that is required to humbly submit to others and serve them in the body of Christ.

Some people try to avoid temptation by sitting life out as a spectator; not taking the risks of Christian ministry.

Paul says "Get involved; Be aggressive in seizing every opportunity for humble service."

Tony Merida: Grumbling causes us to lose our distinctive character, or in the words of Jesus, our “*saltiness*” (**Matt 5:13-16**). Consequently, we will lose our effectiveness. Realize, then, that others are watching you. Others are listening to you. What are they seeing, and what are they hearing? Are we standing out like bright stars in a dark sky? This is Paul’s concern as it pertains to grumbling. He has the watching world in view. We will shine like stars, and like a city on a hill, when our conversation remains blameless, pure, and faultless.

John MacArthur: I once heard a sociologist observe that the typical modern young person lives in a state of sullen discontent, continually dissatisfied with things as they are. Part of the problem, he suggested, is small families, in which fewer children are able to demand more of their parents' attention and do not have to share anything with brothers and sisters. Combined with affluence and materialism, that situation tends to produce selfish, self-indulgent children who are never content with what they have. Instead of bending to the needs of the family, as is necessary in larger families, the family bends to them. Absent parents, gone to work, shop, and play, try quick fixes for their children's demands, usually giving them what they want to stop the conflict. Children in that situation have little desire to grow up, realizing that adult society will not cater to their every whim. They want to postpone the responsibilities of a job, marriage and family, and other such commitments as long as possible, because those things demand a considerable degree of conformity to others. When such children become adults and don't get what they want when they want it, discontentment increases, as do frustration, anger, anxiety, and complaining.

Discontentment also breeds impatience, another defining characteristic of our times. Among the seemingly endless causes of impatience, and often hostility, are long lines, interruptions, talkative people, rude people, high prices, traffic jams, inconsiderate drivers, and crying babies. The last two have actually become causes of serious crime. Inconsiderate drivers often produce road rage, which, with increasing frequency, results in gunfire and even murder. Crying babies have led to child abuse, which occasionally results in the murder of a helpless baby. . .

Believers' failure to willingly, even joyfully, submit to God's providential will is a deep-seated and serious sin. Discontentment and complaining are attitudes that can become so habitual that they are hardly noticed. But those twin sins demonstrate a lack of trust in His providential will, boundless grace, and infinite wisdom and love. Consequently, those sins are especially odious in His sight and merit His discipline.

But Do Not Spoil Your Testimony:

1. By Grumbings

Background = OT grumbings of children of Israel in the wilderness

2. By Arguments

R.C.H. Lenski: evil rationalizing thoughts and calculations (**Rom. 1:21; 1 Cor. 1:20**)

Not referring to quarrels that would disrupt unity among brothers; but grumbling at the disagreeable hardships of life and persecution.

Other commentators feel that the context of the epistle deals with quarrels among the brothers that destroy church unity and would mar Christian testimony.

Ben Witherington: Murmuring and disputing or arguing are not the sorts of behavior that promote community unity. Avoiding such behavior is one of the ways one becomes blameless, pure, and faultless children of God (which, again, is family language, not friendship language), and so they will stand out as starkly in the midst of their agonistic culture as stars in a night sky. An allusion to **Dan. 12.3** is possible here.

B. (:15a) Good Character Reflecting Your Identity as Children of God

“that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach”

1. Blameless -- nothing people can censure you for

2. Pure; innocent -- unmixed; unadulterated -- devoid of matters foreign or improper to a pure heart

3. Children of God -- ones who faithfully reflect the image and nature of their Father

this is where the emphasis lies

4. Without blemish; no flaws (cf. the absence of defects in sacrificial animals)

C. (:15b) Good Contrast-- to the Evil Environment and Perverse Peer Pressure that Wage War Against a Blameless Testimony

“in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation,”

Grant Osborne: The body of Christ is to be the polar opposite of the wilderness generation—pure rather than warped, blameless rather than crooked. The new Israel will continue God’s original purpose in choosing Israel, serving as *“a light for the Gentiles”* (**Isa 49:6**). The character of this crooked world is described in **Romans 1:21**: *“Their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”* God has placed his people in the midst of this sin-sick world so that his truth may rescue these perishing people. Through the witness of the church, *“the light shines in the darkness”* (**John 1:5**), but it is essential that the purity of that witness be maintained. As Paul puts it here, *“Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky.”* Jesus is the *“light of the world”* (**John 8:12**), and his followers are called to be the same (**Matt 5:14**). . . Believers are to shine so brightly that the people of the world are mesmerized, but that will not happen if the lens of our witness is marred by petty bickering. We are light-bearers, and through us the light of God must radiate forth and fill the sky with the beauty of God. Paul challenges us here to be united in the beauty and glory of our witness.

D. (:15c) Good Goal-- Be a Shining Star for Christ

“among whom you appear as lights in the world,”

Be a lighthouse in your community with worldwide impact thru participation in the body of Christ in the midst of such darkness.

The Impact of a Blameless Testimony -- a Picture helps you to visualize the successful implementation of the Biblical principle.

It is possible for us not to be shining as brightly as we should because something is clouding or obscuring our testimony.

How will the world ever see the light if the light does not shine brightly?

Gordon Zerbe: The imagery of shining as bright lights in the world also recalls the imagery of Isaiah in which the people of God are a “*light to the nations*” (**Isa 9:2–7; 42:6–7; 49:6; 58:8–10**). Paul adjusts the text in Daniel by identifying their shining, not in heaven (*ouranos*, sky or heaven), but “*in the kosmos*,” focusing on the earthly world of humanity. The messianic polis has an identity oriented to God’s current regime in heaven (**Phil 3:20**). But its missional vocation is squarely in the midst of the terrestrial world, and its destiny is in this world transformed (**3:21**; cf. **Rom 8:18–25**). Outsiders, even enemies, are always potential insiders.

Dennis Johnson: When our commitment to obedience begins to reflect Jesus’ costly commitment to obedience for us, that simple shift from self-centeredness to Son-centeredness causes our lives to shine like stars in a midnight sky. In view of the tensions that exist in the Philippian church—rivalry, conceit, preoccupation with one’s personal interests—Paul has a very specific form of obedience in mind.

E. (:16a) Good Stability and Mission -- The Source and Power of a Blameless Testimony

“holding fast the word of life,”

- Source -- we need the content
- Power -- we need the content in its efficacy

1st Option -- "*Holding fast the Word of Life*" in perseverance; this would fit as a grounds for Paul's boasting in the day of Christ

Other option -- "*holding forth the Word of life*" in evangelism; this would closely parallel what precedes

Both are true; you must continue to give attention to observing the Word of life yourself in order to be able to offer it to others.

Gordon Zerbe: Paul draws attention to what they hold securely in their hands, connoting both how they maintain their own **stability**, yet also how they interact with hostile adversaries. In the first case, they are holding on in the sense of standing firm in the face of external opposition, continuing with the Greek text of **Daniel 12:3** that Paul draws upon (“*Hold strong to my words*”). The image is roughly synonymous with standing firm together and striving [fighting] together with the loyalty-faith of the

gospel (1:27; 4:1). The word of life is the gospel of Messiah, the sole foundation for their citizenship practice and the only security for their destiny.

But the phrase also seems to imply what armaments are in their hands as they face a hostile nation. Instead of taking up arms in the ordeal, they take up the word of life, fighting God's warfare of love with "weapons" appropriate to the gospel of Messiah. The image reminds us of Paul's language of "weapons of warfare" as the virtues that Jesus loyalists display even to adversaries. In particular, Paul refers to struggling "with the weapons of justice-righteousness for the right hand and for the left" (2 Cor 6:7 AT) or "taking the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph 6:17; cf. Rom 6:13; 12:21; 13:12; 1 Thess 5:8-9; 2 Cor 10:4; also Phil 4:5).

F. (:16b) Good Encouragement -- The Importance of Our Blameless Testimony to Our Spiritual Leaders -- Paul's own stake in this matter

"so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain."

Desire to see his ministry proved effective in the lives of others rather than futile;
Paul has invested a lot of hard work and sacrifice in their spiritual growth;
The true results will be manifest at the day of Christ.

Grant Osborne: Paul is using two metaphors: (1) athletic imagery, describing the race of life in order to depict the great effort needed to finish well in ministry (see **1 Cor 9:24-26; Gal 2:2; 2 Tim 2:5; Heb 12:1-3**); and (2) the image of manual labor and the hard work needed to make a living. In both images Paul depicts a great deal of effort, potentially with no gain to show for it. If the Philippians were to self-destruct, all of Paul's efforts would have been for naught, and he would be filled with shame when he stood before the Lord. His prayer was that this outcome would not come to pass, that these people would indeed respond, find healing before the Lord, and become the light-bearing witness in Philippi they were meant to be.

Max Anders: Paul looks forward to witnessing the **progress** these Christians will make in their lives. They are the reason for his ministry. He wants the concluding scene of history to show that his life had meaning. As he stands at the final judgment to hear God's evaluation of his life, he wants to hear that the Philippians have indeed been the stars of the universe. Then his ministry will not be without meaning or empty. He will have run life's race victoriously. He will have completed his life's occupation successfully. He exhibits a similar anticipation in **1 Thessalonians 2:19-20**: "*For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.*"

III. (:17-18) REJOICE -- FELLOWSHIP IN JOY MUST ALWAYS DOMINATE OUR FELLOWSHIP IN SACRIFICIAL SERVICE AND SUFFERING

A. (:17a) Fellowship in Sacrificial Service and Suffering

“But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith,”

D. A. Carson: Then, if Paul has to give up his life, his sacrifice is merely a kind of libation poured out on top of their sacrifice. Such a libation is meaningless unless it is poured out on a more substantial sacrifice. But their Christian living is that sacrifice; Paul's martyrdom--should it occur--or the pains, sufferings, and persecutions he faces as an apostle are the complementary drink offering poured over theirs.

William Barclay: Paul was perfectly willing to make his life a sacrifice to God; and, if that happened, to him it would be all joy, and he calls on the Philippians not to mourn at the prospect but rather to rejoice. To him, every call to sacrifice and to toil was a call to his love for Christ, and therefore he met it not with regret and complaint but with joy.

Grant Osborne: In referring to a sacrifice to God, Paul probably had in mind three different levels: (1) primarily, his possible execution (after the decision in his trial is handed down), representing a drink offering as his blood is poured out in sacrifice for the Philippians to God; (2) the suffering and sacrifices Paul had been making in his ministry, as he ran and labored (**v. 16**) for the believers' sakes; and (3) the Philippians' sacrificial service for God. The first two levels belong together. Paul was thinking of his many years of suffering and service in his apostolic ministry, but his present-tense statement (*“I am being poured out as a drink offering”*) especially points to the culmination of his ministry in possible martyrdom. Note the parallel in **2 Timothy 4:6**: *“I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.”* Paul was uncertain whether he would be executed and actually believed he would be released (**1:25**), but either way he was pouring himself out on behalf of the Philippians. Here he is saying that *“even if”* his life of sacrificial service were to end in the near future with his death, he would rejoice in the privilege of serving the Philippian church. This is a beautiful and powerful message. If Paul were asked to pour out his life's blood for the cause of Christ, he would joyfully consider this a drink offering to God. In the same way the drink offering completed the sacrifice, his death would complete his sacrificial service of ministry for the believers' sakes.

The third level in the sacrificial imagery comes in the phrase *“on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith.”* Paul was pouring himself out for the Philippians as they were pouring themselves out for God. Later in this letter, he speaks of their sacrificial service both to himself and to God (**2:30; 4:18**), so his point is that he would gladly give his life for these people who were faithfully serving the Lord. As a drink offering, his sacrifice would complete both his sacrificial service and their own. The Philippians' service was two-fold, encompassing their faithful witness in hostile surroundings (**1:27–30**) as well as the gifts they had sent to Paul (**4:14–18**). They had served him and the Lord in both ways, and he was grateful. He viewed their life of faith and service as an acceptable sacrifice to God and saw himself as privileged to offer his sacrificial ministry—and perhaps his life—as a libation to God, completing the believers' faithful service.

B. (:17b-18) Fellowship in Joy Must Be the Dominating Tone

“I rejoice and share my joy with you all. 18 And you too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.”

Gordon Zerbe: There is another new element to Paul’s rejoicing: it is a **mutual rejoicing** in solidarity with each other, emphasized with a verbal redundancy: *I rejoice* [*chairō*] and *rejoice together* [*synchairō*, co-rejoice, rejoice mutually] with all of you. That is, he rejoices doubly, both in his own person and in solidarity together with all his beloved in Philippi. As before, *all* emphasizes the inclusive solidarity of the entire group of “*saints*” in Philippi (**1:1, 4, 7 [2x], 8; 1:25**; on unity, **2:2–5**).

Grant Osborne: Whatever transpires, God’s people are **called to joy**—which would make a good title for Paul’s letter to the Philippians. The idea actually flows from a theology of suffering, as every trial that tests our faith provides a cause for rejoicing (**Jas 1:2; 1 Pet 1:6**). We can have joy in our hardships because we know that God is sovereign over all our circumstances and will turn everything around for our good (**Rom 8:28**; the whole of **Heb 11**). The key is the difference between happiness and rejoicing. We are happy when things are going the way we like, but we are not expected to be happy in painful experiences (**Heb 12:11**). Joy, on the other hand, is based on the presence of God and his eschatological promises. So when trials come we might not be happy, but we certainly rejoice, having confidence in God’s goodness and faithfulness to us.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is our level of obedience affected by who is around us, by whether or not someone is watching us? Or are we the same person in private as we are in church on Sunday morning? (cf. **vs. 12**)
- 2) The doctrine of God's sovereignty is often attacked as being a threat to our individual personhood. From **verse 13** how is this doctrine actually a comfort and encouragement to us in our struggles to mature in Christ?
- 3) Why are "*grumbling and disputing*" viewed so negatively by God? What impact does such an attitude have on our Christian growth and our public testimony? Trace examples from the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness in the book of Numbers to see how severely God judged such transgression.
- 4) What gave the Apostle Paul great joy in the present and what did he anticipate would give him great joy in the future? What is our joy centered around?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Alec Motyer: There is an obvious division between **verses 12-16a** (. . . *word of life*) which are full of *directives*, and **verses 16b-18** which are concerned with *incentives*. But there is more to **verses 12-16a** than a list of commands; it is also a list of reassurances. There is a balance created between what we are to do and to strive to be and, on the other hand, what is already true of us. . . . This is the balance and testimony of the verses: the Christian life, growing in the likeness of Christ, is a blend of rest and activity -- not alternating from one to the other, but a blend in which, at one and the same moment, the Christian is both resting confidently (for example, on what God is doing within) and actively pursuing (for example, the duty of being blameless). . . . The work of the Christian carries the marks of obedience, responsibility and sensitivity. . . . the indwelling of God bears the marks of activity, effectiveness, completeness and free divine choice.

James Boice: No one will ever understand the doctrine of God's working to form a man's will until he realizes that apart from the work of God in his heart through Jesus Christ a man does not have free will where spiritual realities are concerned. I know that someone will want to reply, 'What! Do you mean to tell me that I cannot do anything I want to?' But my answer is, 'Yes; you cannot.' Oh, I know that you have free will to decide certain things, but you do not have free will to decide all things. And you are most unable to decide the things that are important. For instance, you can decide whether you want to go to church on Sunday morning or stay at home. You can decide whether you will take the bus downtown or go by car. You can decide whether you will go to work on Monday morning or pretend you are sick. You can order turkey or roast beef at a restaurant. You can do these things. But you cannot exercise your free will in anything that involves your physical, intellectual, or spiritual capabilities. By your own free will you cannot decide that you are going to have a fifty percent higher I.Q. than you do or that you will have a gift for dealing with quantum mechanics. You just cannot do it. You do not have free will to become three inches taller. You do not have free will to make a billion dollars. You do not have free will to run the 100-yard dash in eight seconds. You do not have the free will to look like Burt Lancaster or Steve McQueen, or to look like Raquel Welch if you are a girl. You do not have free will in anything intellectual or physical.

Now just as you do not have free will intellectually and you do not have free will physically, so you do not have free will spiritually. You cannot choose God. Adam had free will, but he lost it. And all men since are without it until it is recreated in them by the Holy Spirit. Let me give you an illustration. It is as if a man were standing on the edge of a muddy pit with slippery sides. As long as he is on the edge he has free will; he can either stay on the bank or jump in. But if he decides to jump in, then his free will is lost as far as getting out of the pit is concerned. He lost his free will in the fall. Oh, he has free will to walk around on the bottom or to sit down. He has the free will to try to scramble up the side or to accept his plight philosophically. He has the free will to cry for help or to be silent, to be angry or complacent. But he does not have free will to be again on the edge of the embankment. . . .

If you have come to God, it is only because God has first entered your life by His Holy Spirit to quicken your will, to open your eyes to His truth, and to draw you irresistibly to Himself. It is only after this that you are able to choose the path which He sets before you.

John Walvoord: quoting **F. B. Meyer**

F. B. Meyer points out that this great text has six dominant notes:

1. God's Personality -- '*it is God*';
2. God's Immanence -- '*in you*';
3. God's Energy -- '*worketh in you*';
4. God's Morality -- He works in you '*to will*';
5. God's Efficiency " He works in you '*to work*';
6. God's Ultimate Satisfaction -- '*for His own good pleasure*.'

D. A. Carson: So we are called not only to early steps of faith and obedience but to an entire life of working out our salvation. This will be characterized by

- (1) self-denying contentment,
- (2) a conscious effort to please mature Christian leaders, and
- (3) a cheerful sacrifice that ratifies and endorses the work that more mature Christian leaders have poured into our lives.

And all of this is nothing more than learning the entailments of following a crucified Messiah. In short, we must adopt Jesus' death as a test of our outlook.

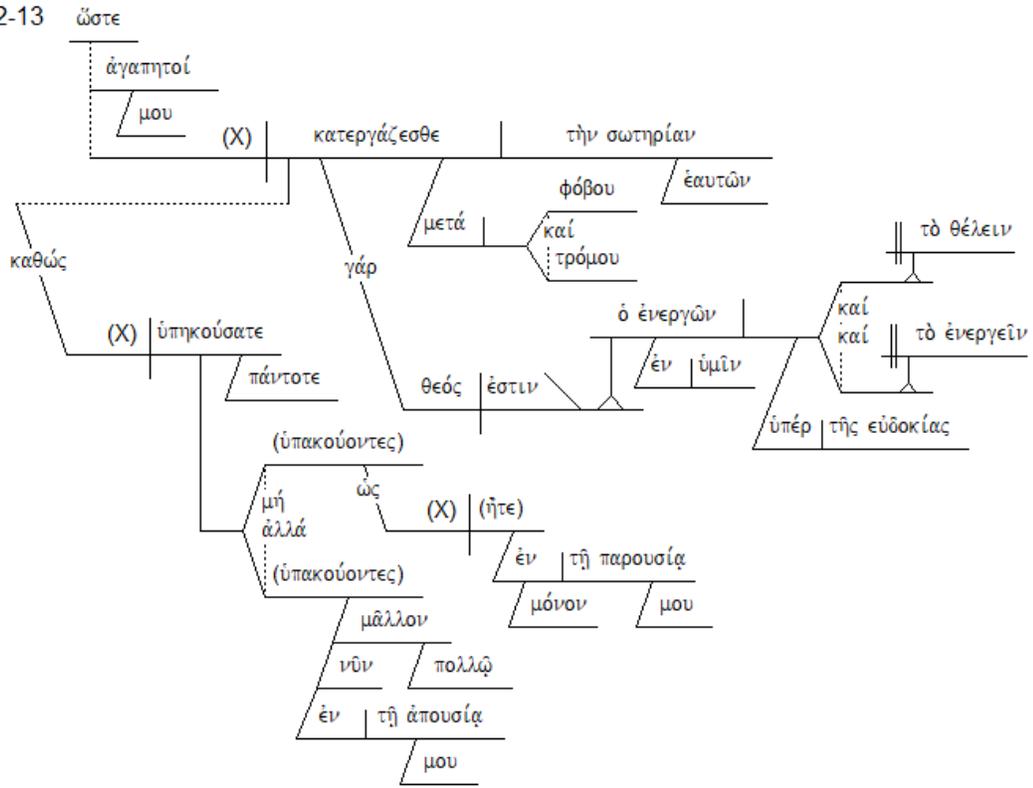
F. F. Bruce: When a sacrifice, such as a burnt offering with its accompanying cereal offering, was presented in the temple at Jerusalem, a drink-offering or libation of wine or olive oil might be poured over it or beside it. This was added last, and completed the sacrifice.

Homer Kent: Regeneration initiates the believer into a life with obligations. Acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord obligates the believer to obey him. Hence, working out salvation does not mean "*working for*" salvation, but making salvation operational. Justification must be followed by the experiential aspects of sanctification, by which the new life in Christ is consciously appropriated and demonstrated...

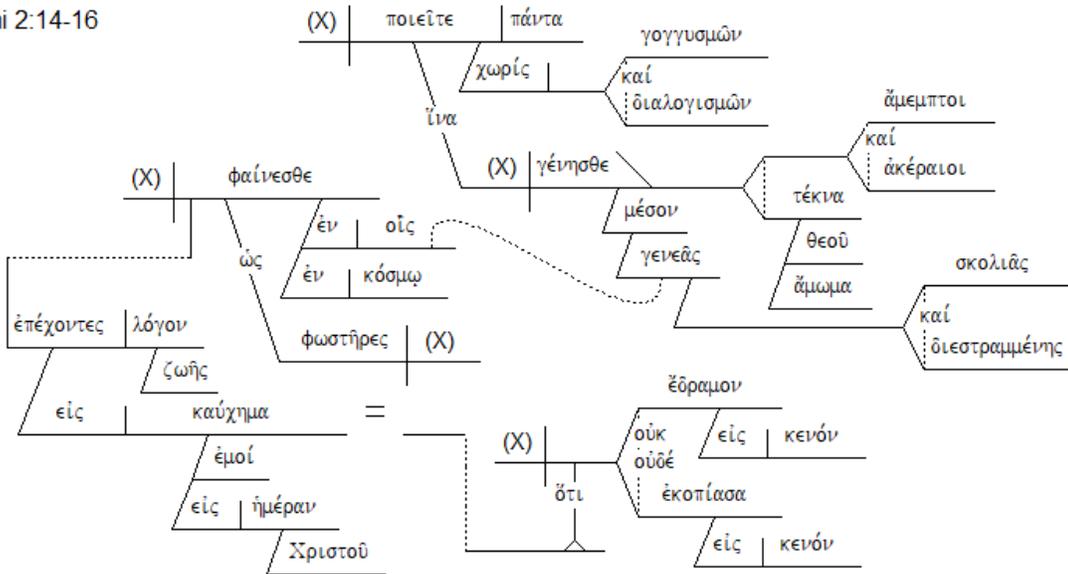
"*With fear and trembling*" is no contradiction of the joyful spirit permeating this letter. Christian joy is the experience of every believer in God's will, but holy fear of God that trembles at the thought of sin is also the attitude of the careful Christian (**James 4:8-10**).

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

Phi 2:12-13



Phi 2:14-16



TEXT: Philippians 2:19-30

TITLE: PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL

BIG IDEA:

TWO SERVANTHOOD EXAMPLES OF PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION:

D. A. Carson: Emulate those who are interested in the well-being of others, not in their own. Be on the alert for Christians who really do exemplify this basic Christian attitude, this habit of helpfulness. They are never the sort who strut their way into leadership with inflated estimates of their own importance. They are the kind who cheerfully pick up after other people. They are not offended if no one asks about them; they are too busy asking about others. They are the kind who are constantly seeking to do good spiritually, to do good materially, to do good emotionally. They are committed to the well-being of others.

Max Anders: Honor Christian ministers because of what they have done for Jesus in serving you and his church courageously and unselfishly.

Tony Merida: Paul moves from instructions and imperatives to **living illustrations**. We need illustrations and examples of a Philippians type of life! **D. A. Carson** gives numerous cases of the need for examples in matters such as prayer, language, lifestyle, entertainment, and he says, “Much Christian character is as much caught as taught—that is, it is picked up by constant association with mature Christians. . . . Modeling, modeling; it takes place all the time, whether we take it into account or not” (*Basics*, 69–70).

These men exemplify **Philippians 1:5**, for they had a “*partnership in the gospel*.” God began a good work in them, and He was carrying it out (1:6). These men show us what it looks like to have affection for Christ’s church (1:7-8). We could also say that they illustrate what it looks like to live “*worthy of the gospel*” (1:27), and that they illustrate the imperatives of 2:12-16.

Gordon Fee: Having informed the Philippians about “his affairs” (as “reflections on imprisonment,” 1:12–26) and appealed to them regarding “their affairs” (that they live worthy of the gospel, 1:27 – 2:18), Paul now proceeds to “what’s next.” And “what’s next” has to do with visits to Philippi (Timothy’s [vv. 19–23]; his own [24]; and Epaphroditus’s [25–30]), which from the point of view of his writing the letter are all future, but from that of their reading it are partly future (vv. 19–24) and partly completed (vv. 25–30).

David Garland: It is . . . a digression praising Timothy and Epaphroditus in such a way that Paul further illustrates what it means to have the mind of Christ (2:5). **Davis’s** comments, 117, are apropos: “As is typical of oral compositions, Paul does not leave

the discussion of working for the benefit of the gospel in the theoretical world. He immediately follows up his commands with two very practical examples. Furthermore, these examples are not icons to be imagined but men with whom the Philippians are quite familiar.” Both Timothy and Epaphroditus have emptied themselves in serving the gospel and provide living, familiar examples of **servanthood**.

F. F. Bruce: Paul did not set out deliberately to present three examples of the same self-renouncing attitude “*as that of Christ Jesus*” [**Phil. 2:5**]. But in fact this is what he has done. His own readiness to have his martyrdom credited to the spiritual account of his Philippian friends, Timothy’s unselfish service to Paul and genuine concern for other Christians, Epaphroditus’s devotion to his mission at great risk to his health and (as it might have been) to his life—all these display the **unselfconscious care for others** enjoined at the beginning of this chapter and reinforced by the powerful example of Christ’s self-emptying.

Dennis Johnson: Our text teaches, however, that God does embed into our experience living, breathing replicas of Jesus: men and women whose heart instincts are growing by grace so that we can sense the heartbeat of Christ in the way they treat others, react to adversity, and invest their energies. Watching them shows us what growing up to be like Jesus looks like in the nitty-gritty of everyday life. Three such miniatures are profiled in **Philippians 2:19–30**: Paul himself, his junior colleague Timothy, and the Philippians’ own messenger Epaphroditus. None of these miniatures fully matches the Original, of course. Even they are not yet fully “grown up.” Paul will frankly admit this about himself in **Philippians 3:12–14**, where he insists that one mark of maturity is realizing that you are not yet fully mature (**3:15**). But each of these men reflects Jesus to the Philippians and to us; and as they do, their reflections show us what growing up looks like, and why and how growing up toward the maturity of Jesus is possible.

Ben Witherington: If the example of Christ is too lofty or remote, since none of the Philippians had likely ever seen Jesus, here were two examples in the flesh that they knew very well, two genuine Christian leaders and servants of the gospel who provided concrete examples and even direct guidance when they were in town. They could be readily contrasted with others in Rome who were preaching the gospel for selfish motives (cf. **1:15–17** to **2:21**). . .

It is surely no accident that Paul appeals to these two examples, since they have both engaged in self-sacrificial suffering like Christ’s and they are both persons exhibiting behavior that produces unity and concord. Indeed, Paul is sending them to Philippi to work on that very matter, and already Epaphroditus had been strengthening the social networks between the Philippians and Paul by coming to Paul’s aid with resources from the Philippians. Paul goes out of his way to stress that these two individuals share like mindsets, goals, behaviors with Paul and so he calls them his coworkers and fellow-soldiers. They serve in the same salvation army for the same Savior, and they have the mind of Christ. They are walking examples of the proposition in **1:27–30**, and Paul will use language here that echoes that passage. The relationship between Paul and these two coworkers models how things should be among and between the Philippians.

John MacArthur: Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus were three very different individuals: Paul the bold, fearless leader; Timothy his quiet, devoted assistant; Epaphroditus a diligent, behind-the-scenes worker. Yet all three manifested the most important characteristic of a godly leader—a **life worth imitating**.

Gordon Zerbe: Outline

Plans for Sending Timothy Soon, 2:19–23

2:19 The Hope for Timothy’s Imminent Visit and Its Purpose

2:20–22 Recommendation of Timothy as Model Messianic Envoy

2:23 Timing Contingency: Paul’s Own Circumstance

Confidence in Paul’s Own Imminent Visit, 2:24

Commendation of Epaphroditus as Model Messianic “Soldier,” 2:25–30

2:25 The Necessity of Sending Epaphroditus

2:26–28 The Reasons for Sending Epaphroditus

2:29–30 Receiving and Honoring Epaphroditus

I. (:19-24) THE EXAMPLE OF TIMOTHY -- A KINDRED SPIRIT

Gordon Fee: Although a passage like this carries much less theological grist than what has preceded, what emerges is of considerable moment. Paul’s description of Timothy, especially as that stands in contrast to those in Rome who out of rivalry are trying to increase his affliction, lies at the heart of what Paul understands Christian life to be all about. Reflecting the kind of concern he has raised by way of appeal in **2:3–4** (see v. **21**), he reminds the Philippians that Timothy’s coming to them would reflect his genuine concern about them; Timothy simply is not one to seek his own interests ahead of those of Christ Jesus. As noted on that passage, it is hard to imagine a more certain antidote to any number of struggles that consistently plague the local church, not to mention larger bodies and denominations, than this one—that God’s people all be as Timothy in terms of their putting the interests of others as the matter of first importance. Here again the way of “humility,” taking the lower road by way of the cross, is on full display; and here alone, as the gospel impacts the people of God in this way at the core of our beings, can we expect truly to count for the gospel in a world that lives the opposite, not only as a matter of course, but for the most part as its primary value. One must “look out for number one,” after all. Agreed, as long as one recognizes the cross to dictate that “number one” is one’s neighbor and not oneself.

Grant Osborne: Let’s rehearse the situation behind the letter. Paul had probably been in his prison apartment for nearly two years, and his capital trial was nearing its end. Several months earlier, the Philippian church had sent Epaphroditus to Rome to deliver a monetary gift and to help Paul in his ministry. Then several events had happened in succession, including Epaphroditus’ serious illness (**2:26–27**) and Paul’s receipt of news about dissension in the church. Paul would like to have gone to Philippi shortly

after receiving this report, but the trial was unlikely to wrap up anytime soon. He decided to have Epaphroditus return home—so the believers could see firsthand that he had recovered—and to send Timothy a short while later.

This letter likely was sent with Epaphroditus in order to explain his return to Philippi and to address Paul’s concerns about the church there, as well as to lay groundwork for the upcoming visit by Timothy, who would try to rectify the situation among the believers. In this section Paul intended to use both of these coworkers as examples for the Philippians to follow—Timothy as a model of love and concern for others and Epaphroditus as a model of perseverance and integrity in the midst of great personal suffering.

A. (:19-21) The Heart of an Undershepherd of Christ -- a Servant to the Flock

1. A Blessing to both Paul and the Philippians

a. Faithful in his interaction

"But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly"

David Garland: The verb “to send” (*pempō*, GK 4287; **2:19, 28**) and the phrase “in the Lord” (*en kyriō*, GK 3261; **2:19, 29**) mark off **2:19–30** as a unit (inclusio).

R. Kent Hughes: Remember, Paul is under arrest in Rome. And as always with Paul, there is no presumption in his planning as he hopes “in the Lord Jesus” to send Timothy their way. This is not a glib cliché. This is the way Paul lived, as other outtakes from his letters make clear: “if the Lord wills” (**1 Corinthians 4:19**) and “if the Lord permits” (**1 Corinthians 16:7**)—*Deo volenti*.

Paul bows to God’s will, but at the same time he longs for Timothy to make that round-trip to Philippi and back to Rome because he felt sure that cheerful, heartening news would be coming from Philippi as the Philippians read his letter and took it to heart.

John MacArthur: Timothy was a native of Lystra in the province of Galatia (part of modern Turkey). His mother, Eunice, was Jewish and his father was a Greek and probably a pagan. Paul led him to Christ (**1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:2, 18; 2 Tim. 1:2**), probably during the apostle’s visit to Lystra on his first missionary journey (**Acts 14:6–23**). Both his mother and his grandmother, Lois, were believers (**2 Tim. 1:5**) and had instructed Timothy in the Old Testament (**2 Tim. 3:15**). That he was not circumcised as a child suggests that his father had educated him in Greek learning and culture. Along with his spiritual maturity, his combined Jewish and Greek heritage made him uniquely qualified to minister the gospel with Paul to the Gentile world. To make Timothy more acceptable to the Jews, especially to those in Galatia who knew of him, Paul circumcised him (**Acts 16:3**). By the time Paul wrote Philippians, Timothy had been his almost constant companion for about ten years.

Richard Melick: In sending Timothy, Paul sent the best he had—an extension of himself—and a costly gift to them. After all, they had sacrificed for him as well.

- b. Encouraging in his outlook
"so that I also may be encouraged"

G. Walter Hansen: Paul explains his reason for sending Timothy to Philippi by saying that he desires to be *cheered* when he receives news regarding the condition of the church in Philippi. Used only here in the NT, the word cheered means “to be heartened, be glad, have courage.” Although Paul assumes that the church will be encouraged by Timothy’s report regarding his own situation, he places his emphasis on the potential impact that Timothy’s report regarding the church will have on his personal sense of well-being. This emphasis on his deep concern for the welfare of the church puts pressure on the church to cheer him up by following his directive to be *one in spirit and of one mind (2:2)*. The church now knows that they will encourage Paul by their unity or discourage him by their disunity. Not as a dispassionate spectator but as a tenderly caring parent, Paul opens his heart to the church. His words “combine a subtle, unobtrusive admonition and an expression of affectionate solidarity between apostle and congregation.”

- c. Accurate in his assessment
"when I learn of your condition"

David Garland: Timothy seems to have functioned as Paul’s dispatch bearer and troubleshooter, since he sent him to the Thessalonians to strengthen them in the midst of their persecution (**1Th 3:2–3**) and to the Corinthians to remind them of Paul’s ways in the Lord (**1Co 4:17**).

Dennis Johnson: Paul implies in **verse 19** that Timothy would make a **round trip** from Rome to Philippi and back again, since Timothy’s return would bring news from Philippi to cheer Paul’s heart. In today’s world of speedy transcontinental air travel, we might not realize the cost in time, comfort, and safety that Timothy’s round trip would entail. The most direct route would be overland from Rome on the Via Appia to Brindisi on Italy’s southeast coast (over 350 miles). A voyage across the Adriatic Sea (about ninety miles) would bring him to Dyrrachium, the western terminus of the Via Egnatia. Then he would make a 360-mile trek eastward on the Via Egnatia across Macedonia to Philippi. In order to bring news from Paul to Philippi and from Philippi back to Paul, Timothy would invest weeks in order to make this arduous and dangerous trip over land and sea.

2. A Kindred Spirit to both Paul and Christ

- a. Unique in this regard
"For I have no one else of kindred spirit"

Robert Gromacki: The term *'like-minded'* (*isopsuchon*) literally means *'equal soul.'* Just as Jesus Christ was equal to the Father in deity (**2:6**), so Timothy was equal to Paul in the characteristics of unity, humility, and concern for others.

Gerald Hawthorne: The second reason Paul gives for sending Timothy is quite startling: “No one else cares! All [οἱ πάντες] are looking out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.”

- Does this statement reveal “a peevish and uncharitable tone” on Paul’s part, a good example of his own personal feelings of hostility against those Christians around him in his place of captivity (**Synge**, 37)?
- Is it hyperbole, designed to enhance Timothy’s worth and authority as opposed to any other person Paul might have chosen to send and the Philippians might have been willing to welcome (**Collange**)?
- Could it mean that of all the Christians around him there is no one else to whom he could entrust so important a mission (**Martin** [1959])?
- Is it a general parenthetical remark regarding the world around him, one that says nothing about his fellow Christians but is rather “his solemn reflection when he remembers that, in a world of selfishness and self-seeking (cf. **Matt 6:32**), it is such a rare thing to find a man like Timothy who is really anxious to promote the welfare of other people, and to give himself to a fatiguing journey and to the resolving of personal quarrels in the Philippian church” (**Martin** [1959], 125)?
- Is it a restrictive statement where “all” does not mean all Christians in the place of his confinement (cf. **1:16**) or in the world but refers only to all those who were near at hand, available and in Paul’s judgment able to undertake such a difficult mission but were not willing to do so (**Jones, Beare, Hendriksen, Caird**)?
- Is it an example of how Christians can differ radically in their evaluation of a particular mission within the church? For Paul the journey to Philippi was a number-one priority—to refuse this mission was to be seeking one’s own interests and to care nothing for the cause of Christ; for others the welfare of this distant church at Philippi was not nearly so important as the welfare of their own community in their town and its outreach to surrounding places. To drop their commitments to their immediate churches and to travel to Philippi, even if an apostle did desire this, would itself be to them a seeking of their own interests and not Christ’s.

It is possible to speculate unceasingly about the meaning of Paul’s startling statement here. In the words of **Vincent** (74), “Without more information a satisfactory explanation seems impossible.”

John MacArthur: **The goal of true discipleship is reproduction;** when a person is fully discipled, Jesus said, he will be like his teacher (**Matt. 10:25**). Over the course of time, Timothy came to think like Paul, relate to believers and unbelievers like Paul, evaluate ideas and situations like Paul, trust in the Lord like Paul, and pray like Paul. Those two men of God had similar qualities of soul, similar passions, similar objectives, and similar zeal. In effect, Paul was saying to the believers in Philippi what he had said to those in Corinth a few years earlier: “*I exhort you, be imitators of me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church*” (**1 Cor. 4:16–17**). So here, as at Corinth, until Paul was able to visit Philippi again,

Timothy was by far his best substitute. He was the ultimate fulfillment of the apostle's desire that other believers be faithful imitators of him, as he was of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). No wonder Timothy was so beloved and dear to Paul.

b. Genuinely concerned for others

"who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare"

G. Walter Hansen: Paul draws a line between obsessive anxiety and genuine concern. Caring for the needs of friends should not lead to anxiety; freedom from anxiety should not lead to a lack of concern for friends. In fact, members of the body of Christ should have concern for each other (1 Cor 12:25: *to auto hyper allēlōn merimnōsin*).

c. Totally unselfish

"For they all seek after their own interests"

d. Totally committed to Christ Jesus

"not those of Christ Jesus"

B. (:22) The Track Record of Faithful Service

1. Man of Proven Worth

"But you know of his proven worth"

Steven Lawson: If you are to be useful to the Lord, it will require that you be **battle-tested**. Realize that every trial that you undergo is intended to prepare you for future ministry. If you are presently in the fires of adversity in your service for the Lord—perhaps you are facing resistance or persecution in some way for your faith in Christ—know that God always has refining purposes in the midst of your difficulties. Your hardships are the training school for your ministry.

2. True Partner in the Gospel

"that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel"

David Garland: The translation “*he has served with me*” dilutes the Greek *douleuō* (GK 1526; he “*slaved*”) and causes the reader to miss the parallel to Christ, who took the form of a slave (2:7).

3. Like a Faithful Son

"like a child serving his father" 1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2

John MacArthur: Model spiritual living demands that you come alongside those who are the fathers, the spiritual fathers and look at them with love and esteem and respect and honor as a little fellow does the father of his love. That alone could heal congregations of immense difficulties.

Gerald Hawthorne: The picture is drawn from the world of Paul's day where it was expected that a son should learn his trade from his father (**Caird:** like any Jewish father,

Paul would encourage his son, and the rabbis were no exception). The Philippians knew, therefore, that Timothy was coming to them having learned all that Paul could teach him. He was coming to them to express exactly the apostle's mind and, more importantly, to exemplify both Paul's self-sacrifice as a prisoner and Christ's "model".

C. (:23-24) The Availability to Meet Needs

1. Willing to Serve Wherever Needed

*"Therefore I hope to send him immediately,
as soon as I see how things go with me"*

Gordon Fee: Thus Timothy's reason for coming is twofold: in the first instance for Paul's sake, to see how the letter has affected them; and second for their sakes, to be encouraged and brought up to speed about the outcome of his imprisonment.

2. Patterned after the Model of the Apostle Paul Himself

"and I trust in the Lord that I myself also shall be coming shortly"

G. Walter Hansen: Paul is also confident that his own visit to Philippi will be **soon** (2:24). Paul envisions only a brief interval before his circumstances will dramatically improve: soon he will be able to send Timothy to Philippi since he will no longer need his assistance; soon he will be free to visit his friends in Philippi. Paul does not appear to gain his positive view of his future from a sanguine temperament, a resolute commitment to an optimistic perspective on life no matter what, or a careful analysis of the latest news. He claims that he is positive about the future because he places his hope in the Lord Jesus (v. 19) and he is confident in the Lord (v. 24). Whether he means that he simply trusts in the goodness of the Lord or that he has received a special revelation from the Lord regarding his future, we cannot be sure. But we do know that when Paul looked at the horizon he focused on the Lord Jesus. As a result he was filled with hope and confidence. . .

Not only does this emphasis on personal presence indicate Paul's commitment to his friends, but it also points to the seriousness of the crisis in the church. Evidently, Paul believes that true unity in the church can be fully restored only by his own personal presence. But Paul hopes that his letter and the visits of his agents will promote the process of restoration of unity in the church. And by promising that he will make a personal visit, Paul enhances the authority of his letter and his agents.

William Barclay: Timothy's great use was that, whenever Paul wished for information from some Church, or when he wished to send advice or counsel or encouragement or guidance or rebuke, and when he could not go himself, it was Timothy whom he sent. . .

The great use of Timothy was that Timothy was a man who could be sent anywhere, and who was always willing to go. In the hands of Timothy a message was as safe as if Paul had delivered it himself. Others might be consumed with selfish ambition, and might be concerned with their own interests alone; but Timothy's one desire was to

serve Paul and to serve Christ in Christ's Church. Timothy is the patron saint of all those who are quite content with the second place, so long as they can serve."

II. (:25-30) THE EXAMPLE OF EPAPHRODITUS -- A COURAGEOUS AND COMPASSIONATE MINISTER

Sending of Epaphroditus

"But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus,"

Gordon Fee: Logically, this paragraph should precede the former: Epaphroditus now, Timothy and myself later. But Paul's logic is that of concern, not chronology.

A. (:25) A Minister of Great Value (based on his companionship/partnership)

1. To the Apostle Paul Himself

a. *"my brother"* – Relationship

R. Kent Hughes: **Stephen Ambrose**, in his best-selling book *Comrades*, describes **friendship**:

"Friends never cheat each other, or take advantage, or lie. Friends do not spy on one another, yet they have no secrets. Friends glory in each other's successes and are downcast by the failures. Friends minister to each other, nurse each other. Friends give to each other, worry about each other, stand always ready to help. Perfect friendship is rarely achieved, but at its height it is an ecstasy."

It certainly was that for Paul and Timothy. Their friendship had grown over the years on the ancient apprenticeship model. Timothy had learned by observing, listening to instruction, and doing. They had endured tumultuous times together, and young Timothy was ever the learner. The depth of their friendship is seen in the Pastoral Epistles, where Paul twice called Timothy "*my child*" (cf. **1 Timothy 1:18; 2 Timothy 2:1**). Now Paul trusted Timothy to act just as he would.

Dennis Johnson: Paul frequently addresses fellow believers as "*brothers*" (see **Phil. 1:12; 3:1, 13, 17; 4:1, 8**)—not because they share biological DNA, but because God has graciously adopted them all as his beloved children (**Eph. 5:1–2**). Epaphroditus's name implies his pagan past, suggesting that at birth his parents had invoked over him the protection of the goddess Aphrodite. By the grace of Christ, however, Epaphroditus had been born into a new family and invested with a new identity. Now Paul affirms that he and Epaphroditus are **brothers**. As the Philippians will glimpse in Timothy, Paul's "*son*," the apostle's deep concern for them, so in his "*brother*" Epaphroditus they will see Paul's readiness to suffer for them. And of course, in all three men they will encounter replicas of Jesus, the selfless Suffering Servant.

b. *"and fellow worker"* – Responsibility

G. Walter Hansen: By calling Epaphroditus his **co-worker**, Paul includes him in his inner circle of associates; he has a place on the team who lived, traveled, and served with Paul for the advance of the gospel.

c. "*and fellow soldier*" -- Resolve

William Barclay: As **Lightfoot** puts it, **Epaphroditus** was one with Paul in sympathy, one with him in work, one with him in danger.

R. Kent Hughes: Paul says elsewhere, "*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*" (**Ephesians 6:12**). This was the **battle**. The two fought shoulder-to-shoulder in Rome. Perhaps Paul had in mind the trademark imperial soldiers' battle ethic of standing side by side, dug in with shields locked solid, swords drawn. The truth is, young Epaphroditus was a battle-tested warrior who had been wounded in combat and was being sent home for a rest. This man was no weekend warrior. He had proven himself with distinction.

2. To the Philippian Believers

a. "*who is also your messenger*"

John MacArthur: *Apostolos* can refer to an ordinary messenger, as it clearly does here. The term is used for the office of apostle, held by the Twelve (including Matthias; **Acts 1:21–26**) and Paul (cf. **Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:1, 19; Eph. 1:1**). They were men who had seen the risen Lord and who were directly chosen by Him. In a completely unique way, Jesus is "*the Apostle [apostolon] and High Priest of our confession*" (**Heb. 3:1**). *Apostolos* can also refer to special messengers who were chosen and sent by the churches (cf. **Acts 14:14; 2 Cor. 8:23**). Clearly Epaphroditus was such a messenger, dispatched to Rome by the church at Philippi.

b. "*and minister to my need*"

William Barclay: The word he uses for *servant* is the word *leitourgos*. In secular Greek this was a magnificent word. In the ancient days in the Greek cities there were men who, because they loved their city so much, out of their own resources and at their own expense undertook certain great civic duties. It might be to defray the expenses of an embassy, or the cost of putting on one of the great dramas of the great poets, or of training the athletes who would represent the city in the games, or of fitting out a warship and paying a crew to serve in the navy of the state. These were munificent gifts to the state; such men were the supreme benefactors of the state; and such men were known as *leitourgoi*.

David Garland: The noun *leitourgos* is used elsewhere in the NT to refer to a priestly ministry (**Ro 15:16; Heb 8:2**). It befits the sacrificial imagery Paul uses to refer to their gift—"an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (**4:18; cf. 2:17**).

Grant Osborne: Epaphroditus was sent to minister to Paul's needs and to serve his mission in any way he could. Those "needs" certainly included financial support, as seen in **4:18**, but Epaphroditus' service went beyond this to all of Paul's needs, both personal and ministry-centered.

B. (:26-27) A Minister of Great Compassion and Mutual Love (based on his companionship/partnership)

1. (:26) With Respect to the Philippians

*"because he was longing for you all
and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick"*

John MacArthur: His heart ached because he had learned that the believers in Philippi had heard that he was sick and were worried about him. He was not apprehensive about his life-threatening illness, but rather was distressed over their distress! *Asthene* (*was sick*) translates a compound verb composed of the negative *a* and *sthenos* ("strength") and literally means "*without strength*." It was used to describe weaknesses of numerous kinds and varying degrees. Related nouns were used of general physical weakness (**2 Cor. 12:10**) as well as of spiritual weakness (**Matt. 26:41**). Paul even used *asthene* to describe the weakness, because of the sinfulness of the flesh (**Rom. 8:3**), of the Mosaic Law to produce righteousness.

But *asthene* was most commonly used of **physical illness**. It was used in the New Testament to describe sicknesses miraculously cured by Jesus (cf. **Mark 6:56; Luke 4:40; John 5:3; 11:2–3**), the disciples (**Matt. 10:8**), and the apostles after Pentecost (cf. **Acts 9:37; 19:12**).

The Philippians had good reason to be worried about Epaphroditus's health, because he had been sick to the point of death. Had God not had mercy on him, he would have died. It is interesting that, although he once had exercised the gift of healing (cf. **Acts 28:8**), Paul evidently did not use it to heal Epaphroditus—perhaps because the era of miraculous apostolic signs was nearly over (cf. **2 Tim. 4:20**).

2. (:27) With Respect to the Apostle Paul

*"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,
lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow."*

Grant Osborne: Paul considered himself one of those friends who wanted Epaphroditus around for the near future, so he recognized God's mercy on himself as well. By sparing Epaphroditus' life God had spared Paul "*sorrow upon sorrow*." This is a great example for us today, for I remember thinking at one time that Christians should never express sorrow at the death of a believing loved one—because death means they are with the Lord, which is a happy thing, right? I failed to realize the true tension, for death is described in **1 Corinthians 15:26** as "*the last enemy to be destroyed*." It is not our friend. . . we all naturally feel deep sorrow that we will never see our loved one again on this earth. Paul would have followed Jewish practice and beat his breast,

crying his eyes out at the loss of his friend. When a believing loved one dies we are filled with conflicting emotions—sorrow that we will never see them again in this world along with joy that their suffering is over and they are with the Lord.

Gordon Zerbe: Paul stresses the gravity of his illness: He was indeed so ill that he was a close neighbor to death (v. 27; cf. v. 30, He came near to death, evoking the imagery of Messiah’s own pathway in 2:8). Then Paul credits God’s mercy for his eventual restoration. Paul also acknowledges that his own story is intimately tied to Epaphroditus’s story: each of them is a recipient of God’s mercy. Otherwise the loss of Epaphroditus would mean pain upon pain (*lypēn epi lypēn*, or, *sorrow upon sorrow*). Paul shares the deep emotion that accompanies sickness, potential loss of life and friendship, separation, and, of course, incarceration.

C. (:28-29a) A Minister of Great Joy (based on his companionship/partnership)

*"Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly in order that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you.
Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy"*

Max Anders: To prevent any criticism of Epaphroditus' leaving Paul in his difficult situation or not completing the mission on which the church sent him, the apostle commanded the Philippians to welcome and honor him for his sacrificial service for the Lord. He, too, followed Christ's model of humble service. In so doing he became the example for all Christians who want to serve in such a way as to win the church's acclaim as well as that of Christ.

G. Walter Hansen: When Paul expresses his desire for the church to rejoice again, he is not simply concerned for the happiness of believers. His focus in this passage as always is God-centered; rejoicing in Paul’s theology is praise for God’s mercy and delight in God’s presence. By sending Epaphroditus home, Paul knows that he will lead the church into joyful worship for the merciful intervention of God.

Charles Swindoll: It is possible that a few might see the return of Epaphroditus as a failure of his mission and of the purpose of his journey to Paul. Maybe they had expected him not only to deliver financial support, but also to provide physical assistance to Paul for the duration of his imprisonment. Maybe they would have sized him up as a quitter. If so, Paul painted quite a different picture of the man. He expected the church to receive him “*in the Lord with all joy*” and to hold him “*in high regard*” (2:29). As a result of his long journey, he had almost lost his life for the cause of Christ and on behalf of the church in Philippi (2:30). Epaphroditus was to be welcomed back, not as a “loser,” but as a home-grown hero and an example for them all.

D. (:29b-30) A Minister of Great Courage and Dedication

*"and hold men like him in high regard;
because he came close to death for the work of Christ,
risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me."*

Steven Lawson: The apostle is concerned that when Epaphroditus returns to Philippi, he should not be critically interrogated regarding why he is back so early. He should not be cross-examined as one who has deserted his post. Instead, Paul exhorts the Philippians to "*hold men like him in high regard.*" Such ministers of the Lord should be highly respected. "*High regard*" (*entimos*) means to give someone a high reputation. In other words, the Philippians should elevate their estimate of Epaphroditus due to the lofty reputation he has earned as a humble servant of Paul, and of Christ.

George Hunsinger: As **Markus Bockmuehl** remarks, "By saying that it is people like Epaphroditus whom the Philippians should '*hold in honor*' (*entimos*), Paul at once contradicts Graeco-Roman society's pervasive culture of rewarding the upwardly mobile quest for prestige and public recognition (*philotima*). The church instead will prize and value those who aspire to '*the mind of Christ*' (**Phil. 2:6–11**)."

G. Walter Hansen: Through all the troubles and disappointments of his life, Paul is able to see and delight in the radiance of Christ reflected in the character and service of his friends. When he draws their portraits, he shows how ordinary people give themselves sacrificially to serve the needs of others as Christ did. In this way his friends become an extension of his imperative to have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had (**2:5**).

Gordon Fee: Thus Paul concludes this brief narrative of proposed travel plans. The narrative is full of warmth and pathos, victory and trepidation. His affection for the Philippians spills over to them through his expressions of affection for Epaphroditus, their "ministrant" to his human needs. At the same time the passage echoes with notes of gratitude and joy, gratitude to God for his mercy in healing a brother, joy renewed as they see him again. Paul hints at his sorrows, but does not elaborate; instead, the passage is full of affection and honor for one who dared to risk his life "for the work of Christ" in bringing him material aid. His ultimate concern is that the Philippians themselves appreciate Epaphroditus for what he has done in their behalf for Paul's sake. If he also thus serves as one who was willing to suffer for the sake of Christ, that note, while not played loudly, neither is played so softly that it cannot be heard. Thus, here is very personal material, which receives its theological moments because Paul seems incapable of doing anything otherwise.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Have we truly offered ourselves as a "*living sacrifice*" to God? What types of acts of service have we carried out this past week?
- 2) Do we submit all of our plans (our travel plans, our business plans, our daily "to do" list) to the sovereign will of God, or do we just press forward in presumption, assuming that we are in control of our life?

3) Do we properly model servanthood and concern for the furtherance of the gospel to our children so that they would do well to emulate our example, serving with us "*in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father*"?

4) Do we have concern for the spiritual condition of others to the extent that we will sacrifice everything to try to meet their needs and give them cause for rejoicing?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Warren Wiersbe: Timothy had a natural concern for the welfare of others; he had a servant's mind. It is too bad that the believers in Rome (where Paul was) were so engrossed in themselves and their own internal wranglings (**1:15-16**) that they had no time for the important work of the Lord. This is one of the tragedies of church problems; they divert time, energy, and concern away from the things that matter most. Timothy was not interested in promoting any party or supporting any divisive cause. He was interested only in the spiritual condition of God's people, and this concern was natural to him.

Robert Gromacki: Epaphroditus was aware that the gift of the Philippians was not enough to meet the needs of the apostle; thus he worked to earn money. The more he worked, the weaker he grew. He tried to make up the difference (*'to supply'*) between the actual amount of the gift and the needed total. The *'lack'* was not created by a deliberate attempt to withhold funds, because the church was later applauded for its generosity (**4:10-19**). Just as Christ died as the sin substitute for the needs of all men, so Epaphroditus almost died as the financial substitute for the Philippians.

Grant Osborne: Against initial appearances this section of the letter is neither mundane nor relatively unimportant. These two men, Timothy and Epaphroditus, have become important models for all of us of true Christian leaders and mature followers of Christ. Timothy is a paradigm of the loving servant who forgets all about himself and his own desires in order to sacrificially and wholeheartedly serve the Lord and the Lord's people. He shows us how to live a Christ-filled life in which our own agenda is placed on the back burner while we give ourselves wholly to meet the needs of those to whom God has sent us. Epaphroditus is a paradigm of the dedicated, mature Christian who accepts hardship and unflinchingly perseveres to the very point of death in order to serve God and the gospel ministry. He shows us how to soldier on and find victory in Christ through even the most severe difficulties.

James Boice: Re "*fellow-soldier*" -- A shoulder-to-shoulder fighting accounted for the success of Rome's armies. Prior to the triumph of Rome, men fought mostly as individuals. They often dressed alike and were armed alike, but they did not fight side by side with each other. The Roman armies did, and as a result the phalanxes of the legions were the terror of the ancient world. The soldiers marched abreast behind a solid wall of shields. And as they marched they struck their shields with their spears in

unison and sang their battle songs. In such a way we are to advance in harmony against the spiritual powers arrayed against us.

Manford George Gutzke: We can see here the unselfishness of Paul. He was in prison, in one of the old pagan prisons. It was a situation where to be left alone would be multiplying a person's distress. The prisoner needed someone to help him, to bring him food and drink, and to take care of him. The people in Philippi had sent Epaphroditus to do this, and Epaphroditus had been doing it. When Epaphroditus heard that the people back home were unhappy and worried because they had heard he was sick, he wanted to go and tell them he was all right. When Paul considered it and thought about it, he felt that was the thing to do. He himself was in danger and in need. Yet he sends the man home. Why? Because they were worried. If ever anyone needed a boost, it would have been Paul. He was standing, as it were, in the very presence of death, yet he sends this young man home so the people there will be strengthened.

F. F. Bruce: Paul did not set out deliberately to present three examples of the self-renouncing attitude "*that Christ Jesus had*" (v. 5). But in fact this is what he has done. His own readiness to have his martyrdom credited to the spiritual account of his Philippian friends, Timothy's unselfish service to Paul and genuine concern for other Christians, Epaphroditus's devotion to his mission at great risk to his health and (as it might have been) to his life--all these display the unselfconscious care for others enjoined at the beginning of this chapter and reinforced by the powerful example of Christ's self-emptying.

R. P. Martin: "*The care of all the churches*" was shared by both men (Paul and Timothy). There is no contradiction here with **iv. 6**. What is forbidden there is anxious care for one's self and one's own interests. Timothy's "*anxiety*" was for the spiritual welfare of others.

In Christian experience it is remarkable how often these apparent contradictions go together, but in reverse. We find ourselves guilty of anxiety over our own interests to the exclusion of others' well-being. One of the surest antidotes to personal 'care' is to widen our horizons and so enlarge our heart of sympathy that we share the burdens of other people.

Brian Racer: The Bonds of Ministry – One-Souled Discipleship (2:19-24)
Rejoicing in Helpers is the overall theme of this section ...

Introduction: Everybody loves a helper when it comes to work; cf the critical need for co-laborers especially in the face of loss (like death or separation where the baton of responsibility needs to be picked up and carried on).

Timothy is charged with difficult tasks to accomplish; not just a gopher, carrying Paul's bags:

- working with a problem church – **1 Cor. 4:17** – correction needed
- working with a model church – **1 Thess 3:2** – encouragement needed in the

face of suffering for the gospel

Everyone in the church needs to plug into this model of discipleship:

- associate with some more mature believers who can continue to mentor you
- take the initiative to seek out some younger believers that you can help disciple

Christ's strategy = choose people you can invest your life in and spend time with so that they will invest their lives in others

Risk Taking in Spiritual Ministry – (2:25-30)

Only a very few people enthusiastically embrace risks. Most of us choose security. This passage deals with “Out of Round Risk Takers” – especially Epaphroditus here. “eccentric” = “out of round, wobbling” – these are the types of people that truly bring progress and make things happen.

I. Paul's Profile of Epaphroditus (vs 25)

- 3 descriptions of his connection to the Apostle Paul
brother / fellow-worker / fellow-soldier
- 2 descriptions of his connection to the Philippian believers
your messenger / your minister – serving as a priest

II. What Perils did Epaphroditus face?

- Emotional anguish and stress – wondering what the Philippians were thinking about him since he had been unable to communicate and explain his delay
- Physical sickness to the point of death; prolonged illness; very intense
- Burden of the church building work (**2 Cor. 6:3ff**)

III. The Perception of Epaphroditus

- How did the Philippians view him
- How did Epaphroditus view himself

IV. The Praise Due to Epaphroditus

- Deserved a Hero's Welcome – maybe people had viewed him negatively since they had not heard any word of what was happening
- Deserved to be Held in High Regard – often risk takers can be perceived as having a screw loose when really their intensity reflects their passion to serve the Lord

John MacArthur: Timothy – the single-minded sympathizer -- The single greatest tool of leadership is the power of an exemplary life ... we tend to be creatures led more by pattern than precept. We are much better at following a pattern and a model than we are trying to live out a concept or a precept or a principle ... Principles and precepts tell us our duty, that's all they can do. Example assures us that that duty is possible because somebody is fleshing it out. If there were no one that I could look to as the model of spiritual virtue, I think I would probably say it's impossible . . . And we need other than Jesus Christ because although Christ is the perfect model, He is not like we are, He is

not battling sin and the flesh and failure and weakness. And so we need somebody who puts flesh on principles, who puts life into precepts that we can pattern our life after ... So we come with all of that to the last characteristic and it really sums it up. Here is a man who is similar to Paul, he's imitating him. He is sympathetic for others. He is single-mindedly consumed with the interests of Christ. He is seasoned by experience and trials. He is submissive by choice as a loving son is to the one who disciplines him. He is sacrificial so that his life is focused on one thing, advance the gospel in the hearts of the lost. And finally because of all of this, can we say he was, number seven, serviceable...serviceable.

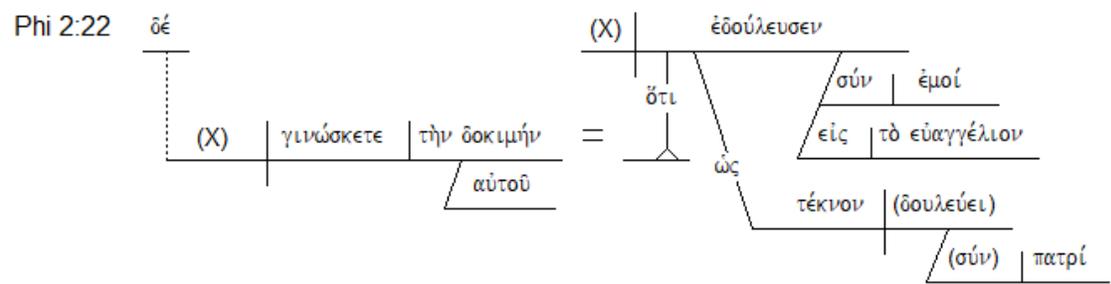
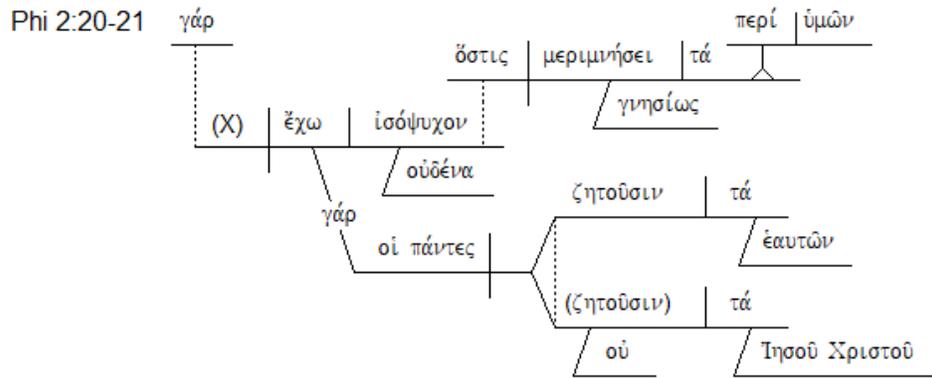
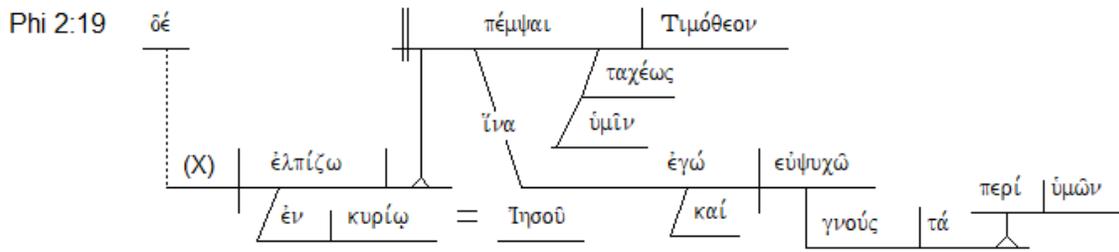
Nijay Gupta: What does Christian Humility Actually Look Like? We have to remember that Christian humility is not:

- Doormat theology. It is not low self-esteem, it is not “woe is me,” it is not Eeyore for Christians. And it is certainly not putting up with abuse or harm.
- False humility. We actually don't do anyone any good when we have an outward appearance of humility, but arrogance lies within.
- Low aspirations. Humility is not the enemy of big dreams, challenging goals, and high hopes. All Christians should live by William Carey's famous words: “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God.”

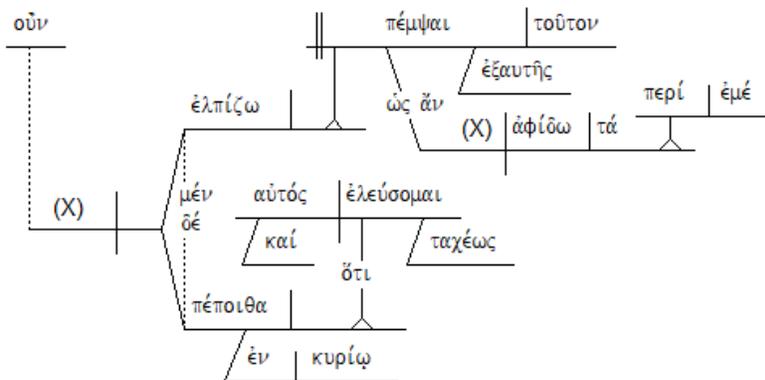
So, then, **what is humility?** Looking at Scripture as a whole, I have found that the “humility” texts of Scripture seem to offer a cluster of traits of the humble.

- The humble know they are not self-sufficient.
- The humble recognize that they are very small when compared to the greatness of God.
- The humble focus on care and concern for others.

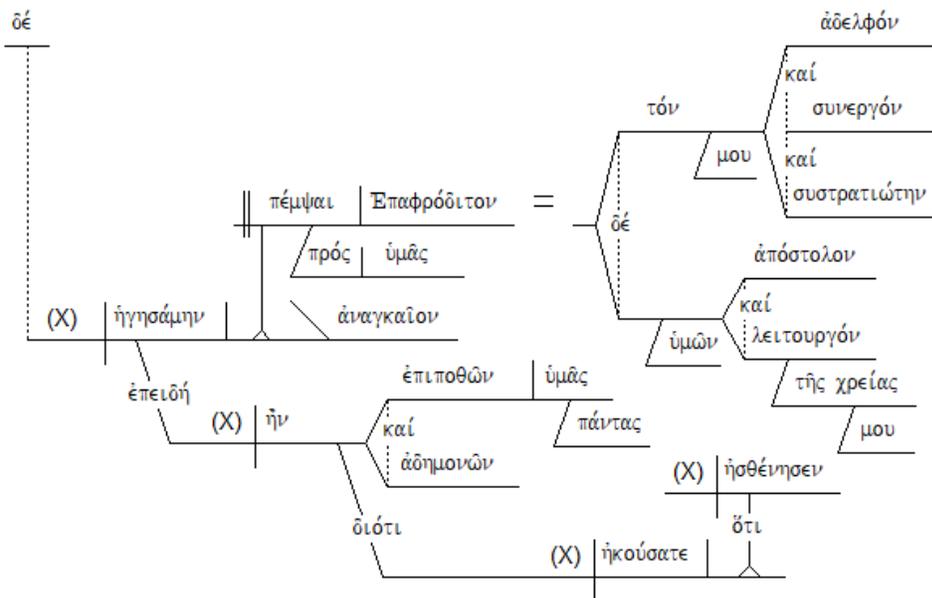
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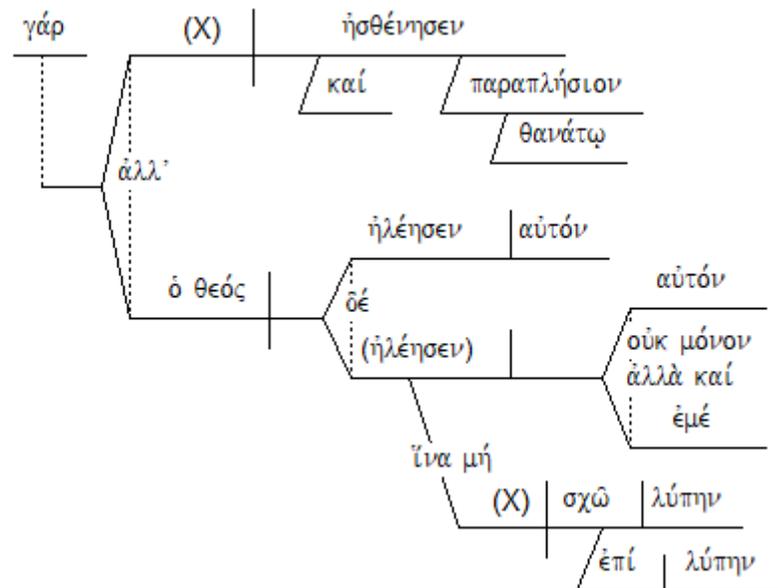
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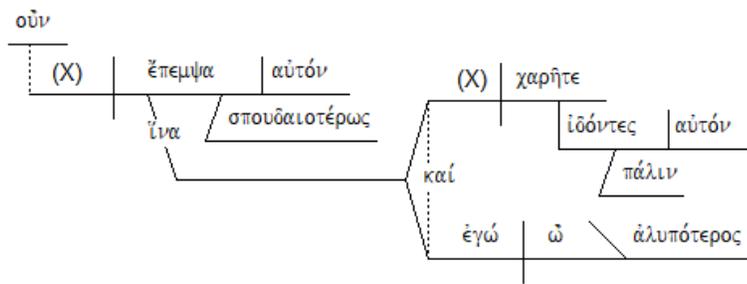
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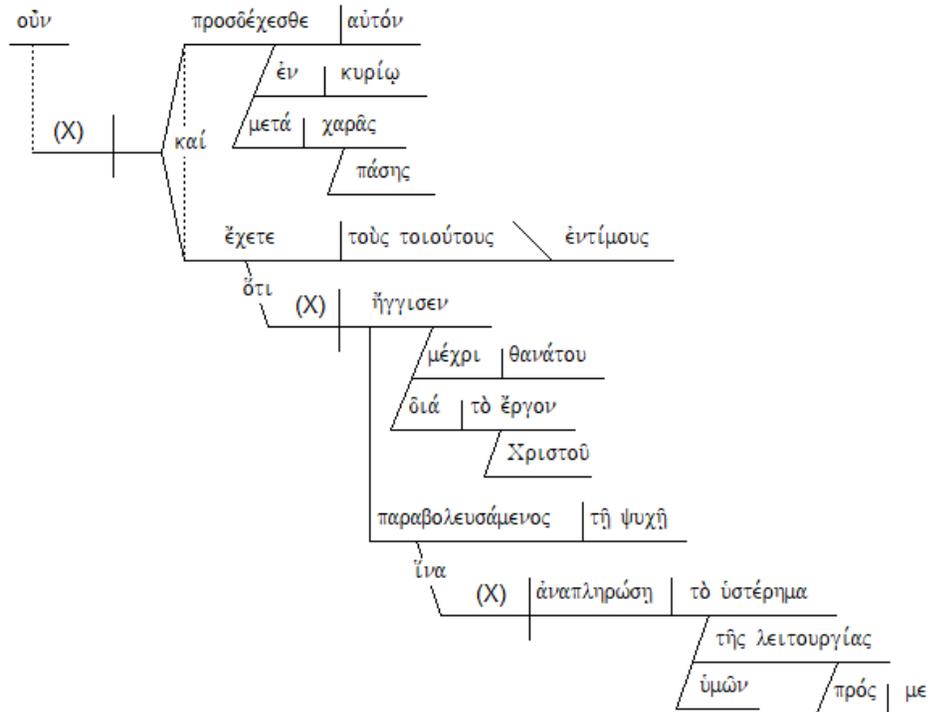
Phi 2:27



Phi 2:28



Phi 2:29-30



TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 3:1-6

TITLE: REJOICE IN THE LORD / PUT NO CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH

BIG IDEA:

REJOICING IN CHRIST INVOLVES TURNING OUR BACK ON EVERYTHING THAT WOULD EXALT OUR FLESH

INTRODUCTION:

Charles Swindoll: Our world honors and rewards high achievement. Trophies, medals, plaques, and awards are given to those who stand out among the crowd. Though there's nothing inherently wrong with appreciating and applauding great accomplishments, these accolades can be very deceptive, leading many to believe that their earthly successes and temporal earnings can somehow translate into heavenly merits or eternal rewards.

Among the many worldly messages we're tempted to believe, the one that emphasizes self-promotion—that is, finding confidence in our own pedigrees and achievements—can be the most alluring. In such a world, how desperately we need God's truth! If for no other reason than to counteract society's lies, we need His principles and precepts to guide us aright. Again and again in the Bible we discover a perspective that stands in stark contrast with the rubbish on the street. In our fight-back, get-even world it's so easy to embrace the philosophy espoused there and to adopt its methods.

If anyone ever had the opportunity to boast of their accomplishments, Saul of Tarsus was that person. In fact, that's exactly what he did throughout his adult life—until he met and bowed before Jesus as Lord. That encounter changed everything. From then on he considered all things outside of Christ and His righteousness as mere “*rubbish*” (3:8).

Grant Osborne: Building on this view of the opponents' identity [as Judaizers], a second line of interpretation becomes available with respect to the **transition** from 3:1 to 3:2. I believe that these Judaizers had recently arrived in Philippi and had started making inroads into the church there, so that Paul had just received word of their influence at this point in composing his letter. Immediately he stopped writing his conclusion and switched to a diatribe against his enemies of the recent past. To me this makes better sense of the change in tone between **verse 1** and **verse 2**. This then introduces a third problem area Paul needed to address in the letter—a Judaizing false teaching (3:1 – 4:1), following the earlier discussions of persecution (1:27–30) and dissension (2:1–18). Paul proceeds to argue against these dangerous heretics based on themes he had taught the Philippians on a previous occasion (“*the same things to you again,*” 3:1), presenting himself as a further paradigm for the believers (“*follow my example,*” v. 17) in addition to the models he describes in **chapter 2** (Christ, Timothy, and Epaphroditus). . .

Note the contrast: “to me” it is not “irksome” or burdensome to say what needs to be said, but “for you” it is a “safeguard” (that is, “for your safety”). The Philippian believers were in grave danger from these heretics and needed a serious warning, lest they fall prey to them (as the Galatians had done). The Greek word for “safeguard” (*asphales*) also speaks of spiritual stability, so Paul is indicating that these warnings were needed in order to stabilize the congregation and avert the kind of theological chaos that could result from following the Judaizers’ heresy.

Gerald Hawthorne: As [[Paul] saw it, God has brought into being a new relationship through Jesus Christ, based not on our bid to please him but on what we have received, and issuing in how we are to live in grateful response. So in Paul’s memorable words, in a modern key, we are his people. We worship as the Holy Spirit moves in us; we place our only hope in Christ, and in that act we renounce all claim to being accepted by God on the basis of ethnic or cultural superiority. Here, then, is a thumbnail sketch of what Paul’s gospel is all about as far as human relationship to God is concerned.

Moises Silva: This doctrinal section [**Chap. 3**] admits of a threefold division.

1. **Verses 1–6** set the context for the polemics by pointing out the Judaizing threat.
2. Over against this heresy, Paul summarizes the distinctives of his theology in **verses 7–11**.
3. The rest of the chapter may be viewed as Paul’s attempt to apply these theological concerns to the Philippian situation.

I. (:1) REMEMBER THE COMMAND = REJOICE IN THE LORD

A. Point of Emphasis

"Finally, my brethren"

R. Kent Hughes: a phrase that has occasioned a lot of humor at the expense of preachers, as, for example when the little boy whispered to his father, “What does the preacher mean when he says ‘finally’?” To which his father muttered, “Absolutely nothing, son.” Of course, we preachers could argue that we have apostolic precedent for this because right here, as the Apostle Paul concludes, he says “*Finally*” and then goes on for two more chapters!

Actually, however, most of our translations have made this more difficult than it is because there is evidence in postclassical Greek that the word functions as a transitional particle to introduce a fresh point in the progress of thought and could well be translated, “Well then, my brothers, rejoice” or “And so, my brothers, rejoice” or “Moreover, my brothers, rejoice.” This fits well with the fact that the occurrences of “*rejoice*” in the book of Philippians function like a hinge at the beginning or the end of the sections in which it appears. . .

So as Paul begins a new section that outlines the doctrinal troubles the Philippians might soon face, he writes, “*Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.*” And when he

transitions to the following section in **4:4** he will hinge it with the command, “*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.*”

George Hunsinger: By addressing his readers as “*brothers and sisters,*” Paul is not resorting to pious rhetoric. These brothers and sisters have forfeited other social bonds. Their new kinship in Christ comes at a cost. For those who have turned to Christ, family ties could be frayed, old religious connections terminated, and former loyalties diminished. With their countercultural profile, Christians were not always welcomed with favor, not least by existing authorities concerned about social cohesion. Suspicion and ostracism could be acute, even if falling short of persecution. Unlike other citizens in Roman-administered Philippi, Christians would not always take part in ceremonies sanctioned by civil religion. As brothers and sisters in Christ, they have embarked on a way of life that relativizes everything else. Their community in Christ is a refuge in an unfriendly world.

B. Point of the Command
“*rejoice in the Lord*”

Start with the most basic of things; fundamental

D. A. Carson: What Paul is doing is picking up the theme of rejoicing he introduced in **2:17-18**.

Robert Gromacki: Designates an abrupt change in subject matter.

James Boice: What is joy? Joy is a supernatural delight in God and God's goodness. And it is a very different thing from happiness... Happiness is circumstantial, but not joy. Joy is an inner quality of delight in God, or gladness, and it is meant to spring up within the Christian in a way totally unrelated to the adversities or circumstantial blessings of this life.

Gordon Zerbe: The stress here is not on rejoicing by itself as a spiritual exercise, important as that is. Rather, the point is for the community to do their joyful celebration **in Messiah**, rather than via some other instrumentality or in some other sphere (as will become most clear by **3:18–21**). Only in Messiah is there cause for true joy. This exhortation has real consequences for life in Philippi, including the readers' necessary avoidance of celebratory civic festivals, which are filled with rejoicing in the salvation brought by Caesar as his subjects celebrate his and the empire's virtuous military exploits that have brought “peace and security” and the wealth of its citizens.

Steven Lawson: “*Rejoice*” (**3:1**) is in the present tense. The means that the Philippian Christians, and we, are always to be rejoicing in the Lord. They were to rejoice not only on Sunday morning in their church gathering, but throughout the week in their homes and workplaces. They were to be always rejoicing in every circumstance of life. They should rejoice in good times, as well as bad times. They should be glad not only in prosperity, but in adversity. Rejoicing was to be their habitual emotion as Christians.

Moreover, this verb "*rejoice*" is in the active voice. This means Christians must take action to rejoice. We are to take charge in this matter. We have this obligation to direct our minds and hearts to rejoice in the Lord. We are the only ones who can fulfill this. God will not do this independently of our making this choice to rejoice in the Lord. When Paul states this in the active voice, this could be translated, I command you to be always making every effort to be rejoicing in the Lord.

In addition, "*rejoice*" is in the imperative mood. "*Rejoice*" is a command to be obeyed. It is an act of the will in choosing to obey God. To rejoice in the Lord is the responsibility of every Christian to choose to obey. Paul is commanding his readers to rejoice. They may not have felt like rejoicing, but that did not give them an excuse to mope around. That would be living in disobedience to this command. Believers are always to rejoice in the Lord. There are reasons why we become discouraged, some of them significant. But there are always greater reasons to rejoice. God does not command what he does not make possible.

Also, "*rejoice*" is a second person plural verb. This is to say, this command is directed to all the believers in Philippi. No matter where they find themselves in life, they must choose to rejoice.

C. Point to Remember -- We need to be reminded

*"To write the same things again is no trouble to me,
and it is a safeguard for you."*

2 Pet. 1:12; Acts 20:29-31

G. Walter Hansen: To write the same things to you again, to repeat his imperatives to rejoice, is not a cause of hesitation for Paul and is a basis of stability for them. The **stability** or firmness of believers in the midst of suffering is one of Paul's primary goals: repeatedly he calls for them to **stand firm (1:27; 4:1)**. Now he asserts that his appeals to rejoice in the Lord are designed to give them stability. When believers rejoice in the Lord, they are strengthened to stand firm even in the midst of sacrifice (**2:17-18**) and sorrow (**2:27-29**). Paul could easily have demonstrated that building stability on rejoicing in the Lord is a scriptural theme:

- "*The joy of the LORD is your strength*" (**Neh 8:10**);
- "*Sing for joy to God our strength*" (**Ps 81:1**);
- "*O LORD, the king rejoices in your strength*" (**Ps 21:1**);
- "*I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength*" (**Hab 3:18-19**).

Although Paul does not offer these texts, he does give the example of his own consistent practice as convincing proof of this scriptural principle that rejoicing in the Lord is the foundation for stability.

II. (:2) WATCH OUT FOR JOY STEALERS = FLESH PROMOTERS (CHARLATANS)

Brian Racer: Pernicious enemies of grace and truth.

Probably 3 designations of the same troublesome group (Judaizers), rather than 3 different groups; unbelieving Jews; former colleagues of Paul

Ben Witherington: Notice the **threefold repetition** of *blepete* here. The sense has to be “watch” in the sense of “watch out for,” as this is a clear threefold warning, changing the epithets used to describe the singular adversary warned about — an example of rhetorical “amplification.” The warning is rhetorically strengthened by each of the objects of the term beginning with the Greek letter kappa — *kynas, kakous, katatomēn*. “Since Paul repeats the imperative watch out three times and each time attaches dangerous direct objects ... to the verb, the direct objects color the verb with the meaning of a warning to be aware of or watch out for something hazardous ... harmful adversaries.” This is why the translation “*beware*” is perfectly appropriate here.

G. Walter Hansen: Paul is not calmly advising his readers to do some academic analysis of possible alternatives; he is urgently warning them to watch out for harmful adversaries.

Frank Thielman: The first step in Paul’s warning is to compare the Judaizers with authentic believers. The force of his language is lost in most English translations, both because Paul’s rhetoric is almost impossible to duplicate in intelligible English and because the stridency with which he speaks is startling. We can almost capture both the rhetoric and the urgency of the original with the translation, “Beware the curs! Beware the criminals! Beware the cutters!”

A. Their Character

"Beware of the dogs"

Paul turns the tables on the legalistic Jews who would have used this derogatory term (filthy scavengers roaming the streets) as one of contempt for the Gentiles.

Brian Racer: Scoundrels; keep nipping at your heels; chased Paul from town to town.

John MacArthur: What is startling here is that Paul, a Jew, calls Jews *dogs*. That's turning the table. That is a serious statement. You wonder sometimes why Paul was not popular. That statement would not make him popular...not popular. He is saying, in effect, beware of those people who self-righteously call other dogs but they're the dogs. They accuse others of shamelessly attacking the truth and they are shamelessly attacking the truth. Are dogs unclean and filthy? So are they. Are dogs snarling and howling and vicious? So are they. Are dogs dangerous and able to wound and even kill? So are they. Stay away from them. Stay away from those dangerous filthy snarling

howling wild attacking false teachers who parade themselves as if they are the virtuous ones, but they are deadly, they are dangerous, they are dirty. And he's talking about people who are religious. He's talking about people who say we must obey the law of God.

Moises Silva: The pejorative sense of the English dog is normally applied insultingly to people considered worthless and vulgar. For the Jews, however, the term had a distinctly **religious sense**: it referred to the Gentiles, those people who, being outside the covenant community, were considered ritually unclean. When Jesus drew a comparison between the Syro-Phoenician woman and dogs (**Mark 7:27**), the woman recognized the analogy not as a vulgar insult but as a religious statement. Paul, therefore, is making a startling point: the great reversal brought in by Christ means that it is the Judaizers who must be regarded as Gentiles.

B. Their Conduct

"beware of the evil workers;"

Brian Racer: They undermine grace; they undermine the experience of the gospel after salvation for others... Grace is meant to bring freedom to every area of our life in a way that does not lead to licentiousness on the other end of the spectrum... Diminishing the work of Christ in other people's lives... taking something that is good and distorting it.

Robert Gromacki: This warning describes their conduct. They were "*workers*" in that they aggressively promoted their beliefs. They were working for their own salvation, and they attempted to influence others to accept legalism as an additional requirement with faith as the grounds for divine acceptance. They were like the hypocritical Pharisees who travelled anywhere just to make one proselyte (**Matt. 23:15**).

Charles Swindoll: Ironically, the Judaizers were claiming to be the promoters of good works —works so good, in fact, that they could merit a right standing before God. However, Paul says they were actually workers of evil. They sowed a corrupt, twisted non-gospel, teaching that people could be saved only by faith plus works of the Law. However, the good news of Jesus Christ is that salvation is by grace alone (it's a gift!), through faith alone (not by works!), in Christ alone (not by any means other than the person and work of Christ!). We are to rejoice in the Lord and what He has done for us, not in any human means of trying to gain favor with God.

Nijay Gupta: They come under the guise of trying to help fellow believers, but in reality they doom them. They are not unlike Satan who masquerades as an angel of light (**2 Cor 11:4**).

C. Their Creed

"beware of the false circumcision."

John MacArthur: By describing them as the *false circumcision*, Paul clearly identified these false teachers as his perennial opponents, the **Judaizers**. Those Jewish legalists denied the gospel of grace, teaching that circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses were necessary for salvation (**Acts 15:1**). The Jerusalem Council condemned their heretical teachings (**Acts 15:1–29**), as did Paul (e.g., **Gal. 1:6–9; 2:16–21; 3:2–14, 22–25; 5:1–4, 11–14**). Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone.

Brian Racer: Provided physical evidence that you have submitted to the gospel ... figuratively speaking: mutilating the freedom of the gospel, not meant to be about externalism anymore but about the heart and spiritual circumcision ... the heart should not remain hard and calloused but be repentant and broken.

Robert Gromacki: The term “*concision*” (*katatomen*) refers to severe mutilation, a thorough cutting. This descriptive title must be seen in contrast to genuine circumcision (*peritome*) which is based upon the same verb stem. The Judaizers were literally *cutting down* (*kata*), whereas circumcision involved a *cutting around* (*peri*). Physical mutilations, practiced in pagan idolatry, were prohibited by God through Moses (**Lev. 21:5; I Kings 18:28**).

Grant Osborne: These Judaizers had a mission that was the direct opposite of Paul’s, for they went forth spreading the “gospel” of Torah observance, not the gospel of Christ and the cross. Their stance constituted true heresy, since they were replacing the cross with the Torah.

This is exactly what Paul means by “*mutilators of the flesh*.” He is using the imagery of circumcision—the primary Jewish sign of membership in God’s covenant—against these pro-circumcision teachers. The Greek word for circumcision is *peritomē*, and the word for mutilation is *katatomē*. Since the Judaizers had replaced the cross with circumcision as the means of salvation, they had, in Paul’s view, changed the rite of circumcision into an act of mutilation, for their covenant ceremony actually “cut off” people from salvation. This is the most serious of Paul’s charges against these opponents, for circumcision is at the heart of the Jewish conception of covenant, encompassing the whole idea of Torah-observance and covenant faithfulness. In effect, those who promoted circumcision rejected the new covenant established by Christ through the cross; in trying to return to the old covenant, they ended up with no covenant at all. Such people, Paul insisted, were entirely cut off from God and from his grace and mercy in Christ.

Gerald Hawthorne: Thus, for Israel to insist on a purely physical and external rite as the means of securing salvation, now that the Christ had come, was not only mistaken; it was lethal in the sense of **Gal 5:2**. Paul therefore attacks these champions of circumcision by using a pun filled with bitter irony: they are the *κατατομή*, “*mutilation*” (used to describe “*the cutters*,” “*those who mutilate the body*”; cf. **1 Kgs 18:28** on the priests of Melkart, but it was also a common practice in the Greek mysteries.

III. (:3) REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE = CHRIST EXALTERS

A. Christian Identity (vs. Imposters)

"For we are the true circumcision"

Grant Osborne: Still continuing his contrast between true circumcision and the Judaizers' mutilation, Paul asserts, "*For it is we who are the circumcision*"—referring to Christians as the real people of God. The people of Israel could no longer be called "the circumcision," for they had rejected their Messiah, the Son of God, and as a result no longer had the Spirit. As in **Romans 2:29**, "*a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is circumcision of the heart by the Spirit, not by the written code.*" It is the heart, not external appearance, that determines the true Israel, and that now consists entirely of Christ-followers. Jews and Gentiles alike who follow Christ are joint members of God's family, not by ancestral pedigree or physical circumcision as the covenant sign but via heart-belief by way of the cross.

Paul follows this up with three clauses that define the new Israel, the people of the new covenant. It is clear that human status, inheritance, and achievement avail nothing, and that salvation comes entirely via the unmerited grace and mercy of God. . .

The message of **Philippians 3:1–3** is clear: Any attempt to place our confidence in our earthly relationships or human achievements is doomed to fail. All non-Christian religions, including that of the Judaizers here, are in the end nothing more than pride-filled attempts to earn our own salvation by our works. We can become a part of the new Israel, the true people of God, only when our boasting is centered in Christ and our action involves faith in him and his work on the cross. The unmerited grace of God is the basis of our salvation. We can purchase nothing; rather, we have been purchased by Christ for God.

B. Christian Identifiers

1. Christian Activity

"who worship in the Spirit of God"

Moises Silva: First, Paul identifies God's people as those "*who worship by [or in] the Spirit of God.*" Whatever the differences between Pauline and Johannine theology, one can hardly deny that this phrase is conceptually equivalent to **John 4:23–24** (true worshipers worship God "*in the Spirit and in truth*"). In neither passage, however, is the point being made that true worship is inner rather than external (so **Hawthorne** et al.). The reference is surely to the **eschatological significance of the Holy Spirit's outpouring**. The coming of Christ, in other words, has ushered in the new age of salvation, and the Holy Spirit is the sign of this redemption (cf. **Ridderbos** 1975: §§11–12, 38, and passim). Those who belong to Christ are part of the new order (**2 Cor. 5:17**); they have the Spirit and are thus able to offer worship that is pleasing to God (**Rom. 8:8–9; 12:1**).

John MacArthur: *Latreu* (worship) might best be translated "*to render respectful spiritual service.*" True worship goes beyond praising God, singing hymns, or

participating in a worship service. The essence of worship is living a life of obedient service to God. “*Do not neglect doing good and sharing,*” exhorts the writer of Hebrews, “*for with such sacrifices God is pleased*” (**Heb. 13:16**). True worship involves every aspect of life.

Gerald Hawthorne: Christians are those whose actions, including worship of God, are directed not by some external law that they must strive to live up to or external ritual they can perform and about which they can boast, but by the impulse of the Spirit of God within them (for the phrase “*Spirit of God*” in Paul, cf. **Rom 8:9, 14; 1 Cor 7:40; 12:3; 2 Cor 3:3**; see **Scott**, *Spirit in the New Testament*; **Lampe**, *God as Spirit*). The Spirit promised by the prophets (**Ezek 36:25–27**), dwelling within Christians, gives life, power, and love, so that they can offer to God true and acceptable worship from the heart (**John 4:23–24; Rom 12:1; 1 Pet 2:5**). But yet there is more involved here in Paul’s words than a simple contrast between external and internal religion (**Michael, J. J. Müller**). The apostle’s choice of the verb λατρεύειν, “*to worship,*” modified as it is by πνεύματι θεοῦ, “*by the Spirit of God,*” stresses that the Spirit of God is the divine initiator at work in the depths of human nature, profoundly transforming a person’s life so as to promote a life of love and service, and generate a life for others; for “such a life is the only worship (“*latreuō*”) acceptable to God” (Collange, 125). “Christians worship through the Holy Spirit” (**Bockmuehl**, 192).

2. Christian Focus

"and glory in Christ Jesus"

Moises Silva: In the second place, God’s people “*glory in Christ Jesus*” (**Fee** 1995: 302 rightly sees an “implicit Trinitarianism” in this verse). The real force of this phrase can best be appreciated by contrasting it with the third descriptive clause, “*put no confidence in the flesh.*” Although the verbs “*to glory*” (καυχάομαι, *kauchaomai*) and “*to have confidence*” (πέποιθα, *pepoitha*) are not precisely synonymous, they may nevertheless be said to occupy the same semantic field when Paul uses them to point out the object of faith. To believe in Jesus Christ is to put one’s confidence in him; but if Jesus Christ is our grounds for confidence, he is therefore also our grounds for joyful pride and for exultant boasting (similarly **Calvin**).

R. Kent Hughes: We boast because it is not even our faith that saves us—it is Christ. Christ becomes the Divine Obsession of the real circumcision. Christ becomes the singular concern and focus of his people. The evidence of the fullness of the Spirit is a one-track mind and a one-theme tongue that speaks perpetually of Christ. Christ becomes the source of all satisfaction.

3. Christian Confidence

"and put no confidence in the flesh"

F. F. Bruce: External ceremonies are henceforth irrelevant. Physical circumcision has been replaced by the circumcision of the heart which “*is the work of God’s Spirit, not of the written Law*” (**Rom. 2:29**). The word rendered *external ceremonies* is literally

translated “*flesh*” (Gk. *sarx*); Paul uses this word not only in its ordinary sense but also to denote unregenerate human nature and sometimes to include practically everything, apart from God, in which people mistakenly put their trust.

Gordon Zerbe: This threefold depiction of the community of Messiah will soon find a contrasting parallel with the threefold depiction of the many enemies of the cross of Messiah (3:18-19):

[we] who serve in/by the Spirit	their god is the belly
[we] who boast in Messiah Jesus	their glory is in their shame
[we] who put no confidence in the flesh	their minds are set on earthly things.

Frank Thielman: It shows that Paul regards confidence in the flesh and confidence in Christ as mutually exclusive. From his perspective, it is impossible to place one spiritual foot on the foundation of the flesh and one spiritual foot on the foundation of Christ. Both feet must be firmly planted on either one foundation or the other.

G. Walter Hansen: The person who puts **confidence in the flesh** says, “Belonging to my tribe and observing my ritual make me secure in my relationship with God.” In contrast to those who put such confidence in the flesh, the true people of God, the circumcision, put no confidence in national status and religious ceremony. Boasting in Christ Jesus excludes putting confidence in the flesh. Although national identities and sacred ceremonies are not viewed as bad in themselves, they are rejected as the foundation for one’s relationship with God or with fellow believers.

IV. (:4-6) EXPOSE THE FUTILITY OF CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH

A. (:4) Poster Boy for Confidence in the Flesh

*"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."*

Paul is the best person to expose the futility of confidence in the flesh. He enjoyed more fleshly advantages than anybody.

Frank Thielman: He lists two types of advantages: those that were his by birth and those he attained. In both categories, he excelled. His parents supplied him with impeccable credentials as a member of God’s people: circumcision, racial identity with Israel, membership in the Israelite tribe that gave Israel its first king, and the ability to speak the language of his people. Paul supplemented these advantages by observing the law after the manner of the Pharisees and by devoting himself to the law so completely that his zeal led him to persecute the church.

Tony Merida: The Judaizers appealed to their impressive Jewish credentials, so Paul now flashes his own credentials, which were unparalleled. He effectively says, “If you

want to brag, I can brag even more!” His point in doing this is to show the Philippians the emptiness of fleshly confidence. He will contrast this salvation by human achievement with a salvation by Christ’s achievement and call his former life of Judaism “*filth*.”

B. (:5-6) Futility of Confidence in the Flesh

G. Walter Hansen: The seven features of Paul’s self-portrait of his Jewish perfections give an impressive display of his privileges by birth and his personal accomplishments.

1. Futility of Trusting in Religious Rites

"circumcised the eighth day"

Grant Osborne: This tells the reader that Paul was legitimately Jewish from birth (eighth-day circumcision was the expected covenant rite; **Gen 17:12; Lev 12:3**). According to the fleshly way of thinking, this fact made him superior to Gentile converts to Judaism (proselytes), who likely had not been circumcised until adulthood.

2. Futility of Trusting in Religious Pedigree

a. Race

"of the nation of Israel"

Grant Osborne: By virtue of his birth to Jewish parents, he possessed all the status and privileges of the covenant people, as enumerated in **Romans 9:4–5**: “*adoption to sonship, the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises.*”

b. Tribe

"of the tribe of Benjamin"

Grant Osborne: After the presumed death of Joseph, Benjamin had become Jacob’s favorite son (**Gen 42:38**). The tribe that descended from Benjamin was the origin of Israel’s first king, Saul (**1 Sam 9:1–2**), the namesake of Saul/Paul. This tribe had joined with Judah in remaining faithful to the house of David when the others had rebelled, and its territory included the city of Jerusalem (**Judg 1:21**). Paul was justly proud of his tribal heritage (compare **Rom 11:1**).

Tony Merida: Paul didn’t come from a disrespected Israelite tribe, but from this distinguished tribe. When the promised land was divided among the 12 tribes, Jerusalem, the holy city, was in Benjamin’s territory. When the kingdom split, Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to the Davidic dynasty. Yet Paul says, as proud as that could make a Jew, it was of no ultimate value for granting anyone salvation.

c. Culture / Tradition

"a Hebrew of the Hebrews"

Grant Osborne: This may have implied that Paul's family spoke Aramaic at home and was especially careful to maintain the dietary laws and other Jewish customs even though they lived in Tarsus, outside the Jewish homeland. In other words, Paul's family was among those who adamantly refused to be adopt a Greco-Roman lifestyle.

John MacArthur: The apostle's claim to be a Hebrew of Hebrews is best understood as a declaration that as he grew to manhood Paul strictly maintained his family's **traditional Jewish heritage**. He was born in Tarsus, a city in Asia Minor, not in Israel. But unlike many Jews in the Diaspora (dispersion), Paul remained firmly committed to the language (**Acts 21:40**), orthodox traditions, and customs of his ancestors. He did not become a Hellenized Jew (cf. **Acts 6:1; 9:29**), one who had been assimilated into the Greco-Roman culture. Instead, he left Tarsus for Jerusalem to study under the famous rabbi Gamaliel (**Acts 22:3; 26:4**). So tightly did Paul cling to his Jewish heritage that he could confidently declare, "*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*" (**Acts 26:4**). Paul's zealous devotion to his Jewish heritage was widely known. Yet after he saw the glory of Christ, it became merely one more item transferred from the gain to the loss column.

Warren Wiersbe: He was born into a pure Hebrew family and entered into a covenantal relationship when he was circumcised. He was not a proselyte, nor was he descended from Ishmael (Abraham's other son) or Esau (Isaac's other son). The Judaizers would understand Paul's reference to the tribe of Benjamin, because Benjamin and Joseph were Jacob's favorite sons. They were born to Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife. Israel's first king came from Benjamin, and this little tribe was faithful to David during the rebellion under Absalom. Paul's human heritage was something to be proud of! When measured by this standard, he passed with flying colors.

3. Futility of Trusting in Religious Rule Keeping (Orthodoxy) *"as to the Law, a Pharisee"*

John MacArthur: To be a Pharisee was to be a member of an elite, influential, and highly respected group of men who fastidiously lived to know, interpret, guard, and obey the Law.

Tony Merida: Don't put your confidence in your **rule keeping**. Paul says regarding the law he was a "*Pharisee*" (v. 5). They loved their rules. Their name comes from an Aramaic term denoting "*the separated ones*" (**Hanson**, Letter, 226). They even added to the commands of the Old Testament—so much so, that it was hard to know what the actual biblical commands were. That's who Paul was. He adopted a **Pharisaical lifestyle**. He belonged to a morally superior group of Jews.

4. Futility of Trusting in Religious Zeal (Commitment) *"as to zeal, a persecutor of the church"*

John MacArthur: In terms of **zeal**, Paul went the Judaizers one better. They only proselytized the church; he had persecuted it. His zeal for God led him to relentlessly, unsparingly, and mercilessly try to stamp out Christianity. Paul was sincere, but wrong. The world is full of people who, like him, are sincere in their religious beliefs. They will make any effort, pay any price, and sacrifice anything in their attempts to please God. They may be devout, orthodox Jews, loyal Roman Catholics who attend Mass regularly, or even Protestants who are involved in church services and ceremonies. They may pray, fast, or live in poverty, and seek to do human good. But religious zeal guarantees nothing. Those people can be absolutely wrong. When Paul faced the reality of Jesus Christ, the zealous persecutor of the church realized that his misguided zeal was a spiritual killer and belonged in the spiritual loss column.

5. Summary Futility: Futility of Trusting in Legalistic Self-Righteousness
"as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless"

Warren Wiersbe: Like most 'religious' people today, Paul had enough morality to keep him out of trouble, but not enough righteousness to get him into heaven! It was not bad things that kept Paul away from Jesus -- it was good things! He had to lose his "religion" to find salvation.

Richard Melick: These seven characteristics of heredity and achievement reveal that Paul's accepting Christ did not occur because he was marginally Jewish. He had not failed in his own religion. He had seen a better way and had chosen to follow it.

Steven Lawson: Paul had a **high standard of morality**. . . Had we been there, we would have stood back and looked at the life of before-conversion Paul, and concluded that here was a straight arrow if there ever was one. He sought to live by the standard of God's law. He was outwardly moral. He was extremely upright. And perhaps you are like this, too. You are well known as a good man or woman. You take following the Bible's commands very seriously. But this too will not save you.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do Christians today receive enough teaching that warns them against the specific types of false teaching that are prevalent today? Apparently it is not sufficient just to present the positive aspects of the truth. Do we take well to reminders on the basics or are we always wanting to hear new things?
- 2) How would we write our own personal testimony (similar to the theme expressed here by the Apostle Paul) to verbalize what type of confidence in the flesh we could put forward? Who is there in our life that would encourage us to put confidence in our flesh?

3) Have we discovered the difference between happiness and joy? Has this fruit of the Spirit been growing in our lives? Does our countenance reflect the joy in our heart?

4) How aggressive are we in making our boast in the Lord? in glorying in Christ Jesus?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

D. A. Carson: For many conservative Jews, the sign of entrance into the covenant was circumcision. That is why circumcision was such a crucial issue for them. If Gentiles had to become Jews before they became Christians, then they had to be circumcised before they became Christians. To put it the other way round: when Jews told Gentile Christians that they had to be circumcised before they could be real and proper Christians, they were saying, in effect, that Gentiles could not really enjoy the blessings of the gospel, the blessings of Christ Jesus, until they had undergone the rite of circumcision and solemnly pledged themselves to live under the ancient Jewish law. But Paul's point is that those who argue in this way do not really understand what the Old Testament Scriptures say about circumcision... The distinguishing feature of a Christian, of a new-covenant believer, is that he or she has undergone "*circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code*" (**Rom. 2:29**).

James Boice: That is the work of God in a man's heart. Paul came to the point where he opened his ledger book. And after he had looked at all of the things that he had accumulated by inheritance and by his efforts, he reflected that these things had actually kept him from Christ. He then took the entire list and placed it where it belonged -- under the list of liabilities. He called it "*loss*." And under assets he wrote, "Jesus Christ alone."

F. F. Bruce: What Paul formerly regarded as achievement he now acknowledges to have been failure. What he would formerly have regarded as worthless and indeed pernicious he now recognizes to be the only achievement worth pursuing -- the personal knowledge of Jesus as Lord, sharing the experience of his death and resurrection.

Alec Motyer: The outward mark of the people of God is that they glory in Christ Jesus. If we give this word more vigorous translation the meaning will be plainer, "*boast about Christ Jesus*." He is their joyous theme. The word indicates a buoyant satisfaction in him; they enthusiastically appreciate who he is and what he has done, and glorify him as alone worthy of all praise: the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus God has reached down from heaven to take a people for himself. He has animated them by his Spirit, displayed before them the beauty and satisfactoriness of his Son and given them faith in him. But he has also shown them what they are in themselves, so that, alongside the experience of the life-giving Spirit and the truth of the atoning Son,

they are aware that they totally lack any personal worth: they put no confidence in the flesh.

This is the negative counterpart of the preceding two great positives. If it is true that we are God's people only because the Spirit of God has quickened us from the dead, what ground is there for self-praise? If Jesus alone is worthy to be boasted of, what room is there for self-glory? If the energy of the flesh can only consign us more and more certainly to the wrath of God, of what use is self-reliance? Flesh sums up what a person is apart from the grace of Christ -- the human being as yet unchanged by God's regenerating and redeeming work.

Brian Racer: Why is it so important to rejoice in the Lord? Because it is not a fleshly-produced response. If I am not rejoicing it's probably because I am walking in the flesh. The spiritual response of rejoicing can only be produced by the Spirit of God; promotes dependence upon God in our daily walk. The flesh keeps us from knowing Christ. It does not produce anything that pleases God.

Legalism is a contagious quality – these Judaizers were unsaved legalists – pernicious enemies of grace and true faith. They tried to define spirituality for everyone else based on their external rules and then make everyone conform to their code. Grace is meant to bring freedom to every area of life in a way that does not bring licentiousness. Legalism rooted in deep-seated insecurity and impatience.

John MacArthur: The Distinctive Qualities of the True Christian –

It is a clear and penetrating distinction between the false circumcision and the true circumcision, between those who profess to be the people of God and those who are the people of God. It is a distinction between those who are religious and those who are righteous. It is a distinction between those who have an outward mark that identifies them with God and those who have had an inward change. . .

Re Circumcision:

But how do we know man is a sinner at the base of his character? How do we know man is a sinner at the root of his existence? The answer, by what he creates. Whatever comes from the loins of man is wicked because man is wicked. So I say to you, nowhere then in the anatomy of a man or in the activity of a man is depravity more manifest than in the procreative act because it is at precisely that point which he demonstrates the depth of his sinfulness because he produces a sinner. And I would remind you that Jesus Christ had no human father because there was no human father who could produce a perfect person. The Spirit of God had to plant a perfect seed in Mary and bypass a human father.

Re True Mark of Genuine Believer:

The event in isolation from the life proves nothing. That is why I say it is no proof that a man is not a Christian because he can't point to an event, nor is it a proof that a man is a Christian because he had an event. And yet I tell you, the church is filled with people who are banking salvation on a past event...particularly do parents find themselves

saying... "Well, I know my son or daughter is living an undisciplined life, a godless life, rejecting the Lord, rejecting the church but I remember when they received Christ at the age of so-and-so." That event doesn't mean anything...unless it was a real change. And if there was a real change, then you don't need to look at the event because you can see the change. And what do you look for? Do they worship God? Do they glory in Christ Jesus? Do they reject the flesh? See. You don't look at the event.

List of 5 things that are not necessarily proof of genuine conversion:

- No past event of a supposed conversion is a verifier of true salvation
- Living by a moral code
- knowledge of the truth
- religious activity. . . going to church, being baptized, taking communion, or whatever, lighting candles, praying beads, doing religious pilgrimages, doing certain prayers
- service in the name of Christ

Alternate View:

Gordon Zerbe: What Paul actually does here is identify in coded language the Roman social and political order and its values as the chief threat to the community's own practice of citizenship. The most natural way of reading Philippians is that the opposing forces to be "observed" in **3:2** and **3:18–19** are the same as those identified in **1:28–30** and **2:15**. These forces are the persecuting and yet alluring Roman sociopolitical system and its values, the same forces now holding Paul in chains (**1:7, 12–14, 20; 2:17**). Thus **Philippians 3** in different words recapitulates what has been Paul's consistent concern throughout the letter: to clarify the **distinctiveness of messianic identity and practice** for a persecuted, suffering, struggling, and fractious community. This chapter then continues the main citizenship-polity agenda of **1:27 – 2:18** and so represents the same things (**3:1b**). . .

In this chapter, Paul's main purpose is to affirm, clarify, and promote the nature, practice, and salvation of Israelite-messianic citizenship (**3:3–14, 15–17, 19b–21**). . . In this chapter, Paul's main purpose is to affirm, clarify, and promote the nature, practice, and salvation of Israelite-messianic citizenship (**3:3–14, 15–17, 19b–21**).

The prevailing Christian interpretation is that Paul is hurling violent and slanderous invective against a new group of opponents – either Jewish adversaries in general or "Jewish-Christian" (Judaizing) preachers who demand that all male Messiah loyalists be circumcised. Christian commentators routinely claim that dogs was a common epithet used by Jews to derogate Gentiles and that Paul is justifiably reversing this invective. But there is no evidence that this was a common (or uniquely used) epithet used by Jews for Gentiles. . . The traditional view also supposes that the cutting up (butchery, slaughter) is designed as a mocking attack on the practice of Jewish circumcision. . . Paul simply contrasts a violent, forceful cutting down or cutting against (*katatome*; KJV: concision) with a refined, surgical "cutting around" (*peritome*, circumcision). The coherence of the argument of this chapter and the entirety of Philippians suggests that the same adversaries are in view here in 3:2 as elsewhere in

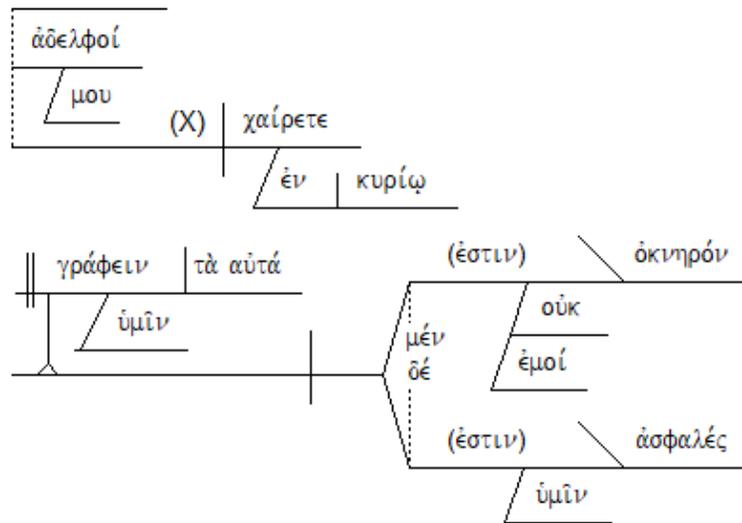
the letter (**1:27-30; 2:14-18; 3:18-19**). There is no evidence of any specific threats in the vicinity of Philippi from the Jewish community in general or from “Christian Judaizers.”

The most crucial clue to understanding this threefold image of dogs, evildoers, and the cutting up (butchering, slaughtering) is a distinct intertextual resonance with **Psalm 22:16** . . . Indeed, it appears that the entire psalm of lament is on Paul’s mind. . . Paul probably thought of this psalm christologically (as having been the experience of Messiah; Mark 15:34) and thus of his own suffering and that of the pressured community in Philippi in light of that paradigm. . .

As elsewhere in Philippians, then, the adversaries caricatured are those representing the Roman sociopolitical order: the crooked and twisted nation among whom the community lives (**Phil 2:15**).

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

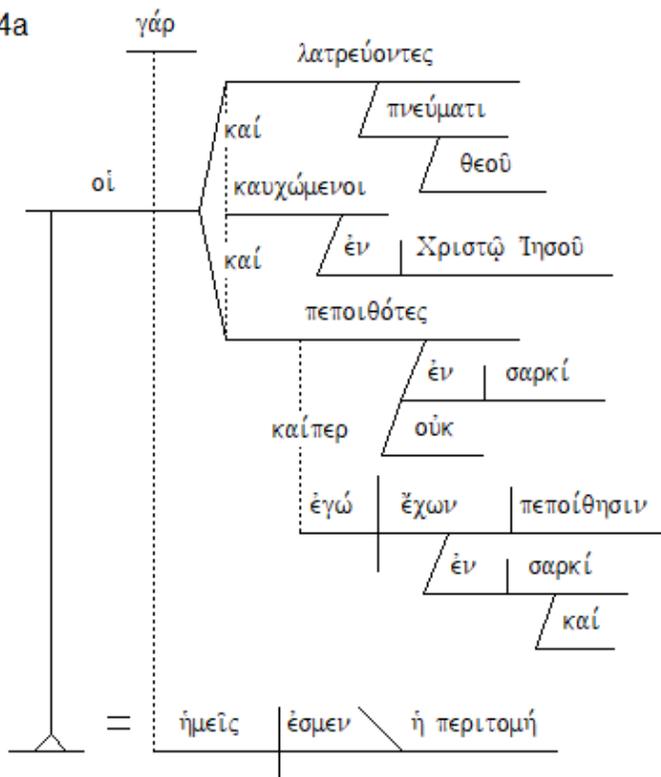
Phi 3:1 τὸ λοιπὸν



Phi 3:2



Phi 3:3-4a



TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11

TITLE: KNOWING CHRIST IN A TRANSFORMING WAY

BIG IDEA:

KNOWING CHRIST IN A TRANSFORMING WAY IS THE SUPREME GOAL WORTHY OF THE NECESSARY COST

INTRODUCTION:

Matt. 16:25-26

Manford George Gutzke: It is tomorrow that gives special meaning to what I do today. Whatever I do today, it is tomorrow when I am going to reap the consequences.

Gordon Fee: With engaging rhetoric, Paul now revises the **balance sheet**, reversing “gain” and “loss” in light of his experience of Christ. He begins with a simple sentence of renunciation, echoing earlier language in the letter and setting up the word plays that follow. “*What things were gains to me,*” he affirms, “*these things I have come to consider loss because of Christ Jesus my Lord.*” The rest of the paragraph is a single sentence, which begins by spelling out the “gain/loss” metaphor in light of “Christ,” and concludes by explaining what it means for him to “*gain Christ.*” . . .

In this case, it is not simply “*because of Christ*” that he considers all things as loss, but “*because of the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*” This piling up of genitives has as its ultimate goal “*knowing Christ Jesus my Lord,*” which so far surpasses all other things in value that their net worth is zero; they are a total loss. As v. 10 will clarify, “*knowing Christ*” does not mean to have head knowledge about him, but to “*know him*” personally (**BAGD**) and relationally. Paul has thus taken up the Old Testament theme of “*knowing God*” and applied it to Christ. It means to know him as children and parent know each other, or wives and husbands—knowledge that has to do with personal experience and intimate relationship. It is such knowledge that makes Christ “trust-worthy.” The **intimacy** will be expressed in v. 10 in terms of “*participation in his sufferings.*” In the light of such expansive language, therefore, the object of his “knowing” is not simply “Christ,” nor even “Christ Jesus,” but “*Christ Jesus my Lord.*”

G. Walter Hansen: Immediately after presenting the portrait of himself as a Pharisee to show that he looked better than others in the flesh (**3:4-6**), Paul juxtaposes a strikingly different self-portrait (**3:7-11**) to demonstrate that he now considers even his most valuable assets in the flesh to be liabilities in the light of his knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. He even considers his extraordinary achievement of a faultless record of righteousness based on the law (**3:6**) to be worthless in contrast to the righteousness that comes from God (**3:9**). As he describes his own personal experience of new life in Christ, Paul provides a theological outline of the entire scope of salvation in Christ: justification, receiving righteousness from God by faith in Christ (v. 9); sanctification,

knowing the power of Christ's resurrection and participation in his sufferings (v. 10); and glorification, attaining to the resurrection from the dead (v. 11).

In this portrait, Paul's whole life **revolves around Christ**: nine times by name or pronoun in these five verses, Christ fills all of Paul's vision. Although Paul does not explicitly label the total transformation in his life as his conversion, his negative assessment of his position and achievements in his previous way of life because of his present passion to know Christ demonstrates that a profound reorientation occurred. True, Paul always remained a Jew who believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and affirmed the divine authority of the Hebrew scriptures, but he was radically transformed by his supreme ambition to know the crucified, risen Christ and to become like him (3:10).

Charles Swindoll: Paul's ancient words hit today's **overachievers** hard. For those who see high achievement as paramount and seek after rewards and recognition —this passage is for you. Our righteousness, good works, fame, riches, and impressive achievements will not get us one step closer to heaven or one mark higher in God's estimation. In fact, these will drive us further away from depending on Christ alone for salvation. This warning also addresses believers who have received Christ's salvation by grace alone through faith alone, but who nevertheless turn to their own strength and accomplishments to live Christlike lives. That, too, is an impossibility. . .

Trusting in your own achievements can bring you glory now, but it leaves you spiritually bankrupt later. The hardest part of getting driven, self-made, "type A" people to understand the gospel is to help them understand that **grace is unmerited favor**. It can't be earned. It can't be bought. It can't be sought and found. It can only be received. This hard truth is painful for go-getters who have come to believe that anything worth having is worth sweating for. The truth is, when it comes to salvation, surrendering our efforts is the only way to gain a restored relationship with God, the result of which is eternal life.

Grant Osborne: To emphasize the powerful turnaround Paul experienced, he presents the material in **verses 7–9a** in a chiastic order:

- A *whatever were gains*
- B *I now consider loss for the sake of Christ*
- B' *I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ*
- A' *that I might gain Christ and be found in him*

Paul writes these lines as a heavenly accountant, presenting a ledger for developing true gain out of illusory earthly gains. Here the gain-loss account has three columns: earthly gains, everything counted as loss, and true gain. Note that the earthly gains are plural and contain Paul's past achievements from **verses 4–6**, as well as his current achievements that come into view in **verse 8**. But the loss column is singular; here, the human gains are not worthy of being listed separately. Taken together, Paul considers

them all a loss, for only Christ and the things linked to him have eternal value. The true goal of life is not legal righteousness by keeping human regulations (even those of the Torah) but spiritual righteousness that leads to eternal life. . .

Our **primary goal**, Paul says, is to know Christ in every area of our life and as deeply as possible. We are to be consumed not with our work or our earthly status, but with Christ alone. When we place him first, everything else falls into place, making us better workers, better bosses, better fathers and mothers, and better people. The temporary gain (earthly attainments) becomes true gain as Christ permeates every area of our lives and transforms us in every way. But he must be first.

I. (:7) FOCUS ON THE BOTTOM LINE = KNOWING CHRIST – THE SUPREME GOAL

A. Counting the Necessary Cost

*"But whatever things were gain to me,
those things I have counted as loss"*

This is an **accounting perspective** -- concerned with profits vs. losses.
This is Paul's thesis statement for this key section.

Warren Wiersbe: The key word in **Philippians 3:1-11** is *count* (vv. 7-8, 13). In the Greek, two different words are used, but the basic idea is the same: to evaluate, to assess. "The unexamined life is not worth living," said **Socrates**. Yet, few people sit down to weigh seriously the values that control their decisions and directions. Many people today are the slaves of "things," and as a result do not experience real Christian joy.

Max Anders: He placed it all in the debit or loss column. Why? Nothing belonged in the profit column except Christ. His relationship with Christ is far superior to his Jewish background.

Moises Silva: Paul recognized the radical antithesis between his former way of life and the new hope offered to him; it was either one or the other. What was required was not a mere adjustment or the incorporation of an additional element—only a total conversion would be adequate. And Paul gladly forfeited his personal achievements to obtain the pearl of great price.

Gordon Zerbe: Each of the *three claims of mental reassessment* (*I consider*) gives the same fundamental reason: because of Messiah (v. 7); because of the surpassing value of knowing Messiah Jesus my Lord (v. 8a); because of him [Messiah] (v. 8b). The reference to what is of surpassing value (a term also found in 2:3 and 4:7; cf. 4:19) shows that Paul is speaking of a relative, not an absolute change in value. Something of superior value has caused former assets to pale in worth (cf. 2 Cor 3:7-18). It is not as if all things from his past have lost all inherent value (cf. Rom 3:1; 9:1-5; 11:1-2, 28-32). Still, a significant "paradigm shift" has occurred in Messiah. On the one hand, any

confidence or pride in ethnic pedigree, moral credentials, or social achievement is completely undercut. Moreover, as we will immediately see, the manner of striving toward the goal of justice-righteousness by reference simply to zeal for the Law has been entirely reoriented (3:9). Nevertheless, Paul will continue to promote energetic striving as reoriented in Messiah (3:12–14). And he never categorically rejects the Law nor his prior identity markers (Rom 3–11).

B. Committing to the Supreme Goal

“for the sake of Christ.”

G. Walter Hansen: The main clause sets forth the shocking reversal in Paul’s evaluation of his assets: these *I consider a loss for the sake of Christ*. Paul’s radically new evaluation was the result of “an intellectual process.” His encounter with Christ did not shut off his mind, but it set him free to think with a whole new depth and clarity about his life from a totally different perspective. His conversion was not an escape from reason but an illumination of reason. Once Christ became the goal of his life, he could finally see and understand the true value of his life in the light of Christ. . .

The shift from plural *gains* to singular *loss* indicates that Paul is not giving different values to each of his assets, discounting them at different rates: some are marked down 50 percent; others down 90 percent. Because of Christ, Paul has added up all of his assets and considered them to be one huge liability. After his conversion to Christ, Paul recalculates the value of all of the advantages of his family and his accomplishments, his social class and his moral achievements, and then he enters the new bottom line: they all add up to one overwhelming disadvantage, one huge loss.

D. A. Carson: Here, then, Paul exposes his fundamental values. On one side stands everything the world has to offer, including the privileged world of learned and disciplined Judaism. On the other side stands Jesus Christ and “*the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*” Paul insists that there is no contest; Jesus and the righteousness from God that Jesus secures are incomparably better.

II. (:8-9) KNOWING CHRIST AS THE SOURCE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS TRANSFORMS US TO LIVE A LIFE OF FAITH

A. Committing to the Supreme Goal

1. Supreme Goal

“More than that, I count all things to be loss, in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord”

2. Two Supporting Goals:

a. *“that I might gain Christ”*

b. *“and may be found in Him”*

Homer Kent: Probably has an eschatological aspect. Paul wants the divine scrutiny he will undergo at Christ's return to reveal unquestionably that he had been in vital spiritual union with Jesus Christ.

Gordon Fee: Thus, in keeping with the urgency of this passage, with its concluding emphasis on the “not yet realized” future toward which he—and hopefully they with him—are striving, Paul uses his own story as the paradigm for looking to the future on the basis of the “presence of the future” found in the righteousness that Christ has provided. He expects to “*gain Christ and be found in him*” on the day of Christ, precisely because this is already his experience of Christ.

George Hunsinger: *To gain Christ (3:8), to be found in him (3:9), and to know him (3:10)* are three ways of indicating the same thing. They are diverse aspects of a single gift. Paul’s hope is “to know Christ fully, to gain him completely, and to be found in him perfectly.” Paul hopes to gain Christ, whose presence is new each morning, and he hopes to be found in him on the last day. Otherwise he would be bereft of saving righteousness *coram Deo*.

Gordon Zerbe: Being found in Messiah suggests images of rebirthing, adoption, and incorporation into Messiah (and his “*body*”), as Paul explains elsewhere (**Gal 3:26–28; 1 Cor 12:12–13; Col 3:1–11; Rom 6**; see **TBC**, “*Becoming Messianic Citizens*”). At the same time, it implies Paul’s radical personal transformation (**Gal 1:11–17; 1 Cor 15:7–11**). As Paul will soon report, he has been seized by Messiah (**Phil 3:12**) into a new relational, social, and transforming reality. Being found in Messiah is more than a statement of a new spiritual state and bond. Rather, it expresses a new political identity: citizenship in Messiah’s regime (**1:27; 3:20**), with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities thereto.

3. End Result: Approved by God as One Who Has the Righteousness of Christ

a. Negatively

"not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law"

b. Positively

*"but that which is through faith in Christ,
the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith"*

John MacArthur: A right relationship to God is not by works, it's by faith. Boy, that's the key to this whole passage. You say, "What is this faith?" Let me give you a definition, listen very carefully. Faith is best described this way, faith is the confident continuous confession of total dependence on and trust in Jesus Christ for the necessary requirements to enter God's Kingdom. Did you get that? Faith is the confident continuous confession of total dependence on and trust in Jesus Christ to provide the necessary requirements for entrance into God's eternal Kingdom. It's not just believing that Jesus lived and died. It's trusting in Him and depending on Him to meet the

requirements in your behalf to give you entrance into God's Kingdom. It's the surrender of your life in trust to Him...to do what you can't do. It's saying I can't do it. . .

Paul gladly exchanged the burden of legalistic self-righteousness for the righteousness which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith. Faith is the confident, continuous confession of total dependence on and trust in Jesus Christ for the necessary requirements to enter God's kingdom. It involves more than mere intellectual assent to the truth of the gospel; saving faith includes trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and surrender to His lordship. It is on the basis of faith alone that righteousness . . . comes from God to repentant sinners.

Righteousness is right standing with God and acceptance by Him. That repentant sinners have their sin imputed to Christ and His righteousness imputed to them is the heart of the gospel. In **2 Corinthians 5:21**, Paul declared that God “*made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*” Paul gladly shed the threadbare robe of his own righteousness and stretched out his empty hands to receive the glorious royal robe of God's righteousness in Christ. This doctrine is at the core of the gospel. On the cross, God judged Jesus as if He had personally committed every sin ever committed by every person who ever truly believed. When a sinner embraces Jesus as Lord and trusts only in His sacrifice for sin, God treats that sinner as if he lived Christ's sinless life (cf. **Isa. 53; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24**). . .

What do believers gain by their union with Christ? The knowledge of Christ in their identification with Him; the righteousness of Christ imputed to them in justification; the power of Christ for their sanctification; participation in the sufferings of Christ; and sharing Christ's glory in their glorification. No wonder Paul gladly exchanged the religious credits in his loss column for the surpassing benefits of knowing Christ.

Max Anders: Why such single-minded devotion to Christ? Because he is the only source of righteousness—that is, of right relationship with God. Righteousness comes as a gift from God and is by faith in Christ, the true way to God in contrast to human merit or works. Here is Paul's doctrine of salvation and philosophy of life. In regards to eternal salvation, humans deserve nothing, can achieve nothing, and have no reason for pride or self-assurance. God has done everything: created, disciplined, had grace, given his Son Jesus on the cross for our sin, raised Jesus, declared us righteous and justified, adopted us as his children, and promised us resurrection and eternal life. The only human part in all this, in faith, is to accept what God has done.

G. Walter Hansen: By setting up this strong contrast between his own *righteousness that comes from the law* and the *righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith*, Paul presents two different meanings for the word righteousness. Paul's own righteousness from the law denotes his own upright behavior determined by the law. The righteousness that comes from God does not come from Paul's good moral conduct or from a superior level of conduct empowered by God, but from God's judicial verdict of a righteous standing before God. The righteousness from the law refers to Paul's

obedience to the law; the righteousness from God refers to a right relationship granted by God, not on the basis of obedience to the law, but on the basis of faith in Christ.

Moises Silva: Paul asserts that true righteousness is obtained by abandoning one's own efforts and exercising faith. As **Rom. 9:30 – 10:4** makes perfectly clear, Paul understands faith as the opposite of "*seeking to establish*" one's own righteousness; in that sense, works and faith are indeed incompatible. This perspective is confirmed by the Philippians passage, where *pistis* takes on a specific nuance through its opposition with those things that Paul, as he has already told us in the previous verses, had renounced. It would therefore not be far-fetched to **define faith** as "the act of counting as loss all those things that may be conceived as grounds for self-confidence before God."

Alternative View:

Richard Melick: The construction "*faith of Christ*" is ambiguous in Greek. Two questions emerge regarding it, one semantic and the other syntactical. The first is the meaning of the word "*faith*." The second is the precise meaning of the genitive Greek construction "of Christ." Regarding the meaning of the word "faith," the tension is between the semantically objective meaning (trust) and the semantically subjective meaning (faithfulness). Both are attested in Scripture (objective, **Rom 4:9**; subjective, **Rom 3:3**). Normally Paul meant "faithfulness" when the word was a quality of "God" or "Christ," as it is here. The syntactical question is the nature of the statement "*of Christ*." It could mean belonging to Christ, produced by Christ, directed to Christ, or simply of Christ. Most likely, it is the faithfulness which is in Christ and should be read "*of Christ*." This first statement, therefore, appears to mean that righteousness is made available to people **through the faithfulness of Christ**.

B. Counting the Necessary Cost

"I count all things to be loss"

"for whom I have suffered the loss of all things"

"and count them but rubbish"

R. P. Martin: The intimate relationship with *Christ Jesus* into which Paul had been brought was not secured without a price. Answering the divine revelation of the Lord there went the forfeiture of his "*gains*" and surrender of his pride on the part of the apostle.

Robert Gromacki: It cost the young Pharisee to become a Christian. He lost his status within Judaism, his reputation, and his opportunity for wealth and fame. He experienced ostracism, bodily harm, death threats, and property destruction (cf. **Heb. 10:34**). He may have forfeited his Jewish birthright and family inheritance.

Tony Merida: Paul calls his religious accomplishments "*filth*" or "*rubbish*" (ESV) or "*dung*" (KJV) compared to knowing Christ. Paul uses a term that sometimes referred to animal or human excrement. At the risk of sounding crass, he says it's all "dog crap" compared to knowing Christ. The vulgarity of the term is deliberate, as Paul wants to

strike us with the worthlessness of life apart from Jesus. You can have the Bread of Life that will eternally satisfy or you can have a pile of dung. Which do you prefer: the dung of religious self-efforts and earthly praise and possessions or the eternal joy of knowing Christ as your Savior and Lord? Paul made his decision, and he's trying to help others choose wisely. One may hear an echo from Jesus' question, "*What will it benefit a man if he gains the whole world yet loses his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life?*" (**Matt 16:26**).

III. (:10-11) KNOWING CHRIST AS THE SOURCE OF RESURRECTION POWER TRANSFORMS US TO LIVE A LIFE OF FELLOWSHIP WITH HIS SUFFERINGS AND HIS GLORY

Grant Osborne: Paul now unpacks what he means by *knowing Christ* (v. 8). His remarks fall into three categories: the **content** of knowing him, the **means** by which knowing him is possible, and the **goal** of knowing him. Once again, this knowledge is experiential as well as intellectual. We have a new relationship with Christ, and these are the aspects of that new personal connection.

There is a chiasm in **verses 10–11**:

- A *the power of his resurrection*
- B *the fellowship of his sufferings*
- B' *being conformed to his death*
- A' *the resurrection from the dead*

A. Committing to the Supreme Goal

1. Supreme Goal

"that I may know Him"

2. Two Supporting Goals:

a. *"the power of His resurrection"*

Gordon Fee: Along with the gift of the eschatological Spirit, it was the resurrection of Christ that radically altered Paul's (and the early church's) understanding of present existence—as both “already” and “not yet.” In Jewish eschatological expectations these two events, above all, would mark the beginning of God's final wrapup. Very early on the church recognized that the Resurrection (Christ's) had already set the future in motion. Paul in particular saw the implications of this reality, which are spelled out in some detail in **1 Corinthians 15**. The resurrection of Jesus, he argues there, makes our future resurrection both necessary and inevitable: necessary, because even though death has been de-fanged as it were, it still remains as God's and our final enemy, but it will cease to be with our resurrection; and inevitable, because Christ's resurrection set something in motion as “first-fruits” that guarantees the final harvest. Precisely because of the latter (Christ's resurrection as guaranteeing ours), Paul understands the life of the future to be already at work in the present.

R. Kent Hughes: All the apostle's powers were concentrated on **knowing Christ personally**. The power of the resurrection had dazzled him on the road to Damascus, and he never got over it. Every day was his personal resurrection day, an affirmation that he had been raised with Christ. So Paul kept seeking the power of the resurrection as an avenue for knowing Christ more deeply.

This in turn enabled Paul to share in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and further increase his intimacy and knowledge of him. Indeed, Paul passionately sought the fellowship of his sufferings as a grace for his soul. Therefore, the apostle was continually being conformed to Christ's death by God himself. His life was stamped with the divine imprint of the cross and a growing knowledge of Christ. This meant that Paul looked with confidence to the indeterminate day of the great resurrection when the full knowledge of Christ would fill his horizon for all eternity.

There is no doubt that if any of us knew today to be the final day of our lives, we would wish that we had made Christ the passion of our existence.

b. *"the fellowship of His sufferings"*

John MacArthur: You see, because I know Christ intimately, because I have the righteousness of Christ, I have available the dynamic spiritual energy that comes from Him. Like in **Daniel 11:32** where the prophet says the people who know their God will display strength and take action. Paul says I take Christ because of the power. You know something? There's no power in the law. There's no power to overcome sin in my flesh. There's no real power for spiritual service in my flesh. There's no power for victory in my flesh. There's no power for witnessing in my flesh. He says I've been operating without power and now I see all the power in Christ. You say, "How do you see it?" In His resurrection.

Grant Osborne: Suffering as believers is never meant to be an isolated experience. We share it with Christ, with his Spirit, and with one another.

Wil Pounds: This power happens only when you take God at His word and act on it by faith. When you begin to exercise your spiritual gifts God has given you the power begins to flow, but not before. You don't feel it. You didn't suddenly feel strong, capable and mighty. You feel weak, and Paul says God's power is made perfect in your weakness. If you feel weak, if you feel inadequate, this is the only requirement for God exercising the power of the resurrection in you. Many Christians keep waiting to feel power before they act. You don't feel power. You begin to reach out and act according to the needs around you and suddenly you discover there is unusual power at work in and through you. God is at work. It is His resurrection power at work through you.

Max Anders: Knowledge is a relationship term of intimacy. Paul wanted the closest possible personal relationship with Christ, a relationship pictured in baptism as buried to the old life of sin and raised to a new life of righteousness. To know Christ in this

way meant he was ready to share in Christ's sufferings, even if that meant sharing his death. Paul's longing to share with Christ comes through strongly in **Galatians 2:20**: "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*"

Gordon Fee: "*Knowing Christ*" for Paul involves "*participation in his sufferings*"—and is a cause for constant joy, not because suffering is enjoyable, but because it is certain evidence of his intimate relationship with his Lord.

G. Walter Hansen: The unity of these two aspects of the knowledge of Christ leads to viewing them as contemporaneous: since knowing participation in his sufferings is the present experience of Paul, then knowing the power of his resurrection takes place in the present context of sufferings. Knowing the power of Christ's resurrection provides the incentive and strength to participate in the sufferings of Christ. Certain elements in the context, however, also point to the future experience of knowing the power of Christ's resurrection.

3. End Result

"in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead"

Bruce: "Experiencing the power of Christ's resurrection here and now was not a substitute for looking forward to the resurrection of the body, as some of Paul's Corinthian converts appear to have thought (1 Cor. 15:12). Christ's resurrection, the power of which was imparted to his people even in their present mortal life, involved the hope for those who died believing in him '*that God, who raised the Lord Jesus to life, will also raise us up with Jesus*' (2 Cor. 4:14)."

Moises Silva: A serious problem is raised, however, by the apparent **tentativeness** of Paul's language, εἴ πως καταντήσω (*ei pōs katantēsō*, lit., *if somehow I may reach*—the idea is obscured by the NASB: "*in order that I may attain*"). Because Paul elsewhere speaks with great assurance about his future hope (e.g., **Rom. 8:30–31**; **2 Tim. 1:12**), it might seem legitimate to look for a way of interpreting these words that removes the element of doubt. One could argue, for example, that Paul's tentativeness "is not in reference to the reality of his resurrection . . . but in regard to the way in which it will be his" (**Martin** 1976: 136, who thinks the possibility of martyrdom is in view; cf. also **Motyer** 1984: 170; **O'Brien** 1991: 413). Unfortunately, I can find no evidence to support this interpretation. True, the word "*somehow*" is a common English equivalent for *pōs*, but the semantic area common to these two words is that of **indefiniteness**, not means or method. . .

It is always important, in this connection, to distinguish between the firm, unmovable object of our hope and our subjective apprehension of it. The apostle Paul, in spite of his maturity, and though writing under inspiration, was neither omniscient nor sinless. This passage is not the only place where he expresses a note of self-distrust (cf. esp. **1 Cor. 9:27**); moreover, his concern to strengthen Christian assurance is always balanced

by a desire to prevent presumptuousness (**1 Cor. 10:12; Gal. 4:19–20**). In the very nature of the case, any warnings against complacency and a presumptuous spirit are susceptible to misinterpretation. Indeed, someone unfamiliar with the apostle's teaching could deduce, from **Phil. 3:10–11**, that Paul perceived he was in the process of earning the resurrection by his willingness to suffer. Of course, such an interpretation would undermine the perfectly clear thrust of **verses 7–9**; yet it serves to remind us of the way in which this epistle repeatedly juxtaposes divine grace with personal responsibility. . .

We may still ask, however, why Paul's striking expression should occur in this particular passage. The only reasonable answer, as others have suggested, is that Paul is already anticipating what he will stress in **verses 12–14**. It is apparent that some perfectionist tendencies were present in the Philippian community. The apostle wants to give no encouragement to that, but perhaps he senses that the glowing descriptions of **verses 8–10** could be misused. Accordingly, the subsequent verses qualify his previous remarks to prevent a perfectionist interpretation. In that light, **verse 11** can be seen as a **transitional statement**: although it brings the previous passage to a culmination, it also anticipates the qualifying remarks that follow.

B. Counting the Necessary Cost

"being conformed to His death"

James Boice: The knowledge of Christ's sufferings comes at a very high price, the price of total obedience. Hence, Paul writes of "*being made conformable unto his death.*"

To understand this phrase we must go back to **chapter two** of the letter, where Paul speaks of Christ's obedience in death and holds it up as a pattern for all Christian conduct. He argues that Jesus was so careful to obey his Father that he laid aside His outward mantle of glory and took to Himself man's form and nature, enduring all the sufferings of this world, and that He even died as a man in obedience to His Father's will. The fellowship of Christ's sufferings is won at the price of such radical and total obedience.

G. Walter Hansen: Being *conformed to his death* can be interpreted in several ways:

(1) Paul may be referring to his **martyrdom**. Just as the sufferings of Jesus led to his death on the cross, so also Paul's sufferings led to his execution. . .

(2) Being conformed to his death may also be interpreted as a reference to the **inward experience of dying to sin by being united with Christ in his death**: "*For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin*" (**Rom 6:6**). Certainly Paul is concerned in this letter with being free from sin, pure and blameless (**1:10; 2:14**). But the difficulty with interpreting this phrase in the light of the parallel with **Romans 6:1-6** is that it limits the reference of being conformed to his death to the beginning of life in Christ since this passage refers to being united with Christ's death through baptism: "*all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death*" (**Rom 6:3**).

Paul is not referring to the beginning of his life in Christ, but to his entire experience of participation in Christ's sufferings as a process of being conformed to his death.

(3) Being conformed to his death may be interpreted as a reference to **Paul's obedience in his faithful proclamation of the gospel of Christ**. The link between partnership (*koinōnia*) in the gospel and participation (*koinōnia*) in his sufferings connects sufferings to the proclamation of the gospel, and those sufferings for the sake of the gospel are the means by which Paul is conformed to the death of Christ. Paul's reference to Christ's death is primarily a reference to Christ's obedience. . .

These three interpretations do not need to be set against each other as separate alternatives. Paul's experience of being conformed to Christ's death may well include his sense of facing his own execution, his awareness that he was baptized into the death of Christ to be freed from sin, and his appreciation that his sufferings for the gospel are shaping his obedience so that he will reflect Christ, who was obedient unto death.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why do we still put so much value on things which the Lord judges to be "*rubbish*"? If we fail to renounce the world's accounting system, why are we surprised when we find ourselves in the category of the double-minded?
- 2) What are some Scripture passages that point to the type of experiential, relational *knowledge of Christ* that Paul refers to in this context?
- 3) Are we shrinking back from embracing the "*fellowship of His sufferings*" and being "*conformed to His death*"?
- 4) Is Paul expressing any type of uncertainty in **verse 11**? What is the "*resurrection from the dead*" to which he refers?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Robert Gromacki: Such total resignation to the will of God means "*being made conformable unto his death*." It is saying to God: "*Not my will, but thine be done*." Just as Christ was in the "*form*" (*morphe*) of God, so the believer should be "*conformed*" (*summorphoumenos*) to His death. The essence of the cross-death should be the goal of each Christian (cf. **2:8**). The present tense of the participle indicates that this joint conformity should be a progressive daily drive in each life; thus Paul could say: "*I die daily*" (**I Cor. 15:31**). The passive voice of the participle shows that the Holy Spirit causes this transformation to occur."

F. B. Meyer: We may know Him personally intimately face to face. Christ does not live back in the centuries, nor amid the clouds of heaven: He is near us, with us, compassing our path in our lying down, and acquainted with all our ways. But we cannot know Him in this mortal life except through the illumination and teaching of the Holy Spirit. . . . And we must surely know Christ, not as a stranger who turns in to visit for the night, or as the exalted king of men—there must be the inner knowledge as of those whom He counts His own familiar friends, whom He trusts with His secrets, who eat with Him of His own bread.

To know Christ in the storm of battle; to know Him in the valley of shadow; to know Him when the solar light irradiates our faces, or when they are darkened with disappointment and sorrow; to know the sweetness of His dealing with bruised reeds and smoking flax; to know the tenderness of His sympathy and the strength of His right hand—all this involves many varieties of experience on our part, but each of them like the facets of a diamond will reflect the prismatic beauty of His glory from a new angle. (*The Epistle to the Philippians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1952], 162–63)

Manford George Gutzke: The natural human interest in any person would be to preserve himself. Someone will tell you that self-preservation is the first law of nature. There is no objection to that. It is the first law of nature, but do you realize that self-denial is the first step of the spiritual life. In the Spirit there will be self-denial. In nature, there is self-preservation. Paul wants to deny himself to death in order that Almighty God might raise him in Himself, in his daily experience, from the power of the flesh into the life of the Spirit by the grace of God.

James Boice: The accumulation of human righteousness is a bit like playing Monopoly. The game has beautiful money. The least valuable bills are the one-dollar bills; they are white. The most valuable are the five-hundred; they are gold. The object of the game is to collect as much money and property as you can. The game is enjoyable, but only a fool would take his Monopoly earnings and go into town to buy groceries. A different kind of currency is used in the real world. It is the same spiritually. And yet, although this is true, there are people who think they are collecting assets before God when they are only collecting human righteousness. And God tells us that we must leave the play currency to deal in His goodness. Man's goodness has no value in heaven.

D A. Carson: Re vs. 11 -- The word “*somehow*” in the original probably suggests that Paul is uncertain as to the timing and circumstances of this experience. Might it come to him in his lifetime, so that he receives a transformed, resurrection body without passing through death? From his first letter to the Thessalonians we learn that this is what Paul teaches will befall those believers who are alive when Jesus returns (**1 Thess. 4:13-17**). Or will he die and then rise from the dead? Either way, “*somehow*,” he will “*attain to the resurrection from the dead.*” And in Paul's mind, attaining that glorious end, the final resurrection, the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness, is bound up with persevering in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. So for knowledge of Christ Paul yearns.

John MacArthur: The Surpassing Value of Knowing Christ –

What was Paul experiencing (at the point of conversion)? What was he feeling? Well he had always put all his confidence in his flesh, that phrase back in **verses 3 and 4**. He had always put all his confidence in his own human ability, his religion, his sincerity, his race, his tribe, his rank, his self-righteousness. And he had it all in the profit column, all in the asset column. And that's where all his confidence was for salvation. He believed that he was saved because of his religious privilege and his religious achievement. And now all of a sudden he confronts Christ, the Spirit of God gives him understanding and he sees Christ for the first time as the true value, the real pearl, the treasure. And then he sees the loss that is in this column he once identified as assets and he's willing to throw the whole thing into one bag and trash it all and take Christ because Christ is of surpassing value. He made the right exchange. . .

May I note one other thing? He didn't say... "I had something good, this is better." He said, "This is loss, this is not asset, this is liability, that's not neutral, that's not good, that's negative, that's bad." Liabilities are bad. That's a loss not a profit. What do you mean by that? I mean to say that all of that stuff isn't good and Christ is better, all of that stuff is bad. You say, "Now wait a minute, is it bad to be circumcised the eighth day? Bad to be a Jew? Bad to be of the tribe of Benjamin? Bad to be a Hebrew of the Hebrews? Bad to be religious? Bad to be zealous?" Yes in this sense, if you count on that to save you...then it's bad. Why? Because it is so self-deceiving. You know the hardest person to reach in the world for Christ is the person who is religious. And the more religious they are and the more sincere they are and the more stuck in tradition they are and the more ceremonial they are, the harder they are to reach. Why? Because all their confidence is in that stuff and consequently they count on that for their salvation. Paul says that is not just good and this is better, that is bad. Why? Because religion damns the soul. False religion deceives the mind and damns the soul.

Steven Lawson: Having recounted how he had been converted on the Damascus road, Paul continues by describing his new life after his conversion. In **verses 10-14**, there are four distinguishing marks of his new life in Christ.

1. A New Priority

We saw earlier that he came to know Christ at the time of conversion (**v 8**). If he already knows Christ, why does he want to know him who he already knows? The answer is that he wants to know Christ more deeply, and have a more intimate relationship with him. He wants to learn more of his teaching and draw closer to his heart. He wants to enter into a closer, experiential fellowship, a more intimate communion. As **Boice** summarizes: "Paul wanted to know Jesus in the truest biblical sense—personally and experientially. And he wanted this to affect his day-to-day living."

Paul has written, "*For to me, to live is Christ*" (**1:21**). The whole life, the highest aim and the greatest priority of the apostle, and for us today as believers, is knowing Christ.

2. A New Power

Paul wants to experience more of the power of Christ in his life. He does not want to live a mundane Christian life that could be easily explained by his own natural abilities. Instead, he wants to be a powerhouse for Christ, to exert a spiritual influence upon the world and to see transformation in others. But for this to happen, he needs to know the resurrection power of Christ surging through his soul. He longs for the very power that raised Christ from the dead to be more operative in his life. Paul needs this power to live a godly life, resist temptation, and meet every challenge within the will of God. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is what Paul wants in his life, to experience at work in his life.

3. A New Persecution

Paul understands that the more he grows to know Christ and to make him known, the more he is being called upon to suffer for him.

4. A New Prospect

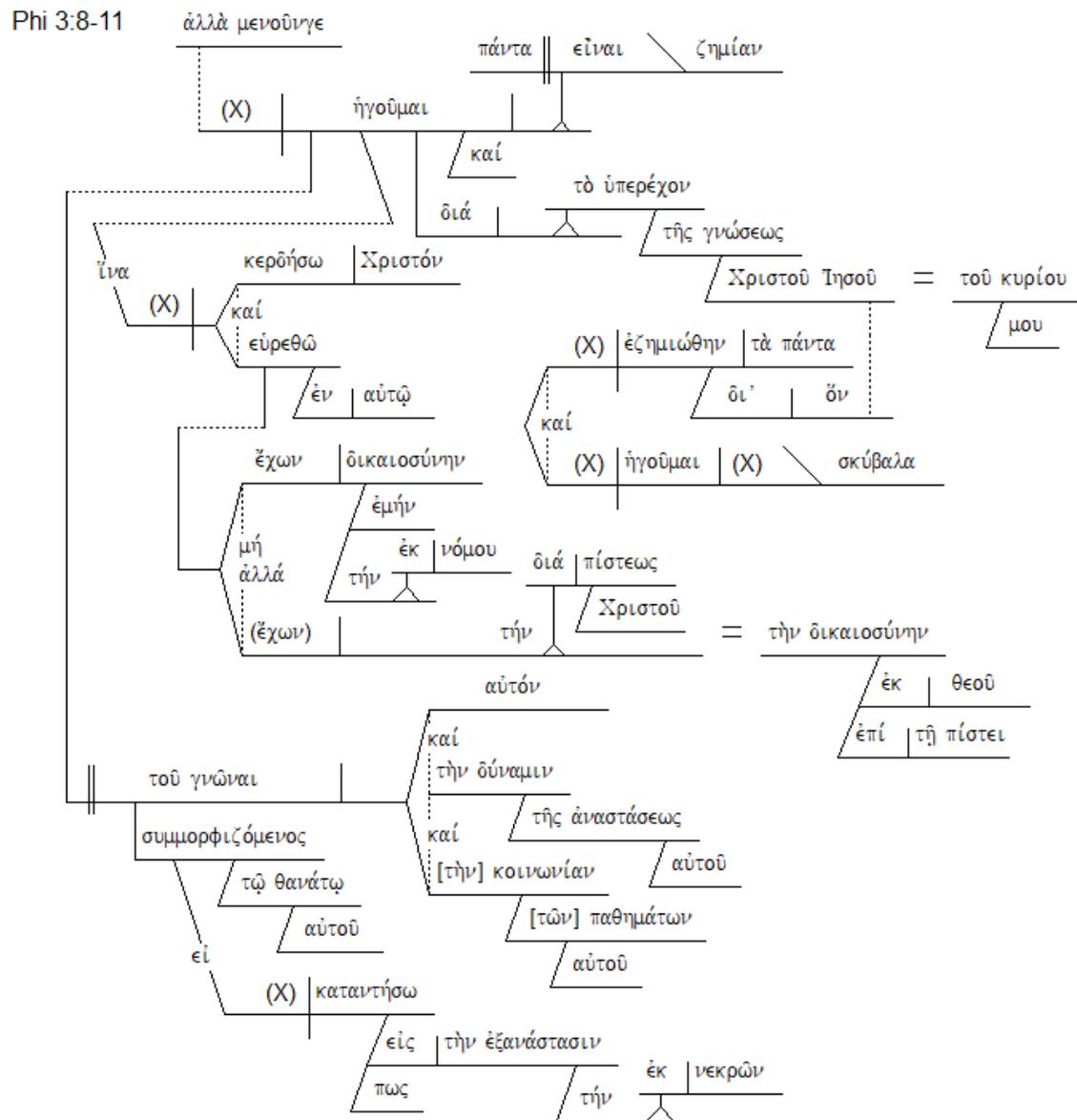
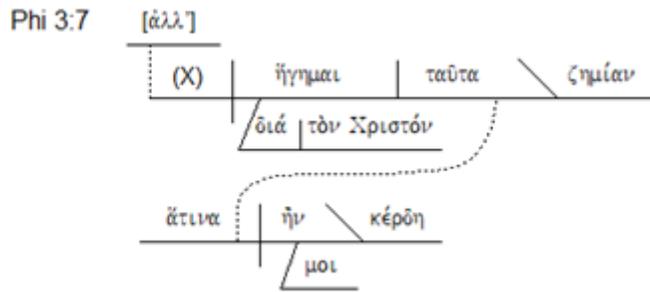
Because of his deep partnership with Christ in the suffering of his death, he will also share in the resurrection of Christ at the end of the age. Paul states that he is in union with Christ "*in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead*" (**Philippians 3:11**). This statement asserts the certain guarantee of Paul's future resurrection. Jesus Christ is the first fruit of the resurrection and Paul, along with every believer in Him, will be part of the full harvest, raised to share in Christ's glory.

Goettsche: Paul tells us that he now "*considers everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*" The word "*consider*" shows us that Paul has made a choice to refuse to rest or point to his actions as a reason for his salvation. He is constantly reminding himself that he is just an "old sinner saved by grace."

When we do this, several things happen.

- First, we are more prone to worship. When we get hung up on ritual and accomplishments we tend to worship our goodness rather than His.
- Second, we will know greater joy. We will know that we are accepted by God. We will no longer carry the burden of trying to save ourselves. And we will know the incredible freedom that comes from forgiveness.
- Third, we will be a better witness for the Lord. Instead of confusing people with our requirements, we will be pointing them to Jesus. Instead of trying to change people we will introduce them to the one who brings real change in a life. Instead of adding burdens to those seeking God we will remove the burdens.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14

TITLE: PRESSING ON

BIG IDEA:

PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL IS THE ONLY WAY TO RUN THE RACE OF CONFORMITY TO JESUS CHRIST

INTRODUCTION:

John Walvoord: On the one hand, discontent with one's spiritual life can bring discouragement and unnecessary resignation to spiritual defeat. On the other hand, in overestimating one's spiritual attainments, it is easy to become complacent with the measure of transformation which has taken place. Either alternative is falling short of the scriptural standard. What Paul is teaching in this section is that absolute perfection, such as exists in heaven, or attainment of spiritual victory which makes defeat impossible, is never achieved in this life. But there is the possibility of a high plateau of victory in Christ, of joy in the Spirit, and of the satisfaction of having served the Lord acceptably. It is this proper doctrine that the apostle is attempting to teach in this section.

Ben Witherington: Making progress toward the goal of full conformity to the image of Christ in the Christian life requires one to become a spiritual athlete according to Paul. It will not happen automatically or without human effort. Notice as well the perfect passive tense form of the verb for “*to perfect*”! Paul insists “*not that I have already been perfected ...*” and what he means is, he has not yet been fitted with his resurrection body which is the ultimate goal. The passive tense makes clear that Paul sees this as something that will happen to him, not something he will do or accomplish.

Frank Thielman: According to **3:8–11**, Paul had suffered the loss of all things in order to gain Christ, to be found in him, to know him in both his suffering and in his resurrection power, and to attain the resurrection of the dead. Did this mean that he had reached **spiritual perfection**? Paul was aware that at least in Corinth some would have drawn that conclusion from his words (**1 Cor. 4:8; 15:12**). He did not intend to allow such notions to take root in Philippi, however, and so in **Philippians 3:12–16** he affirms the incompleteness of his own journey toward the final day stating that, paradoxically, only those who understand their lack of perfection (*teteleiomai*) have reached spiritual maturity (*teleios*). . .

Paul also speaks positively in **verses 12–14** of what he is doing in light of the incompleteness of his spiritual journey. His language comes from the world of war and athletics and emphasizes the strenuous nature of his efforts to fulfill his vocation. In **verse 12** he says that he presses on to take hold of the goals listed in **verses 8–11**, choosing a pair of words that could, in military contexts, refer to the pursuit of one army by another. Together the two terms connote **a single-minded attempt to reach a particular goal**.

Moises Silva: The statement of **verse 12** ought not to be interpreted apart from **verses 13–14**, particularly in view of the **parallelism** between these two sections:

- A *I have not attained* [*lambanō*] (**12a**)
- B *I pursue* [*diōkō*] *that I may reach* [*katalambanō*] (**12b**)
- A' *I do not reckon to have reached* [*katalambanō*] (**13a**)
- B' *I pursue* [*diōkō*] *toward the goal* (**13b–14**)

The first set (A-A') consists of negative statements; here Paul makes clear what he is not claiming. These negatives help to correct any false impression that may arise from **verses 9–11**. The second set (B-B') consists of affirmations; because he does not yet possess all he expects, he presses on with confidence and determination.

John MacArthur: Some in Philippi might have mistakenly assumed that, having gained those marvelous benefits, Paul had reached **spiritual perfection**. The Judaizers may also have taught the Philippians that spiritual perfection was attainable through being circumcised and keeping the Law. There were also heretics (forerunners of the second-century Gnostics) who taught that spiritual perfection awaited those who attained a certain level of knowledge. To counter such false ideas, Paul quickly added this passage, which is a forceful disclaimer of spiritual perfection. Though he was a new creature (**2 Cor. 5:17**), with a new heart (**Ezek. 36:26**), a new disposition that strongly desired holiness (**Rom. 7:22; 2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16**), was united with Christ (**Gal. 2:20**), possessed a renewed mind (**Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23**), had the mind of Christ (**1 Cor. 2:16**), had right standing before God (**Rom. 8:1**), had been justified (**Rom. 5:1**), had been forgiven (**Eph. 1:7**), had Christ's righteousness imputed to him (**2 Cor. 5:21**), and was indwelt by the Holy Spirit (**Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:14**), Paul was not perfect. He was still subject to temptation, still possessed his unredeemed flesh, and was still a sinner (cf. **Rom. 7:14–25; 1 Tim. 1:15**). Far from having obtained perfection, he was pursuing it with all his might. Like Peter, Paul understood that the Christian life is a lifelong process of “*grow[ing] in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (**2 Peter 3:18**; cf. **1 Peter 2:1–2**).

This passage deals a devastating blow to the false doctrine of perfectionism that still prevails in some denominations and churches. Perfectionism is the teaching that believers can reach a place of spiritual and moral perfection in this life. Perfectionists teach that in a second work of grace, believers may instantaneously be made sinless. Some even go so far as to teach the eradication of the sin nature. But the apostle Paul, undoubtedly the most committed, dedicated, spiritually mature Christian who ever lived, confessed gladly that he had failed to reach spiritual perfection thirty years after his conversion. And that confession was clear evidence of his true and mature spirituality. Who, then, could make a legitimate claim to have done so? To maintain the fiction that they have achieved sinless perfection, perfectionists are forced to make an unbiblical distinction between willful sin and “mistakes.” But Scripture teaches that any violation of God's law—whatever the intent—is sin. No Christian will ever become perfect in this life; that awaits the redemption of the body (**Rom. 8:23**). Perfection in

this life will always be a goal, never an achievement. If we say we do not sin, we make God a liar, because He says we do (**1 John 1:7–9**).

Some may question why they should bother to pursue spiritual growth. After all, believers are promised “*an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for [them]*” (**1 Peter 1:4**). But that question is a moot point. Spiritual children, like physical children, cannot help but grow (cf. **1 Peter 2:1–2**); they have a built-in desire and drive for growth.

Apart from that, there are **several compelling reasons that Christians must grow spiritually**.

1. First, it glorifies God.
2. Second, it provides evidence that their salvation is genuine.
3. Third, it adorns and makes visible the truth of God to others (cf. **Titus 2:10**).
4. Fourth, it brings assurance of salvation.
5. Fifth, it preserves believers from the sorrow and suffering associated with spiritual immaturity.
6. Sixth, it protects the cause of Christ from reproach.
7. Seventh, it produces joy in believers’ lives.
8. Eighth, it equips them for ministry to others in the body of Christ.
9. Finally, it enhances their witness to the lost world.

Gerald Hawthorne: Hence **vv 12–16** may be viewed as relating to the previous section in this way: they provide a caution about past experiences and a plan of action for the future. Paul has just said that his supreme desire is to know Christ (and this is a worthy goal for any Christian). But lest some should assume that he (or anyone else for that matter) had already attained complete knowledge of Christ, he immediately proceeds to disabuse them of such an assumption. Christ is too great to be grasped in a single lifetime. And yet this fact does not discourage Paul or dampen his ardor. Rather, it drives him on to know more. The more he knows about Christ, the more he wishes to know. Hence he views his future as a race course stretching out before a runner who is pressing on to reach the goal and win the prize. Thus, the incomprehensible majesty of Christ is no deterrent to Paul’s quest, but a spur, urging him to press on to a still greater knowledge of Christ until it is finally complete when he is called up to receive the prize.

Dennis Johnson: Relying on God’s righteousness (received freely through faith in Christ) does not and must not foster complacency in sin or any illusion of having already achieved perfection. Paul evokes imagery drawn from the annual athletic competitions familiar to the Philippians in order to compare our present life in Christ to a race to be run with vigor and persistence. He does not consider himself to have arrived at perfection but strives toward the goal of complete conformity to Christ, his crucified and risen Lord. With confidence grounded in the fact that Christ has already grasped him firmly in grace, Paul strives to grasp the prize, God’s heavenward call that awaits believers at the resurrection. Instead of dwelling on things lying behind him, both his discarded credentials in Judaism (**vv. 4-6**) and his apostolic service to Christ, Paul sets his sights ahead, toward the objective of knowing Christ fully and reflecting

Christ's perfect maturity (cf. **Eph 4:13**). Paul's humble longing for and striving toward that goal sets an example for all who are and wish to be spiritually mature. In the present we may have differences of perspective (cf. **Php 4:2-3; Ro 14:1-12**). He is confident, however, in God's ability to lead all his children into unity in conviction and compassion (**Php 2:2**). In the meantime, each Christian must maintain the degree of maturity that God has already granted, relying completely on Jesus' blood and righteousness while energetically pursuing holiness in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

I. THE GOAL IS CONFORMITY TO JESUS CHRIST

"in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus"

"the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"

THE MOTIVATION OF A LOFTY GOAL:

A. Salvation is Just a Starting Point

Tony Merida: What's the "prize"? What goal is Paul pursuing? Based on the previous passage, it's a fuller knowledge of Christ. It involves gaining Christ. That's what Paul wants—to know Christ more and more; and in knowing Him more, he will become more like Him. This pursuit is a lifetime adventure. To illustrate this pursuit, Paul uses athletic imagery to convey his passion for the Savior.

John MacArthur: What was Christ's goal in saving Paul? The apostle stated it in **Romans 8:29**: "*For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren.*" God chose Paul, as He did all believers, **to make him like Jesus Christ**. That purpose for which God saved us is also the purpose for which we live. "*It was for this He called you through our gospel,*" wrote Paul to the Thessalonians, "*that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (**2 Thess. 2:14**). The Christian life is a life-long pursuit of **Christlikeness**. That was the Lord's goal in saving Paul and was his goal in response.

George Hunsinger: Paul might be saying that although he already knows Christ, he does not yet know him perfectly; that although he has already gained Christ, he has not yet gained him perfectly; and that although he is already in Christ, he is not yet to be found in him perfectly (at the level of lived experience). Whereas this way of resolving the ambiguities focuses more on the saving benefits of Christ in nobis, the former way focuses more on our possession of them extra nos. In any case, Paul's saving relationship to Christ is such that he knows Christ, enjoys him, and partakes of him under an eschatological (or apocalyptic) proviso. Christ and his benefits are known under a very different aspect here and now than they will be there and then in eternal life.

Gordon Fee: Paul tends to see all of Christian life in terms of "*God's calling.*" It begins as a call, call into fellowship with his Son (**1 Cor 1:9**), thus a call to "be saints,"

and thereby joined to his people who are destined for glory. The present usage is unusual in that it looks at the believer's calling from the perspective of its completion rather than its beginnings, as in most instances. This has been the aim of God's call right along, to lift them "heavenward" to share in his eternal Presence.

B. Christ Jesus Sets the Standard

Rom. 8:28-29 = the purpose for which we have been called by God

G. Walter Hansen: The word *heavenward* indicates both the direction of the call and the origin of the call. God's call is a calling from above and a calling to a heavenly reward. In his encounter with the risen Christ, Paul experienced God's call from above. As a result he pressed on all his life with the eager anticipation of the future prize of being with Christ and knowing Christ in the heavenly realm, free from all earthly limitations.

C. The Prize is Worthy of the Effort

Gordon Zerbe: What constitutes the actual prize should be identified in the manner already explained: full knowledge of Messiah, union with Messiah, and participation in the resurrection life of the age to come.

William Hendriksen: When this perfection is called **goal**, it is viewed as the object of the human striving. When it is called **prize**, it is viewed as the gift of God's sovereign grace ... Though it is true that this believing and this striving are from start to finish completely dependent on God's grace, nevertheless it is we who must embrace Christ and salvation in him. It is we who must strive to enter in. God does not do this believing and striving for us!

II. IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE ALREADY "ARRIVED" YOU ARE OFF TARGET

"Not that I have already obtained it"

"or have already become perfect"

"Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet"

THE DELUSION OF PERFECTION:

A. Some People Feel They Have Reached the Spiritual Mountaintop

He had not received yet all that God has for him.

David Garland: He is concerned about the Philippians' progress in the faith and now holds up the example of his own progress, which depends on single-minded, undistracted, earnest exertion that is locked on to the goal like a heat-seeking missile. He issues a caveat that Christians do not reach perfection in this life; the achieving of this perfection awaits the life to come (**1Co 13:10-12**).

B. Some People Feel They have Arrived

He had not been matured yet to the point where he was like Christ.

John MacArthur: Obviously, pursuing the prize of spiritual perfection begins with **dissatisfaction with one's present spiritual condition**. Those who think they have reached spiritual perfection will not see the need to pursue a better condition; why should they chase something they believe they already have? Such complacent, contented people are in grave danger of becoming insensitive to their sin and blind to their weaknesses. It is only those who are aware of their desperate spiritual need who come to Christ for salvation (**Matt. 5:6**). And it is only those who continue to recognize the need to eliminate sin and cultivate holiness who will make progress in the Christian life. This pursuit by the power of the sanctifying Spirit produces a decreasing frequency of sin and increasing love for holiness, which makes less sin feel like more. The truly mature and godly have the most sensitive awareness of their sins, and are the humblest before God because of it.

Steven Lawson: Faith is always active and dynamic, always moving us out and forward. Paul is acknowledging that he has not come to a point in his spiritual life where he can say he has arrived. There is still much spiritual growth for him to realize in his Christian life.

C. The Reality is That We All Have a Long Way to Go

Charles Swindoll: **God's plan is progress . . . not perfection (3:12)**. Paul was clear: He had not yet obtained the full outcome of his salvation. As one commentator notes, the "*it*" in **3:12** probably refers to "the experiential process begun in his salvation. He looked forward to the resurrection from the dead and, secondarily, to the process of conformity to death which would bring it forth." Paul was on the same path as every one of us. He had been justified (declared righteous by God) on the basis of the merits of Christ, and like all of us, he was in the process of being sanctified as he looked forward to one day being glorified through resurrection.

Perfection in this life is not possible. We are frail, fallen, feeble humans; and we will continue in this state until our death. Not only are we imperfect, but so is everyone around us. The best, most moral, most Christlike person who has ever lived is still a wicked sinner saved by grace, unable to be compared to the perfect standard of holiness we see in Christ.

But constant progress toward Christlikeness is possible. I've seen believers get very frustrated with their lack of stunning progress in their pursuit of Christlikeness. I've seen them peter out. I've seen them fail. They get down on themselves for their inability to measure up to an impossible standard in this life. This is precisely when they need to hear that the plan is progress, not perfection. We press on in spite of knowing that in this life we will never fully arrive.

R. Kent Hughes: The reality is, the more we come to know Christ, the more we will come to sense our need to grow. And when we imagine that we have arrived, stagnation sets in. We must understand that Paul's prayer—"that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death"—is a prayer of **humble dissatisfaction** that opens us to the blessing of God—and to a sublime cycle of dissatisfaction and satisfaction and dissatisfaction and satisfaction . . . it brings on a life that knows more and more of Christ and then desperately wants to know more and indeed does know more and more and more and more. Spiritual dissatisfaction is a blessed state. Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied*" (**Matthew 5:6**). Do you long to know Christ better? If so, blessing rains upon your soul.

Gerald Hawthorne: Paul's encounter with the resurrected and living Christ created within him not only a consuming desire to know Christ intimately and fully, but also an awareness that this was something that could not be achieved in a moment. To know the incomprehensible greatness of Christ demands a lifetime of arduous inquiry.

III. LOOKING AT THE PAST WILL SLOW YOU DOWN

"forgetting what lies behind"

THE PITFALLS OF THE PAST:

- A. Weighed down by Sins/Failures of the Past (Heb. 12:1-2) / OR
Complacent because of Past Spiritual Success**
(Past Positive Performance is no Indication of Future Success --
cf. the warning on commercials for mutual funds)

Charles Swindoll: Living in the past —whether basking in old glories or pouting over old defeats —keeps us from advancing boldly into the future.

O'Brien: He will not allow either the achievements of the past (which God has wrought) or, for that matter, his failures as a Christian to prevent his gaze from being fixed firmly on the finish line. In this sense he forgets as he runs.

George Hunsinger: In any case we may posit that Paul looks on his entire sinful past as having been blotted out and removed by the blood of Christ. His sinful past is therefore no impediment to the future. In Christ it is as good as gone. All anxiety about the past, whatever it may include, is done away with. It is spiritually irrelevant. The remembrance of past guilt can no longer be crippling. "*The things that lie behind*" might, of course, also include adversities and traumas. In any case, for Paul, the old has passed away, and the new has come (**2 Cor. 5:17**).

- B. Tainted by Bitterness and a Lack of Forgiveness / OR
Over Confident because of the Evidence of the Fruit of the Spirit**

Tony Merida: We must deal with sin, but if you've been forgiven and sought to make wrongs right, then forget and run. Don't let Satan bring up accusations against you if Christ has forgiven you. Flee to Christ; remind yourself of the gospel and press on.

**C. Resigned to Powerlessness / OR
Distracted from Continuing to Rely on the Lord**

F. F. Bruce: A competitor in a race does not look over his or her shoulder to see how much ground has been covered already or how rivals are getting on: the runner keeps eyes fixed on the winning post.
(cf. my experience in sixth grade relay race)

James Boice: What is the nature of the forgetting then? I believe that it is the kind of forgetting that occurs when we cease to let things that are in the past overshadow the present, that lets the past be past, both the good and the bad, and that constantly looks forward to the work that God still has for us.

Grant Osborne: Paul outlines two stages for achieving his goal. The first is "*forgetting what is behind*." The image is powerful: Paul is like a runner refusing to be distracted by the competitors behind him. The effectiveness of this approach has been proven many times. I recall one of the most famous footraces ever, in 1954 between Roger Bannister of England and John Landy of Australia. Earlier that year, Bannister had become the first runner to cover one mile in less than four minutes; six weeks later, Landy beat Bannister's time by 1.4 seconds. Their first head-to-head matchup came later that summer and drew worldwide attention. Ninety yards from the finish line, Landy had the race won until he looked over his left shoulder to check for Bannister—who sprinted past him on the right to a dramatic victory. It became known as the "miracle mile."

The question in **verse 13** is: What does Paul mean by "*the things behind*"? It is unlikely that this indicates his achievements before he had become a Christian (**vv. 5–6**), for he is speaking in **verses 12–14** of the more recent past. More likely, "*the things behind*" refers to all that Paul had attained since becoming a Christian. It is important for us to note carefully what he is saying here—and what he is not saying. Paul does not mean that our service for Christ and the gospel does not matter; such a view would contradict the teaching about storing up treasure in heaven. Instead, he is insisting that we dare not sit back and be satisfied with our accomplishments. We can never have enough of Christ, and we should never become complacent about where we are in the Christian life and what we have done for Christ. We must be insatiable in our desire to attain more of Christ and to achieve more for him. By "*forgetting*" Paul does not mean to be uncaring; rather, he does not want to be distracted or led astray by dwelling on the past. We live for the future, not for the past.

Max Anders: Paul, in this verse, underlines his denial of personal power or attainment and his single-minded focus. To describe that focus, he employs the image of a runner in a race who hopes to win the prize. He cannot look back. He cannot cloud his mind

with past memories. He strains every muscle in his body to achieve forward motion. Eyes focus on the finish line. Paul forgets the guilt of persecuting the church. He forgets the pain of prison and physical punishment. He forgets the frustration of disobedient church members and false teachers. He looks ahead to see the resurrection, where he will meet Jesus face-to-face.

IV. PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL IS THE ONLY WAY TO RUN THE RACE

"I press on"

"but one thing I do... reaching forward to what lies ahead"

"I press on toward the goal"

THE CHALLENGE OF PERSEVERING IN MAKING PROGRESS:

A. Requires a Perspective of Hope

Tony Merida: The gospel humbled Paul. Look at the way Paul talks about his life here, compared to his pre-conversion experience in **verse 6**, where he said, *"in the law, blameless."* He previously thought of himself as having arrived, but the gospel has a humbling effect. In telling the Philippians that he wasn't perfect, Paul not only corrects any misunderstandings that they might have had regarding legalism or perfectionism, but his words surely brought **hope** to them as well! How so? Paul is identifying with them as a fellow Christian. He doesn't want them to think that he is somehow superhuman and superior. He's made some remarkable statements about his life in the book of Philippians, but he's **admitting that he hasn't arrived**. So you and I shouldn't despair. Keep running with Paul!

R. Kent Hughes: *"But one thing I do"* introduces a single sentence that draws on the metaphor of a foot race described in the graphic present tense but with clauses that reference the past (*"forgetting what lies behind"*), the future (*"and straining forward to what lies ahead"*), and the present (*"I press on toward the goal"*). It is a picture of absolute focus and intensity.

B. Requires a Work Ethic of Diligence

Grant Osborne: Paul's second stage for achieving his goal involves *"straining toward what is ahead."* This continues the athletic imagery, depicting the runner with every muscle in her body taut and straining toward the finish line. This is what makes the Olympic Games so compelling; we are privileged to witness the world's greatest athletes at the apex of their careers, with their entire being and all their energy focused on winning. We have all seen runners collapse at the end of a race, lying on the ground and heaving for air while smiling from ear to ear at the sheer joy of reaching their goal. Victory is unbelievably difficult in any race, but it is worth the effort—and that is precisely Paul's point here. The Christian walk is not intended to be an easy stroll through life; it is incredibly hard work, demanding the utmost of our effort to live for Christ.

Ben Witherington: The verb “*press on*” is further explicated by the participle *epekteinomenos*, “*straining forward*” (found only here in the NT). It can in fact refer to the relentless pursuit by a predator of its prey, or can be used of an army in hot pursuit of a foe, and in any case conveys the notion of deliberate, strenuous maximum effort, straining forward like a runner who is expending every ounce of energy to reach the finish line.

G. Walter Hansen: Paul’s dramatic imagery of his race cuts both ways: perfectionists who claim to have already arrived at the goal and libertines who have dropped out of the race are both called to get back on track and press on.

C. Requires a Large Dose of Perseverance

John MacArthur: It is such singularly focused people who succeed in athletics and in other pursuits of life. Many people dabble in much, but succeed at nothing. Despite all the energy they expend, they accomplish little. Their lives are full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. James called them “*double-minded . . . unstable in all [their] ways*” (**James 1:8**). To avoid such lack of focus the psalmist prayed, “*Unite my heart to fear Your name*” (**Ps. 86:11**), and Solomon counseled, “*Let your eyes look directly ahead and let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. Watch the path of your feet and all your ways will be established. Do not turn to the right nor to the left*” (**Prov. 4:25–27**). When believers have one driving compulsion, to be like Christ, they will move toward spiritual perfection.

Dennis Johnson: It may seem counterintuitive that confidence of victory at the crack of a starting pistol would stimulate a sprinter’s most strenuous effort. Aesop’s ancient fable tells how the hare, with a swift start and a long lead, smugly lay down to nap, while the tortoise’s perseverance proved the maxim: “Slow but steady wins the race.” In other sports, when a dominant team is outscoring its opponent to the point of embarrassment, the second string is sent in to “coast” to the victory. Yet God’s sovereign initiative in salvation, far from making our response in faith and love superfluous, actually **makes our perseverance both necessary and possible**. Paul has already told the Philippians that “*he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion¹⁹ at the day of Jesus Christ*” (**Phil. 1:6**). On the basis of that assurance, he has urged them to “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,*” grounding that exhortation in the truth that “*it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*” (**2:12–13**).

Gordon Fee: The future, however, belongs only to those who persevere (to use the language of theology). Paul thus immediately sets them right regarding the future that is “not yet”: “*but I press on,*” he says. In this first case the object of his present “pursuit” is expressed with a set of clauses that play on a compound of the verb “take” in the first disclaimer: “*whether I also may take hold of that for which I was also taken hold of by Christ Jesus.*” If that comes out a bit awkwardly, both in Greek and English, it is because Paul is simultaneously playing on the word “*take hold of*” while “putting it

TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 3:15-21

TITLE: STAYING ON TRACK

BIG IDEA:

FOLLOWING THE RIGHT EXAMPLES (THE WAY OF THE CROSS RATHER THAN THE WAY OF INDULGENCE) WILL KEEP US ON TRACK IN THE RACE TO GLORY TO JOIN OUR SAVIOR, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

INTRODUCTION:

Robert Gromacki: In this section, the apostle challenged the believers to experience the joy of maturity.

Gordon Fee: The best explanation of the “**why**” of all this, therefore, is the one we have suggested right along, that in the face of opposition and some internal dissension, some of them have lost their vision for and focus on their crucified and risen Lord, including his coming again. Even in a Roman prison Paul has not lost his vision; here he urges them to follow his example and to see their participation in Christ’s sufferings as Christ’s way of “*conforming them to his death,*” so that they, with Paul, may joyously gain the prize of his eternal presence.

Dennis Johnson: In this text, Paul teaches that the people whom we imitate are indicators of our true citizenship, of the political entity that defines our identity and our status, our privileges and our duties. The term citizenship, which appears in **verse 20**, is related to the verb that Paul used earlier, in **Philippians 1:27**, to summon his Christian friends to behavior befitting their privileged status as citizens. Paul now makes explicit that believers are citizens not merely of Caesar’s city, Rome, but of heaven itself, where Jesus the true Savior and Lord now reigns. Throughout our present text, therefore, the **theme of citizenship** provides the backdrop for the contrast that Paul draws between his own positive example and the polluting pattern seen in the lifestyle of others (**Phil. 3:17–19**). The apostle’s point is that the models who mold your desires and behavior are telltale signs of the town you call “home.” When we hear a Southern drawl or a Scottish brogue, we know in an instant where the speaker was raised. Her accent and inflection echo the voices that surrounded her as she grew up. So also, Paul implies, your values and choices will reflect the accents of your spiritual “hometown.”

In these verses Paul speaks of two competing destinations, of contrasting paths that people “walk” to reach them, and of two rival groups of guides that show the way. On the one hand, Paul and those who shared his Christ-centered commitment are role models to be followed by heaven’s citizens as they walk their earthly pilgrimage (**Phil. 3:17**) toward the glorious coming of our Savior from heaven at the end of history (**3:20–21**). On the other, Paul describes people whose “walk” exhibits enmity toward Christ’s cross and preoccupation with earthbound interests, and whose “*end is destruction*” (**3:18–19**). Paul directs our eyes first in one direction, toward mentors

worth mimicking (**Phil. 3:17**), and then in the opposite direction, toward the dangerous examples whose trajectory leads downward into the pit of hell (**3:18–19**). Finally, he points our gaze upward and forward to the heavenly metropolis that is our true home, and to the Savior-Lord who will come from there, to impart his own glory to all who belong to his celestial city (**3:20–21**).

R. Kent Hughes: Paul’s message to us is this: the way we live, our walk, our appetites, the things in which we revel, the set of our inner disposition all tell whether we are Christian or post-Christian. We should note that Paul, who had much to say about the nature of authentic faith in other places (cf. **Ephesians 2:8–10; Romans 3:21, 22, 28; 10:5–13**), did not say a word about faith here. Here **lifestyle** revealed the authenticity of professed belief. Taking this warning to heart is essential if we are to stand firm.

David Garland: **Verses 12–16** form a chiastic pattern:

- A ἔλαβον (elabon, **3:12a**)
 - B τετελείωμαι (teteleiōmai, **3:12b**)
 - C διώκω (diōkō, **3:12c**)
 - D κατελήμφθην (katelēmphthēn, **3:12d**)
 - D' κατειληφέναι (kateilēphenai, **3:13a**)
 - C' διώκω (diōkō, **3:14a**)
 - B' τέλειοι (teleioi, **3:15a**)
- A' ἐφθάσαμεν (ephthasamen, **3:16**)

I. (:15-16) BUILD ON THE PAST WHILE PRESSING ONWARD

Gordon Fee: Although very compressed and some of its grammar ambiguous, what Paul says is in three parts:

- (1) A direct application: *Therefore, as many of us as are teleioi, this let us “think” (phronōmen).*
- (2) A qualification: *And if you “think” (phroneite) anything differently, this also God will reveal to you.*
- (3) A rejoinder (to the qualification):
In any case, unto whatever we have attained [already, is implied], [let us] conform to the same.

A. Common Pursuit –

Be Like-Minded in Your Perspective of Pressing Onward

“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;”

G. Walter Hansen: In Paul’s self-portrait, his eyes are always **focused on Christ**: he reevaluates his life before Christ in the light of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ

(3:4-9); he concentrates in the present on being like Christ (3:10); and he looks into the future with eager anticipation of winning the prize, the reward of being with Christ (3:11-14). His Christ-centered vision determines the way that he views his past, his present, and his future. Now Paul directs the Philippian church to take such a view of things. When they adopt his Christ-centered perspective on life, they will join together in following his example and align themselves with all who live as he does. . .

The **mature attitude** exhibited by Paul combines genuine humility, knowing that we have not already arrived at the goal, and wholehearted commitment, straining toward the goal. By including himself with his readers in his exhortation, “*let us have this attitude,*” Paul is calling for **unity of mind** in the community as he did in 2:2: be like-minded . . . of one mind. The attitude of those who press on toward the goal to win the prize (3:14) is not an individualistic, competitive attitude of runners who run alone to beat everyone else. This attitude draws people together as they focus in their community on knowing Christ and following Christ. Paul does not offer his self-portrait to put himself above or beyond others but to unite others with him in the common pursuit to know Christ. He is drawing together the friends of the cross before he refers to the enemies of the cross (3:18). . .

How God will reveal his direction to resolve minor points of difference Paul does not explain. He seems content to leave the means of God’s guidance undefined and open. His move from a law-centered life to life in Christ gives him freedom from detailed prescriptions for every conceivable situation. Paul is no longer bound by the tradition that produced the Mishnah with its applications of the law to all known circumstances. Although the unity of the church is one of Paul’s highest priorities, he knows that true unity will be achieved only by God’s revelation, not by his rhetorical power.

George Hunsinger: The word translated as “*mature*” (*teleioi*) involves guesswork to decide on a rendering (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6). Almost in the same breath Paul states that he is not yet “*perfected*” (*teteleiōmai*) (Phil. 3:12). He seems to be engaged in wordplay. Many have followed **John Chrysostom** in interpreting what Paul means—namely, that Christian perfection means acknowledging Christian imperfection, as if he were saying, “*Let those who are mature recognize that they are not perfect.*” If so, taking the “*mature*” view is a matter of humility. The phrase “*let us take such a view of things*” (*touto phronōmen*) (3:15) lines up rather nicely with the exhortation in Phil. 2:5 to “*let this mind be in you*” (*touto phroneite*). Both places find Paul commending a “*mindset*” of **humility** and **perseverance** in the midst of affliction for the sake of love. The mindset found in Christ Jesus is reflected in the mindset of Paul.

Charles Swindoll: Paul graciously acknowledges that everybody grows up in Christ at different paces. In the spiritual marathon, some will be nearing the finish line at full speed . . . others will be farther behind . . . some will be trudging along at a snail’s pace . . . and a few will be dragged along by others! Paul knew that not everybody was yet in the same condition for running the race at top speed. But he was confident that God would continue to work in them toward the upward call in Christ Jesus.

**B. Consistent Practice –
Be Careful to Continue to Build on the Foundation of Past Maturity**

"however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained."

We know what has been profitable in guiding us to our present level of maturity. It doesn't make sense to switch horses in the middle of the race. Dance with who brought you.

D. A. Carson: We are not to leave old truths and prior steps of holiness behind, but as new truths and applications of old truths open up before our eyes, they should shape our knowledge and our living so powerfully that others see the improvement... So look around carefully, and emulate those who are continuing to grow spiritually, not those who are stagnating. Beware of those who project an image of smug self-satisfaction. Imitate those who keep on imitating Christ.

Gerald Hawthorne: The conduct of Christians must be consistent with the level of truth they have already reached (cf. **NEB**). And that conduct should conform to the pattern of life they are to follow as those *"in Christ Jesus"* (**Phil 2:5**).

Grant Osborne: Note that Paul is not reprimanding the Philippians for failing to progress sufficiently, nor is he showing displeasure with their level of maturity. He accepted them as they were, called on them to appraise themselves realistically, and challenged them to move on from there and continue growing in Christ. The Philippians didn't have to reach a certain maturity level before the Spirit would guide them and Christ pour his strength into them. They did, however, need a desire to know Christ better and to yield to the Spirit more thoroughly. God wanted them to be faithful and committed, in accordance with the level of Christian maturity they had attained. Paul had taught them the gospel and its demands; now they had to make it the standard by which they lived and begin to grow in the depth by which they lived it.

This path of discipleship is not a passive approach—as though, after a season of preliminary growth, we can be satisfied with the level we have reached and just coast our way to heaven. Rather, Paul is challenging Christians to have an active, ongoing, and aggressive demand for more of Christ. We carefully take stock of our present status and level of maturity (**v. 16**), and then we put all of our effort into pressing on from there and progressing toward the goal and prize awaiting us (**vv. 12–14**).

Frank Thielman: Paul has only one request of them in the meantime (**v. 16**): The believers in Philippi should not turn back from the progress they have already made in living lives worthy of the gospel. The verb the NIV translates *"live up to"* is a rare word in Paul (*stoicheo*), used only three other times in his letters. In these other occurrences, the word refers to living the life of faith (**Rom. 4:12**), a life characterized by the Spirit's fruit of *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control"* (**Gal. 5:22–25**), and a life that God himself has re-created (**Gal. 6:15–16**). God has begun a good work in the Philippians, and many of these qualities are evident among them (**1:6, 9–11**), but Paul does not want the slight deviations from the truth that

may be present among them to destroy the progress they have already made. That would mean that his apostolic labor on their behalf had been in vain and that he would stand before Christ on the final day, at least with respect to the Philippians, empty-handed (2:16).

II. (:17-19) IMITATE ONLY THE RIGHT EXAMPLES

A. Right Example = Sacrificial Pattern of Life

Demonstrated by the Apostle Paul (and His faithful co-workers)

"Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us."

Quite a confident statement on Paul's behalf. He must have lived with a clear conscience before his Lord.

G. Walter Hansen: Although his example is admittedly imperfect, it is, nevertheless, tangible and accessible to the church he founded. So he takes the role of a mentor.

Gerald Hawthorne: This one verse, then, stands as a warning by example against two wrong emphases originating from Paul's Jewish opponents (cf. **Phil 3:2**). It is a warning against the belief that one can be perfect now (**3:12–16**) and against the belief that external rituals can be a necessary means of grace (**3:18–19**). Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, not having yet attained perfection, is thereby driven on to still greater moral endeavors. He calls the Philippians to follow his example, quit claiming perfection, and get busy living the Christian life. Paul, a Jew par excellence (**3:5–6**), having seen the all-sufficiency of Christ, is thereby forced to surrender confidence in the effectiveness of the observance of food laws or rites of circumcision (**3:19**) to establish a right relationship between himself and God. The Philippians should follow his example and abandon thinking only of things that belong to this world. They should forsake putting confidence solely in human accomplishments (*ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες*, "putting confidence in ourselves" [**3:3**]). This verse stands as a **transition** point between these two errors of perfection and of trust in Judaism's boundary markers. It forms the conclusion to the one and the introduction to the other. . .

Confident that his own manner of life—characterized by self-renunciation, humility, and service to others—and his own presuppositions—namely, that God is, that Christ is the only way to approach God, and that the Holy Spirit provides the power to live acceptably before God—are so thoroughly right and true, he is unafraid to present himself, in whom these characteristics and beliefs are embodied, as a model for others to follow. Like an experienced craftsman who shows an apprentice how to do a difficult job (**Grayston**) or a scout who knows the way and leads a caravan through perilous terrain, he is in no way ashamed to say "Follow me!" nor is he arrogant in doing so.

Steven Lawson: Any growth in godliness is enhanced when we are influenced by the right spiritual mentors. So Paul encourages his readers to "join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us" (v 17). He

addresses them as "brethren" to help them hear this correction. He seeks to endear himself to them so that they will receive his instruction. They must have brothers and sisters in Christ who are modeling Christianity and are worthy of their emulation. Paul is not being arrogant when he tells them to follow his example, but rather, he is being practical.

B. Wrong Example = Indulgent Pattern of Life

Demonstrated by the "*enemies of the cross of Christ*"

1. Their Description

"For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ"

David Garland: Since Christ's path to the cross was characterized by humility and obedience, the enemies of the cross are those who stubbornly refuse to humble themselves and accept low status, to live out the foolish wisdom of the cross and suffer for Christ. Their earthly orientation puts their belly, their own concerns (see **2:1–4, 19–21**), above all others.

G. Walter Hansen: When Paul speaks of these people who are walking contrary to the way of the cross of Christ in their pursuit of their own self-interests, he speaks with tears. Literally, Paul writes, "*but now I speak even weeping.*" Paul reserves such an outpouring of emotion for those who have professed belief in Christ. Although he refers to these people in the third person as outsiders, they are still close to his heart. Paul's pastoral concern for those whose mind is set on earthly things causes him intense emotional pain. Though his words are harsh, his heart is broken. He mourns over the *enemies of the cross*.

George Hunsinger: Who are these "*many*" (*polloi*)? It seems that they are not members of the Pauline community, though they claim to be Christians. Their posing as Christians is what makes Paul weep. Nor are they likely to have been his Jewish Christian opponents, for that group would not be living an indulgent lifestyle. The problem with the offending group seems to be its lifestyle, not its teaching. They are not strict adherents of the law, but seem more like antinomians or libertines who "degraded the true doctrine of Christian liberty," perhaps not unlike some at Corinth (**1 Cor. 5–6**). They are a peril to themselves and an obstacle to the progress of the gospel. They do not accept suffering, should it come, as integral to the Christian life. They want a theology of glory without a theology of the cross. "They make use of Christ's name, but do not follow his example"; instead they live "a life of self-indulgence."

Alternate View:

Gordon Zerbe: **Who, then, might these many enemies be?** First, they do not appear to be part of the Philippian assembly. Paul's reference to the generic *many are walking* and reminder of having mentioned this pattern on earlier occasions precludes this (**Fee**). Second, they are not presented as teachers (as are the opponents in Galatians and 2 Corinthians). Paul highlights, as elsewhere in Philippians, the critical matter of conduct

(1:27–2:16; 3:17; 4:9), not of doctrine. Third, they are not depicted as personal rivals to Paul (cf. 1:15–17). Fourth, they can hardly be identified exclusively as lax or lapsed believers on the grounds that Paul would not shed tears for outsiders (contra O'Brien). To the contrary, just as Paul weeps for the uncommitted among his own people of Israel (Rom 9:1–5), it appears that here Paul is shedding tears for the majority in the non-Jewish, Greco-Roman world, insofar as the goal of universal inclusion and reconciliation in Messiah (e.g., Rom 11:25–32) seems so remote.

The reference is thus primarily to those many who remain antagonistic to Messiah and his regime. Indeed, the palpable counter-Roman rhetoric in the next verses suggests that Paul is depicting the **practice of citizenship of general Roman society**. Their imperatives of earthly glory (including social, economic, political advancement; cf. Phil 2:3), conspicuous consumption, and moral license combine to make it antithetical to Messiah's pathway to the cross. While the humiliated faithful will be exalted (3:20–21), the presently exalted will presumably be humbled (3:18–19). The resumption of the themes of 1:27–30 and 2:14–16 further suggest that in 3:18–21 the same threat and set of adversaries is in view. The first known commentator on Philippians assumed that the enemies of the cross referred to **Roman persecutors** (Polycarp, To the Philippians 12.3; 2nd quarter of 2nd c.) [Opponents in Philippians, p. 300].

2. Their Destiny

"whose end is destruction"

John MacArthur: Having rejected the one and only truth of salvation—the cross of Christ—all false teachers face the same fate. Their end (the Greek word *telos* refers here to their ultimate destiny) will be **eternal destruction** (torment, punishment) in hell (Matt. 25:46; 2 Thess. 1:9). The Judaizers deserved this fate because they added human works to the cross of Christ. To believe the truth about Him but also to believe that human works are necessary for salvation is to be damned forever. The Gentile heretics deserved their fate because they stripped the cross of Christ of its power to transform lives. The result is a dead faith, unable to save (James 2:14–26).

3. Their Dependency

"whose god is their appetite"

They are addicted to the lusts of the flesh.

David Garland: In Paul's words to the Philippians "*belly*" becomes a picturesque reference to "*the flesh*," to a self-centered, self-indulgent existence controlled by illicit desires. Their own glory holds them spellbound, betrays the gospel, and destroys Christian community.

John MacArthur: *Appetite* translates *koilia*, which refers anatomically to the abdomen, particularly the stomach. Here it is used metaphorically to refer to all unrestrained sensual, fleshly, bodily desires (cf. 1 Cor. 6:13). The false teachers were condemned because they did not worship God but bowed down to their sensual impulses. It could

be a reference to the Judaizers' emphasis on keeping the Jewish dietary laws. Or if the false teachers in view were Gentiles, it could refer to their unrestrained pursuit of sensual pleasures. Jude described such people as "*ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ*" (**Jude 4**).

4. Their Dishonor

"whose glory is in their shame"

Max Anders: For the Greek such shame would be meaningless rituals for all their gods, rituals often involving sexual practices and prostitution. For the Jew such shame would be in their attention to the "shameful" body parts, namely their preoccupation with circumcision as a requirement for perfection with God. All such pride is misplaced, for it centers on human achievement. For Paul all glory is in Christ and what he has done (**3:3**). Thus Jew and Greek faced a destiny of destruction. Instead of winning the prize and participating in resurrection, they would face eternal hell.

Grant Osborne: "*Glory*" is another term for **boasting**. Paul has spoken three times (**1:26; 2:16; 3:3**) about boasting in Christ, and now he describes its antithesis: **boasting in self-indulgent pleasures**, defined here as "*their shame.*" **First John 1:8, 10** confronts the faulty thinking of hedonists who claimed to be without sin despite their sensual lifestyle. They believed that their salvation was centered in their *gnosis*, or knowledge, meaning that they could live however they wished and their lifestyle would no longer be considered sin. Paul is addressing a similar situation in **Philippians 3:18–19**; these individuals pretended to be right with God, while their actions were completely shameful. Their life was filled with shame, and at the last judgment that shame would be manifested in their indictment from God, immersing them in shame.

5. Their Delight

"who set their minds on earthly things"

G. Walter Hansen: But in his description of the *enemies of the cross*, Paul employs this verb to depict a self-centered, divisive attitude. People with this orientation of life are obsessed with getting earthly things for their own personal gratification. In contrast to pursuing the heavenward call of God in Christ Jesus (**3:14**), they are concentrating on their earthly possessions and pleasures. These people had probably been members of the Christian community in Philippi, but now they "have turned full circle; having abandoned the way of the cross, they have their mind once again set on earthly things."

Gerald Hawthorne: Recent discussion of these verses is summarized in **O'Brien**, 450–58. He finds the key thought to be that of "*boasting*" (common in **2 Corinthians**), and this suggests that the issue between Paul and his opponents was eschatological more than simply moral. They boasted that their powerful presence in the church was based on their "realized eschatology" (the claim that they were "perfect"), and so they were not subject to moral restraints. The attraction of this view is that it links directly to **Phil 3:20–21**.

Tony Merida: Remember the proverb: “*Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm*” (**Prov 13:20** ESV). Don’t become a fool by observing and following the ways of foolish people. Find examples of those who are walking the way of the cross and finding a superior joy in knowing Christ more and more. Whom you follow matters. Follow those who are following Jesus passionately.

III. (:20-21) FOCUS ON FUTURE GLORY

A. Future Glory Seen in Our Heavenly Citizenship

"For our citizenship is in heaven"

Manford George Gutzke: For the believer heaven is his homeland. Although he lives in this world, he does not belong here. Scripture tells him he is here as a stranger and a pilgrim. He is journeying through this world to his eternal home.

G. Walter Hansen: Paul’s eschatological vision establishes the basis for his ethical imperatives. The future shines a bright light on the present to guide our moral choices. From Paul’s eschatological perspective, we are already citizens of the heavenly order of reality. Our citizenship in heaven is not based upon wishful thinking or an imagination of future possibilities, but on the righteousness that comes from God. The righteousness that comes from God means that by God’s judicial decision we belong to the heavenly community.

John MacArthur: It is consistent for believers to have a heavenly focus, because our citizenship is in heaven. *Politeuma (citizenship)* appears only here in the New Testament, though Paul used the related verb in **1:27**. It refers to the place where one has official status, the commonwealth where one’s name is recorded on the register of citizens. Though believers live in this world, they are citizens of heaven. They are members of Christ’s kingdom, which is not of this world (**John 18:36**). Their names are recorded in heaven (**Luke 10:20**; cf. **Phil. 4:3**; **Heb. 12:23**; **Rev. 13:8**; **21:27**); their Savior is there (**Acts 1:11**; **1 Thess. 4:16**); their fellow saints are there (**Heb. 12:23**); their inheritance is there (**1 Peter 1:4**); their reward is there (**Matt. 5:12**); and their treasure is there (**Matt. 6:20**).

Dennis Johnson: **Citizenship** was a significant reality in first-century Philippi. Though located in Macedonia, far from Rome (the capital of the empire), Philippi enjoyed the honor of being a Roman colony (**Ac 16:12**). Philippi’s citizens (though not all its residents, which included slaves and freedmen) were citizens of Rome; they were exempt from imperial taxation and had the right to due process in imperial courts. Though living on earth, Christians have citizenship in a more glorious city: heaven itself. Unlike the ruin awaiting the cross’s enemies, heaven’s unmitigated joy is the destination of the believer’s pilgrimage. Rome extolled its corrupt and ephemeral emperors as savior and lord. But we await the true Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, who now rules in heaven and will return in glory at history’s consummation! Then he will transform our lowly bodies, now subject to pain and decay, conforming them to his

resurrected body, which is immortal, imperishable, and full of glory (**1Co 15:51-57**). Such a destiny sustains our hope and fuels our resolve to strive for the prize that God promises.

B. Future Glory Seen in Our Coming Savior

"from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ"

G. Walter Hansen: The close connection between Roman colonial language and Paul's terminology comes into even sharper focus in the next phrase: *we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ*. In the Roman Empire, Caesar Augustus was acclaimed to be the "savior of the world" because he restored order and peace not only in Italy but also throughout the provinces and regions under his sovereign rule. Paul's use of the term Savior in his letter to Christians in Roman Philippi "sharply opposes Jesus Christ as Lord to the imperial savior." By applying the imperial title Savior to Jesus Christ, "Paul explicitly (and we must assume deliberately) speaks of Jesus in language which echoes, and hence deeply subverts, language in common use among Roman imperial subjects to describe Caesar." Paul redirects the focus of his readers from the savior in Rome, Caesar Augustus, to the Savior in heaven, Jesus Christ the Lord. In contrast to the enemies of the cross who set their minds on earthly powers (**3:18-19**), the Christians in Philippi are called to focus their trust and hope in the Lord and Savior above all earthly powers. The enemies of the cross followed the natural inclination of residents in Philippi to look to the emperor in Rome to exert his sovereign power to solve their problems, satisfy their appetites, rescue them from trouble, and protect them from danger. But the Christian who followed the example of Paul (**3:17**) looked to Jesus Christ to be their Lord and Savior. Such a change of allegiance would inevitably cause them to participate in the sufferings of Christ (**3:10**). Their sufferings will cause them to eagerly await their Savior from heaven who has the power that enables him to bring everything under his control (**3:20-21**). Their hope for the future is not fixed on Caesar, the savior and lord of the Roman Empire, but on Jesus Christ, the heavenly Lord and Savior.

Steven Lawson: We must never forget that each of us who name Jesus as King is a citizen of a higher kingdom. This world is not our home. But as we live out our days here on earth, we must maintain our greater allegiance to our Sovereign Lord, who is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. We must never cave in to the surrounding pressures to squeeze us into the mold of this rebellious world. Instead, we must set our minds on things above, not upon things below. We are heading for the finish line. We are headed for home. That is where we belong, and we must run hard until our King returns, or until he calls us home.

John MacArthur: Believers are not to wait for Christ's return with attitudes of passive resignation or bored disinterest. Instead, they are to eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Believers are not waiting for an event but a Person. *Apekdechomai* (*eagerly wait*) is often used to speak of waiting for Christ's second coming (e.g., **Rom. 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Cor. 1:7; Gal. 5:5; Heb. 9:28**). It describes not only **eagerness**, but also **patience**.

C. Future Glory Seen in Our Resurrection Body

"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."

John Walvoord: Our body needs to be changed by an act of God. This puts attaining perfection beyond the power of any Christian as long as he has his present body. Paul does not dwell here upon the sinfulness of the body, its mortality, or decay, but sums it all up as a body of humiliation suited for this life but not for glory.

G. Walter Hansen: In contrast to the present body of humiliation, the body of the future will be like his glorious body. The line of continuity in our present and future forms of existence is existence in a body. Paul's hope is not to be rescued from his body, but to have his body transformed; he does not contemplate a future out of the body or bodiless human existence. The future of Christians will be as somatic as was the bodily resurrection of Christ.

Gordon Zerbe: What Paul in effect claims is that what it means to have honor or dishonor (humiliation, shame) will be completely inverted on the day of Messiah, when the present age gives way to the age to come. In other words, he invites his listeners to disengage from preoccupations with honor in the present order (cf. **3:3, 19**). We can presume that some of his listeners are already in positions of honor and are wary of losing it for Messiah, hesitant to walk the downward path of divestment. Others are simply preoccupied with the benefits of glories that coincide with advancement through the coveted Roman citizenship as they strive for that. Still others might already be in the position of having lost all things of honor for the sake of Messiah (cf. **3:3–11**). Paul has specifically chosen words to embrace the vulnerability and suffering of the Philippians in their current circumstance.

Richard Melick: One final point occurs in v. **21**. Paul focused on the **physical body** which would be transformed so that it became like Christ's body. Two factors are significant. First, the body is destined for eternity. It should be treated accordingly, and people should not make earthly existence in the body their ultimate concern. The tragedy of the false teachers was, in part, that they did just that. They focused on some aspect of the body that would not last beyond this life. Second, Paul's hope involved a physical transformation. His theology included the fact that redemption culminated in a change of the body itself. The spirit was already in a resurrection with Christ; the body awaited that change. This statement reiterates the hope expressed in v. **10**. The power of the resurrection would be complete when Jesus exerted his power toward the bodies of believers. Paul characterized the body now as one of **humiliation** (*tapein se s*). In so doing, he addressed the limitations Christians have on earth. The body is not suited to heaven unless a transformation takes place. In that sense, it symbolizes a Christian's state of humiliation. Someday, however, it will be a body of glory, fully suited to the needs of heaven and displaying the glory of Christ himself. This was a significant hope,

fully pastoral in motivation. It should have caused the believers to press on until that great day.

R. Kent Hughes: This section heaps encouragement upon encouragement. The Philippians were citizens of the commonwealth of Heaven in the continuing present. This was not a future denouement but ongoing, eternal reality. What an empowering perspective in the midst of the officious Roman unctuousness of the mini-Rome of Philippi. And as citizens of Heaven they didn't await a pale Roman savior, a petty little-caesar, but rather the Savior with a name that is above every other name—Yahweh, Jesus, Messiah—to whom every knee will bow, in Heaven and on earth and under the earth. And this Savior will someday give them bodies like his own glorious body as he subjects everything in the universe to himself. **So stand firm.**

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How is it possible for Christians to put such an emphasis on being "*like-minded*" without a cultic methodology of brainwashing and coercion and restriction of independent thinking? How does God make plain additional truth to believers today who are not as mature as they should be in the areas in which Paul is discussing?
- 2) Who are some spiritual leaders in our own Christian pilgrimage that have proved to be examples worth imitating in various areas of the fruit of the Holy Spirit? Try picking each character trait (*love, joy, peace*, etc.) and identifying one special fellow believer who has been a positive example to you in that area.
- 3) Who are some of the "*enemies of the cross*" in today's world? How do we recognize them as false teachers?
- 4) How much attention do we give to looking forward to that *blessed hope* -- the imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ? How can we improve in this area and encourage one another?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Robert Gromacki: These false preachers were in the ministry for what they could get out of it. Peter warned about elders who would take a pastorage for '*filthy lucre*' (**I Peter 5:2**). Paul likewise cautioned his readers about greedy ministers (**I Tim. 6:3-10**). Their belly became their god in that they served their worldly appetites (**Rom. 16:18**).

One reason why Paul surrendered his right to be supported financially by his converts was to avoid the suspicion that he was only interested in their money (**I Cor. 9:1-18**). In order to show that salvation was a divine gift, he offered his apostolic services at no

charge. Unfortunately, his critics turned this gracious gesture into an argument against his apostleship (**II Cor. 11:7-9; 12:13**). They claimed that God financially prospered all successful preachers (**I Tim. 6:5**). This assertion is ridiculous in that Christ Himself experienced no material rewards in this life.

William Barclay: Philippi was a Roman colony. These Roman colonies were amazing places. Here and there at strategic military centres the Romans set down their colonies. They were not like modern colonies out in the unexplored wilds; they commanded great road centres, and passes across the hills, and routes by which the armies must march. In such places the Romans set down colonies, whose citizens were mostly soldiers who had served their time -- twenty-one years -- and who had been rewarded with full citizenship. Now the great characteristic of these Roman colonies was that, wherever they were, they remained fragments of Rome. No matter where they were, Roman dress was worn; Roman magistrates governed them; the Latin tongue was spoken; Roman justice was administered; Roman morals were observed. Even in the ends of the earth these colonies remained unshakably and unalterably Roman. So Paul says to the Philippians, "Just as the Roman colonists never forget that they belong to Rome, you must never forget that you are citizens of heaven; and your conduct must match your citizenship." Wherever the Christian is, his conduct must prove that he is a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven.

James Boice: In the early days of the Christian Church the doctrine of the last things had three great points of focus: the return of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the body, and the final judgment. And of the three the most significant was Jesus Christ's return. This was the blessed hope of Christians. For this they prayed. And with this thought they comforted one another in the face of sorrow, persecutions, death, and martyrdom.

The expectation of the Lord's personal and imminent return gave joy and power to the early Christians and to the Christian communities...

Unfortunately, in our day belief in the second coming of Jesus Christ has faded into a remote and sometimes irrelevant doctrine in many large segments of the Christian Church. And it is entirely possible that our present lack of courage and lack of joy flow from this attitude.

Alec Motyer: The first point at which they are spiritually degenerating is their *devotion to self-indulgence*. Their appetites and emotions have ceased to be subject to them and have been accorded the place of lordship and worship. They are governed by self-pleasing in bodily matters. Paul does not elaborate. He does not call them fornicators or drug-addicts or particularize their pet sensualities. If he did so we might stand aloof from the warning, if it did not happen to apply to us. The warning is not against particular sins, but against the underlying sin of pandering to self...

Paul's second observation as he diagnoses spiritual degeneration is their reversal of moral standards: *they glory in their shame*. In other words, they exalt things and

practices which they ought to be ashamed of but are not.... There is no dwelling upon this or that reversal of moral values, but upon the thing itself...

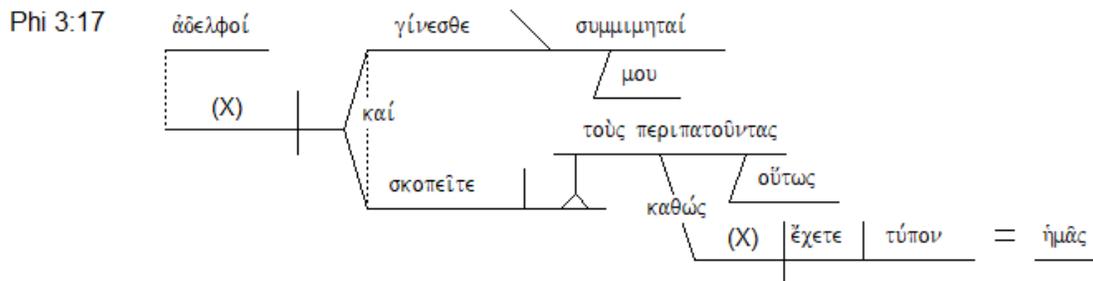
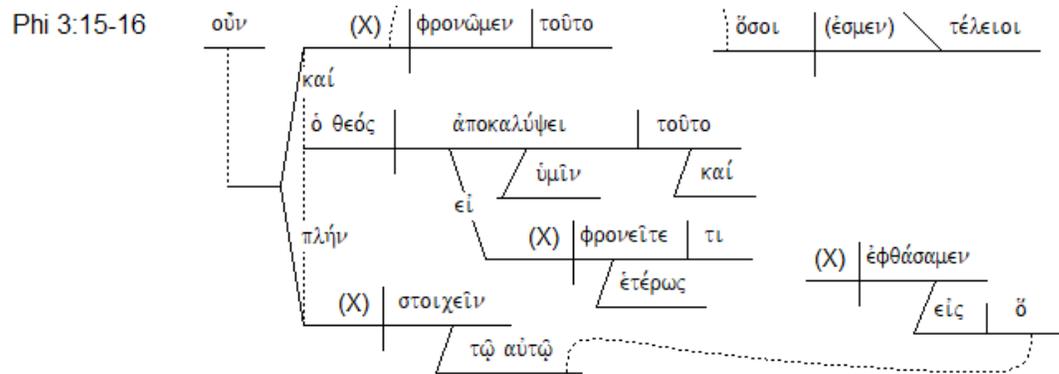
In the final diagnosis the root of the trouble is discovered in their cultivation of an earthly mind: *their minds are set on earthly things*. At the very centre of their being, where their life finds its direction, where attitudes and tendencies are fashioned which subsequently influence decisions and govern likes and dislikes -- at this vital centre the world and its ways are the whole object of attention. The mind is set upon earth...

To continue in sin as if he had never died, to value sinful practices as if he had not exposed and discredited them, to live within earthly horizons as if the Son of God had not opened before our eyes a vision of heaven, and to remain bound by the trammels of the old life when he has achieved new life for sinners -- is not this to oppose all that the cross means? Is it not enmity?

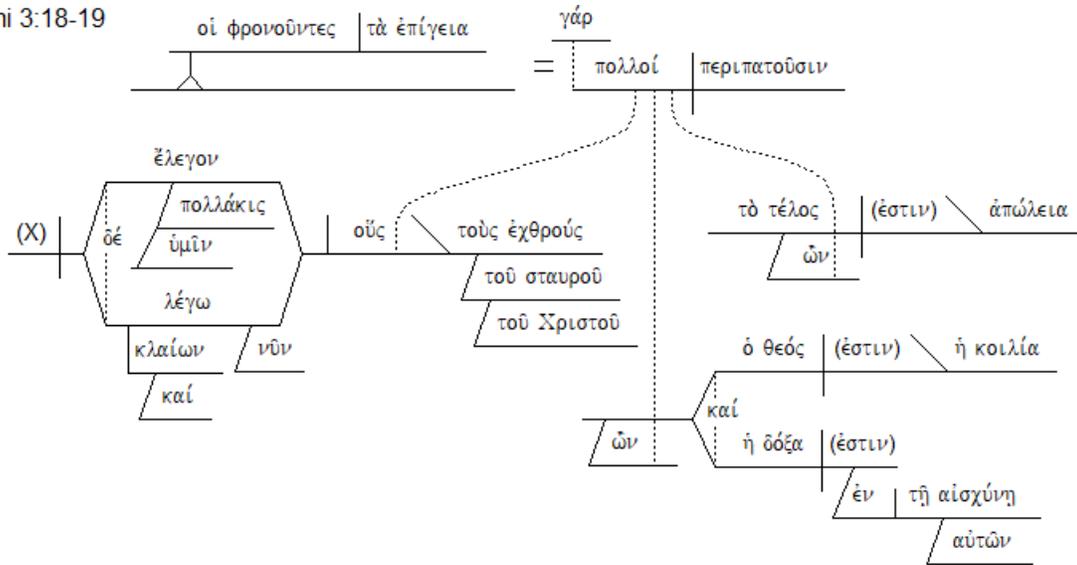
Tony Merida: Let us make every effort by heeding these five challenges for growing in maturity:

1. Humbly acknowledge that you haven't arrived.
2. Passionately pursue greater knowledge of Christ.
3. Never lose the wonder of the gospel.
4. Follow cross-centered, heavenly minded examples.
5. Live in light of your true citizenship.

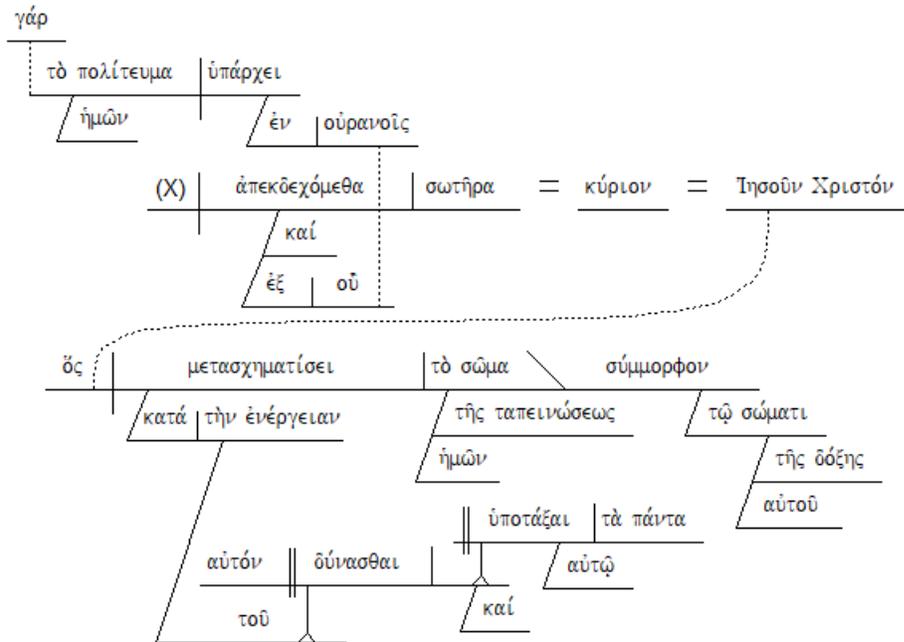
Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:



Phi 3:18-19



Phi 3:20-21



straight” theologically. His meaning is plain enough, since it is clarified by the elaboration in vv. 13–14. Precisely because he has not yet arrived at the goal specified in vv. 10–11, he is “pursuing” it with all his might, which in this first instance is expressed in terms of “*taking hold of*” the very thing for which Christ first “*took hold of*” him. While Paul is indeed pursuing the eschatological goal with all his might, that is only because Christ was there first, pursuing him as it were, and “*apprehending*” him so as to make Paul one of his own. Paul’s point, as always, is that Christ’s work is the prior one, and that all his own effort is simply in response to, and for the sake of, that prior “*apprehension*” of him by “*Christ Jesus my Lord.*”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Have you ever encountered someone who claimed sinless perfection? How do you think they would be able to respond to these verses?
- 2) How do these verses provide a healthy perspective of Christian ambition? We are warned against selfish ambition and looking out for number one, but often the problem is more one of complacency.
- 3) What are some things in your past that sometimes distract you from pressing forward in the Christian race? (could be either positive things leading to complacency or negative things leading to discouragement) How do you focus on the future and running the race God has set before you?
- 4) What is the *prize* Paul talks about in **verse 14**?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Alec Motyer: To be “*perfect*” means to become increasingly like our Lord Jesus Christ, with his righteousness, not only as an inward, spiritual gift but as an outward way of life. His pattern of life is reproduced as we suffer even unto death which alone issues in a resurrection like his. In all this Paul has not yet “*arrived*” but was still on his way. Truly, knowing Christ has brought Paul to a very different self-estimate from that which his Pharisaic upbringing had inculcated (**verse 6**) -- and a more realistic and sobering one at that. He did not “*think of himself more highly than he ought to think*” and this lowly self-estimate was a springboard to progress.

D. A. Carson: Paul is not stagnating... If Paul knows that he is a model to be imitated, he also knows that he is a model in transition to greater glory. If he wants to be followed, he wants to be followed as he himself is still following hard after Jesus (**1 Cor. 11:1**). He is pressing on. He does not think of himself as having already been made perfect.

Warren Wiersbe: So “*forgetting those things which are behind*” does not suggest an impossible feat of mental and psychological gymnastics by which we try to erase the sins and mistakes of the past. It simply means that we break the power of the past by living for the future. We cannot change the past, but we can change the meaning of the past. There were things in Paul's past that could have been weights to hold him back (**1 Tim. 1:12-17**), but they became inspirations to speed him ahead. The events did not change, but his understanding of them changed.

Warren Wiersbe: 5 Essentials to running the race in a way that wins the reward:

- Dissatisfaction -- "*Not as though I had already attained*"
- Devotion -- "*this one thing I do*"
- Direction -- "*forgetting the past*"
- Determination -- "*pressing forward*"
- Discipline -- **vv. 15-16**

James Boice: Someone once said to David Livingstone when he was back in England briefly after having worked for many years in Africa, “Well, Dr. Livingstone, where are you ready to go now?” And Livingstone answered, “I am ready to go anywhere, provided it be forward.”

Homer Kent: Perhaps there were perfectionists in Phillipi who had resisted the Judaizers with their emphasis on works and ceremonies by going to the extreme of claiming to have acquired already the consummation of spiritual blessings. Paul understands clearly that he has a continuing responsibility to pursue the purposes Christ had chosen him for. Spiritual progress is ever the imperative Christians must follow.

TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 4:1-9

TITLE: SHALOM: HOW TO EXPERIENCE PEACE

BIG IDEA:
4 PRESCRIPTIONS FOR PEACE

INTRODUCTION

SHALOM – describes the deep sense of peace and well-being; much more than absence of conflict

Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:1-9

As we read, look for emphasis on phrase “*in the Lord*” – think of that in terms of in union with the Lord ... just like He is the vine and we are the branches; just as His very life flows through us and we do everything in total dependence upon Him
We are going to be looking at a supernatural way in which to live our lives ... no possibility apart from this simple phrase of “*in the Lord*” – don’t want you to leave frustrated or discouraged ... what we are talking about is totally unrealistic and unattainable apart from being plugged into the Lord’s grace and power and mindset and purposes

That is what the message of Philippians is all about:

THE PURSUIT OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST AND HIS POWER PRODUCES A HUMILITY AND UNITY THAT BRINGS GREAT JOY

Need to test ourselves ... any increase in our passion for pursuing the Person of Christ and His Power? Any deepening Humility? Any stronger bonds of Unity? Any Increase in our Joy? – that’s what we are shooting for

Peace has always been popular ... but rarely understood or actively pursued.

How about those annoying bumper stickers: “I’m in favor of World Peace” – what do you think that means .. Do those people even have a clue??

Or how about those interviews in those stereotyped beauty pageants: What is your goal in life asks the inquiring judge? The contestant responds back: “I want to do all I can to promote world peace” – what does that mean??

I find it interesting that people want to jump all the way to the macro level of World Peace without having any insight into personal peace in their own lives ... and what God’s prescription is to experience that type of peace

Wouldn't it be great if we could go to our doctor and explain our symptoms of fear, of anxiety, of stress, of broken relationships ... and he could just prescribe a little Peace Pill

Certainly Peace should be an important goal for all of us

Dads – What kind of a job are you doing to promote a peaceful household;

How do you handle the pressures of work, of finances

Moms – do you find anxiety and stress to be a recurring problem

Maybe there are physical problems or uncertainty contributing to stress

Kids – do you like it when Mom is all stressed out??

The Apostle Paul had concerns about the stress level, the anxiety potential facing the believers at Philippi ... they had external pressures from the Judaizers and enemies of the cross of Christ; they had internal pressures from potential divisiveness over individuals who were having a hard time getting along in the church.

How can any church be effective in fulfilling its mission to reach out to the lost when they can't even get along with one another?

Gerald Hawthorne: Paul customarily brings his letters to a close with a section dealing with practical and personal matters and greetings. So here in Philippians. However, the contrast between the theoretical and the practical, the didactic and the personal application, so prominent in other Pauline letters, is not nearly so pronounced here because (1) it is such a personal letter in all its parts and (2) practical matters have been dealt with throughout. Nevertheless, this final chapter is more pronounced in its practical application and in its attention to personal notices than those that have preceded it. In this it shows itself to be in harmony with the Pauline style and pattern of writing. Thus, as is to be expected, the **imperative mood** is predominant. And as is usual, too, the exhortations given here are given to the entire Christian community. If individual Christians are singled out for special instruction, it is always with the understanding that they are part of the church and that behind them—to support, encourage, guide, and be responsible for them—is the congregation, which with them is equally the recipient of the apostolic commands.

Charles Swindoll: In **Philippians 4**, Paul puts the finishing touches on his symphonic “ode to joy” with a soaring, moving, inspiring conclusion. Some of the most quoted, best-loved passages of Scripture are found in **Philippians 4** —as are a few obscure lines. We also get a sneak peek into the lives of some Philippian Christians and their real-life conflict. In this final chapter Paul argues that there is joy in resting. He includes perhaps the finest passage on contentment in all the Scriptures, and this contentment is the essence of joyful living in the midst of a restless world. Whether the cause of our unrest is disunity (**4:1-3**), anxiety (**4:4-7**), lack of peace (**4:8-9**), discontent (**4:10-13**), or need (**4:14-19**), Paul encourages believers to find Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered joy in resting in God, and God alone. . .

Anger and **anxiety** steal our joy and rob us of **peace**. They force us to focus on the wrong things, drawing us away from a Christlike life. When we turn our attention to

things that are excellent and worthy of praise (4:8) and follow the godly examples before us (4:9), we will truly know and experience what it means to “stand firm in the Lord” (4:1) and will encounter God’s peace.

John MacArthur: In this passage, Paul addresses the vital question of how believers can be **spiritually stable**. *Steko* (*stand firm*) is the main verb of **verses 1–9**. It is an imperative, a command with almost a military ring to it. Like soldiers in the front line, believers are commanded to hold their position while under attack (cf. **Eph. 6:11, 13, 14**). They are not to collapse under persecution and compromise, to fail under testing and complain, or to yield to temptation and sin.

The passage opens with the transitional word therefore, which indicates that what Paul is about to write builds on what he has just written. The preceding passage (3:12–21) described the believer’s pursuit of Christlikeness, which is both the goal in this life and the prize in the next life.

The Lord Jesus Christ provides the perfect example of firmness for us who await our perfection. He faced persecution, but never compromised; He “*endured . . . hostility by sinners against Himself*” without wavering (**Heb. 12:3**). He was “*tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin*” (4:15). Facing a more severe trial than any believer will ever undergo, “*Jesus . . . for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*” (**Heb. 12:2**). Jesus Christ is the perfect model of **standing firm** that believers are to follow.

Gordon Zerbe: Outline

I. Reconciliation of Euodia and Syntyche, 4:2–3

II. Consolation and Encouragement in Suffering, 4:4–7

- 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord Always
- 4:5a Clemency toward All People
- 4:5b Assurance: The Lord Is Near
- 4:6 No Anxiety, Dedication to Prayer with Thanksgiving
- 4:7 Assurance: The Peace of God Will Guard Hearts and Minds

III. Ethical Discernment and Models, 4:8–9

- 4:8 Auditing Civic Virtues and Public Commendations
- 4:9a Practicing in Accordance with Paul’s Teaching and Modeling
- 4:9b Assurance: The God of Peace Will Be with You

So Paul starts off in vs.1-3 with his **first Prescription for Peace**

I. (:1-3) HOW TO EXPERIENCE PEACE IN OUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH

- Not talking about philosophical differences in church strategy and mission;
- Doesn’t seem to be talking about doctrinal issues . . . although many of the same principles will apply (otherwise Paul would apply the truth)

- Talking about 2 believers who are having trouble getting along with one another
Maybe they can't even stand one another ...

John MacArthur: We're not talking about doctrinal error here, we're talking about two women who couldn't get along with each other, had picked sides, caused a conflict and lined up people on both sides against each other. They were prominent women and they were obviously beloved women who were having an impact.

Be thinking about how you get along with every other person here ... Maybe there is someone that really rubs you the wrong way ... If it's me then I beg you to especially listen very closely!

What's the Solution?

REQUIRES OUR TOTAL COMMITMENT TO STICK TOGETHER IN THE LORD AS WE STRIVE TOGETHER FOR THE FAITH OF THE GOSPEL

Homer Kent: This verse is another of Paul's subtle transitions, so skillfully blended as to make it difficult to decide whether it should be placed with what precedes or what follows. A good transition, however, fits both segments.

George Hunsinger: This verse is a kind of hinge between what came before and what comes next. The appeal to remain "*steadfast*" connects it to the previous theme of competing loyalties. It pertains to duties in the world ("citizenship") more than to bonds in the community ("fellowship")—more to withstanding external pressures than to healing internal conflicts and divisions (although both are of course involved).

A. Encouragement to Stand Firm in the Lord

William Barclay: The word which Paul uses for *stand fast* (*stekete*) is the word which would be used for a soldier standing fast in the shock of battle, with the enemy surging down upon him.

1. Based on Our Common Pursuit

pressing forward together to know Christ
do we have a passion for knowing Christ or more
interested in our own goals and agenda
"Therefore" – looking back to end of Chap 3
are we truly living for eternity??
are we living like citizens of heaven??

If we allow other pursuits to distract us we will no longer be plowing the same field together

2. Based on our Preciousness (to the Apostle Paul and hopefully to one another) – expressions of intimacy

- “*beloved brethren*” – closer than unsaved blood relatives; we actually have more in common = eternity!
- “*whom I long to see*” – vs. can’t stand to spend time with you know who that is in your life
- “*my joy and crown*” –
cf. **1 Thess. 2:19** “*For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?*”
Paul did not want to see his reward compromised

How Precious are the fellow believers to you?

Alec Motyer: We have a long way to go before we are feeling the emotions of Christ towards each other as Paul was -- we who so easily dismiss from our reckoning those whom God has accepted and reconciled, and who so lightly offend those for whom Christ died. If we felt for each other as Paul did, we should soon recognize the scandal of division.

Some people just have a great big heart ... said to say that has not been one of my strengths ... I need to pray “*God, enlarge my heart*” ... for a lot of reasons.

I think of 2 people (You need to think of your own examples)

- **Dr. Fullerton** – aged man that led our college fellowship at Princeton
“*Dear children*” . . . “*beloved children*” -- he could say that with a full heart
- a missionary I come back to in my thinking a lot ... you may have heard me make reference to him ... I wish we could have him visit one day and present the incredible way God has used him ... **Abraham Thomas** – just had that smile that made you warm all over and that pastoral heart where you knew that he valued you as one of his own dear children.

B. Exhortation to Live in Harmony in the Lord

Think of how they used to fight when hand-to-hand combat was the main tactic. They would form ranks and try to stand firm and not be driven back by the attacks of the enemy. It would only take one weak spot for the attackers to break through and compromise your position.

“*I urge Euodia*”

How do you think these genuine believers felt when names read in public? What a legacy to leave for the future

“*I urge Syntyche*”

Grant Osborne: The names “*Euodia*” and “*Syntyche*” mean, respectively, “*prosperity*” and “*lucky,*” and it is ironic that success and luck were at war with one another here. These were evidently two of the leading women in a church founded by a woman,

Lydia, the patron of the church in Philippi (**Acts 16:13–15**). Paul repeats the verb “*plead with*” for each woman, showing that he is addressing them separately and refusing to take sides. He was concerned not with the question of who was in the right, but rather with the need for reconciliation and unity.

“*to live in harmony in the Lord*” – what a mouthful ... saying a lot there

Mindset of Christ is what is most important – **Phil. 2**

What was the source or nature of their conflict?? Paul deliberately does not tell us
Key = letting their personal rights get in the way of that path of humility and love that would prove most productive for *striving together for the faith of the gospel*.

George Hunsinger: Fellowship has to be restored so that **heavenly citizenship** can be sustained. Having the same mind “*in the Lord*” (*en kyriō*) (**4:2**) is essential to standing fast “*in the Lord*” (*en kyriō*) (**4:1**).

C. Plea for Assistance – from mysterious “*true comrade*” -- could be Luke whom Paul left in Philippi? Timothy?? Proper name?? Unknown??
“*Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle*”

Importance of the **role of women** in the progress of the gospel

- in Paul’s day
- in our day

Think of how often the Apostle Paul is criticized for what God spoke thru him about the differing roles of men and women in the church make no mistake: the apostle Paul elevated the position of women and treated them as equals and co-laborers with himself in the gospel ... this passage is probably the best proof text for that.

Importance of **Role of Peacemaker** – “*blessed be the peacemakers*”

Ministry of reconciling believers to one another – **2 Cor. 5:18-21**

Excellent here ... read in context ... speaking of reconciling believers to believers.

How receptive are we to help that is offered by others?? We tend to want to assert our independence ... to claim that nothing is wrong ... that we can handle it ... what is our first reaction when someone offers to help us???

D. Final Encouragement

1. Based on Our History of Partnership in the Gospel

- Think of the comradery of sports teams ..
the greater the degree of suffering and discipline ... the more you value that comradery
- cf. how it is with those who have fought together in a war – common cause, common danger;

2. Based on Our Common and Guaranteed Final Destination
“whose names are in the book of life”

(Rev 3:5; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19; Luke 10:20; Heb. 12:23)

What a tremendous promise and anchor for our souls ... we should never be embarrassed by the doctrine of God’s sovereignty with respect to our salvation; about the eternal security we enjoy because God has elected us before we were conceived and written our names in the precious **book of life** before the foundation of the world.

- Do you think everyone’s names are written in the book of life??
- Do you think we can remove our names once God has written them there?

We are going to be living together in heaven for all eternity ...let’s start living together right now

John Walvoord: A common faith in Christ and a common desire to serve Him do not necessarily adjust personal differences and do not always unite everyone in a course of action. The road to smoothing out these differences is found when Christians achieve “*the same mind in the Lord.*” When this is realized, differences in minor details of doctrine and in practical matters can be adjusted. But too often human pride, the stubbornness of the flesh, and personal ambition for prominence get in the way. Paul's exhortation emphasizes that Christians who are really yielded to the Lord should be able to resolve their differences. Even though they may not all be of precisely the same opinion, they should be able to find a meeting place in the mind of the Lord.

II. (:4-5) HOW TO EXPERIENCE PEACE IN ALL OUR RELATIONSHIPS

A. PREREQUISITE – Requires Our Total Commitment to Always Rejoice in the Lord

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!”

Must have this fundamental tone to your life or you will be thrown off course by:

- outward circumstances
- how others treat you

Another great transition verse ... goes with both sections

Do you know some believers that remind you of prunes or lemons?? all shriveled up with negativism and gloom and doom;

But not enough to have “The Power of Positive Thinking”

not talking just about taking a Dale Carnegie class here although I have taken my share for work and find a lot of principles borrowed from the pages of Scripture

But it does you no good to borrow **the principles** if you don’t tap into **the power!!!**

God did not design us to live on an emotional roller coaster with extreme highs and lows depending on our circumstances and how others treat us

He designed for us to recognize our supreme role as His creatures = that of offering up praise and rejoicing for His name sake for Who He is = The Alpha and Omega who never changes; and what He has done, is doing and will do for us

Worship – that is what we have been called to devote ourselves to

God seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth

this spirit of rejoicing requires a commitment on the part of our will; we don't always just wake up and feel like doing it

Presbyterian inhibited upbringing – we aren't good at outwardly expressing the emotional side of this rejoicing – hurts us – because rejoicing has a snowballing cyclical effect just like depression does

Look at how easy I find it is to emotionally express myself while watching a Ravens game ... amazing phenomena ... over something so empty of eternal significance

Different cultures vary greatly in their capacity here

Homer Kent: [One might ask: How can we rejoice in view of our difficulties?] -- So he repeats the command, because in all the vicissitudes of the Christian life, whether in . . . personality clashes among believers, persecution from the world, or threat of imminent death—all of which Paul himself was experiencing at this very time – the Christian is to maintain a spirit of joy in the Lord. He is not immune to sorrow nor should he be insensitive to the troubles of others; yet he should count the will of God his highest joy and so be capable of knowing inner peace and joy in every circumstance.

B. GRACIOUSNESS – Requires Our Total Commitment to Put Up with a Lot

“Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.”

Greek word can be translated:

"fairmindedness"

"gentleness"

"readiness to forgive"

"graciousness"

"sweet reasonableness"

John MacArthur: *Epieikes* (*gentle spirit*) has a richer meaning than any single English word can convey. Hence, commentators and Bible versions vary widely in how they render it. Sweet reasonableness, generosity, goodwill, friendliness, magnanimity, charity toward the faults of others, mercy toward the failures of others, indulgence of the failures of others, leniency, bigheartedness, moderation, forbearance, and gentleness

are some of the attempts to capture the rich meaning of *epieikes*. Perhaps the best corresponding English word is **graciousness**—the graciousness of humility; the humble graciousness that produces the patience to endure injustice, disgrace, and mistreatment without retaliation, bitterness, or vengeance. It is **contentment**.

We can't pick or choose those people that we are going to put up with ...

Isn't it curious how the Lord gives us close relatives that really test us in this area.

Need to overlook irritations; not be overly sensitive; don't make people walk on pins and needles when around you.

- such conduct has value in terms of giving us peaceful relationships with others
- such conduct has value in terms of giving us a good testimony before others

Steve Zeisler: Now if you want to check whether or not you are a gentle, forbearing person, see if your forbearance works with everybody, not just certain people. Anybody can be gentle with nice people, but the Word of God to us is to "*let your forbearing spirit be known to all*"-- everybody, hard people, intimidating people, pushy people. That is how to check whether or not we are really trusting in the nearness and the strength of Christ. This gentleness is also part of the peace we have with God. Harmony between brothers and sisters in the family of God, joy in everything, and gentleness as we face all the things the world throws at us are all evident in people who receive God's peace.

Robert Gromacki: The term '*moderation*' (*epieikes*) means gentleness, reasonableness, magnanimity, forbearance, good will, and a friendly disposition. A magnanimous person bears trouble calmly and rejects revengeful meanness.

C. ACCOUNTABILITY – Requires Our Consciousness of the Nearness of the Lord

- Possibly: His presence close to us now ??
 - provides comfort and encouragement and the patience and perseverance we need
 - omnipresence: watching how we are conducting ourselves right now
- More likely eschatological sense: His soon return?? – cf. **3:20-21**
Parousia trials are just for a short time; almost over final accountability before the judge

James 5:7-9 – parallel passage

Paul not asking them to do the impossible. Patience is possible because the return of the Lord is at hand

Grant Osborne: Frequently in the New Testament, a passage of admonition segues into a reminder that the end is coming soon (for example, **Rom 13:12; 1 Cor 16:22; Heb 10:25, 37; Jas 5:8; 1 Pet 4:7**). This is both a promise and a warning—a promise that our future glory will be worth our present hardship and a warning that God expects us to live in light of Christ's return and will hold us accountable for how we live. God's

people are to be loving; as such, we do our part to rescue the perishing and usher in God's final kingdom.

III. (:6-7) HOW TO EXPERIENCE PEACE IN OUR HEART

A. (:6a) Formula for Certain Defeat = Giving in to Anxiety

"Be anxious for nothing"

Greek word = "to be pulled in different directions" – our hopes pull us in one direction and our fears in another and we are pulled apart

We excuse ourselves: I just can't help it ... it is a Panic Attack I'm defeated before I even had a chance to put up a struggle ... Overlooking the importance of preparation ... look at how important **prayer** is as the safeguard to protect us before the temptation of fear or anxiety strikes

(Don't view the Starting Point of the conflict as that moment when you first sense the temptation and the pressure to worry or fear; the Starting Point is that quiet time where you do the necessary preparation of prayer and praise before the Lord)

Cf. **Performance Anxiety** – Humility is the key here ... why do we respond one way before a certain type of person and another way before someone we view as very important?? Remember we are living in the presence of God ... that's the only one we need to please ...

Moises Silva: We **worry** when we imagine the future in a terrible way. **John Piper** says, "Anxiety seems to be an intense desire for something, accompanied by a fear of the consequences of not receiving it" ("Is There Good Anxiety?"). This desire normally involves something we really value, like money or relationships. Worry involves imagining the future in a worst-case scenario and then freaking out about it. We can freak out about how we think our kids will turn out, how we will pay the rent next year, who we will marry, and so on. . .

Anxiety is a joy killer. Anxiety will also make you self-absorbed. When you're consumed with your worries, you will be less likely to serve others wholeheartedly. Worry distracts you and keeps you from mission. It also robs you of peace, which Paul says will fill the hearts of praying believers. All of these results are spiritual issues. There may also be physical results that display the signs of anxiety. Here are just a handful of them: unusual mood swings, irritability, anger, sweating, rapid heartbeat, chest pain, exhaustion, nervous twitching, decreased concentration and memory, nausea, shortness of breath, hair loss, weight gain or loss, panic, indecisiveness, canker sores, muscle tension, insomnia, self-medicating, high blood pressure, eating comfort foods, and reckless driving.

Steven Lawson: "*Worry*" comes from an old English word meaning "*to strangle*." This is a good image, because stress chokes our inner life (and sometimes the way we feel physically), robbing us of peace. Worry squeezes the life out of the heart, strangling all enjoyment of life. To be anxious is to be a worrier, to be fearful and distressed; and

such anxiety compromises our faith in the sovereign purposes of God. And in that way, anxiety robs us of our joy.

B. (:6b) Formula for Certain Victory = Life of Inner Peace

1. Transfer of Responsibility = Cast all your cares upon God
“let your requests be made known to God”

Key point: we want to pray to God for help while still holding on to the responsibility of trying to control all things – not possible!

Isn't it nice we have a father who is approachable ... who wants to give us good things

2. Tools

- a. *“by prayer”* – instead of worrying; emphasis on worship and devotion
- b. *“and supplication”* crying out for your personal needs; pleading the promises of God

3. Tone = *“with thanksgiving”*

Have we misplaced the tone of thanksgiving and rejoicing which Paul continually stresses as essential for effective living and praying?

R. Kent Hughes: The corollary to not worrying is to take up Paul's following command to pray: *“but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God”* (v. 6b). Pagan prayers are destitute of thanksgiving (cf. **Romans 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:2**), whereas truly Christian prayer breathes thanksgiving because thankfulness is the posture of grace. Thus, at the root of our prayers must be thanksgiving for what God has done for us in Christ through the gospel. In fact, every activity is to be freighted with thanksgiving. *“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him”* (**Colossians 3:17**). All our requests are to be made known to God and adorned with lavish praise to God for the innumerable hues and shapes of his grace.

C. (:7) Assurance of Victory When We Depend on the Amazing Resources of God

1. Key Resource here = *“the peace of God”*

2. Supernatural Quality and Quantity of God's Amazing Resources
“which surpasses all comprehension” (**Eph. 3:20**)

3. Active nature of God's Peace

“shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”

Military metaphor: The Philippians, living in a garrison town, would be familiar with the sight of the Roman sentry, maintaining his watch.

IV. (:8-9) ALL PEACE ULTIMATELY DERIVES FROM THE GOD OF PEACE

But that doesn't mean we can just sit back and wait for God to make it happen. Talking about that balance between the sovereignty of God and man's responsibility.

2 KEYS TO TAPPING INTO GOD'S GRACE AND FAVOR

A. (:8) Thinking Right

Satan wages a constant battle for control of our minds

Lots of enemies and temptations that would prevent us from Thinking Right:

- Internet temptations – I think I'll just pull up one picture of this particular actress; just curious
- TV – using that channel switcher to just linger on that one station a split second too long
- no place for gossip or giving a bad report of someone
- no place for putting others down

1. Appropriate Food for Thought

- “*whatever is true*” valid, reliable, honest opposite of false
- “*whatever is honorable*” – noble , worthy of respect – cf. elders
- “*whatever is right*” – upright or just; conformable to God's standards
- “*whatever is pure*” – moral purity
- “*whatever is lovely*” – pleasing, agreeable, amiable
- “*whatever is of good repute*” -- admirable

What have you been munching on lately?

2 Cor. 10:5 “*taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*”

Max Anders: **Right thinking** is the first step toward righteous living. What is right thinking? It is thinking devoted to life's higher goods and virtues. Thus Paul picked up a practice from secular writers of his day and listed a **catalog of virtues** that should occupy the mind. Such virtues are not limited to the Christian community but are recognized even by pagan cultures.

True is that which corresponds to reality. Anxiety comes when false ideas and unreal circumstances occupy the mind instead of truth. Ultimately, thinking on the truth is thinking on Jesus, who is the truth (**John 14:6; Eph. 4:21**). **Noble** refers to lofty, majestic, awesome things, things that lift the mind above the world's dirt and scandal. **Right** refers to that which is fair to all parties involved, that which fulfills all obligations and debts. Thinking right thoughts steers one away from quarrels and dissensions to think of the needs and rights of the other party. **Pure** casts its net of meaning over all of life from sexual acts to noble thoughts to moral and ritual readiness for worship. Thinking on the pure leads one away from sin and shame and toward God and worship. **Lovely** is a rare word referring to things that attract, please, and win other people's admiration and affection. Such thoughts bring people together in peace rather

than separating them in fighting and feuding. **Admirable** is something worthy of praise or approval, that which deserves a good reputation. Pondering ways to protect one's moral and spiritual image in the community leads away from worries about circumstances and possessions that project a different image to the community and which thinking cannot change. The catalog of virtues Paul sums up in two words: **excellent** and **praiseworthy**. The first encompasses what is best in every area of life, the philosophical good for which every person should strive. Here it is especially the ethical best a person can achieve. The second term refers to that which deserves human praise.

The catalog of virtues thus reflects the best life a person can live and the best reputation a person can thereby achieve in the community.

2. Highest Possible Standard

“if there is any excellence”

“and if anything worthy of praise”

3. Active Focus

“let your mind dwell on these things”

Alec Motyer: The verb *think about* (*logizomai*) means to ponder, to give proper weight and value to, and to allow the resultant appraisal to influence the way life is to be lived.

B. (:9) Acting Right

1. Actions Worth Imitating

“the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me”

R.P. Martin: Before the composition of the New Testament and its acceptance as authoritative Scripture, “the tradition,” as a standard of Christian belief and behaviour, was embodied in the teaching and example of those persons in whose lives the authority and ethical practice of the Lord was to be found. Paul refers to such “traditions” (or “commands” or “ordinances”) in a number of places (cf. **1 Cor. xi. 2, xv. 1 ff.; Gal. i. 9; Col. ii. 6; 1 Thes. iv. 1,2; 2 Thes. ii. 15**). Before they were committed to writing and later formed the corpus of New Testament Scripture they were *learned, received, heard, seen* in the person of the apostles.

2. Practice Makes Perfect (but only when you are practicing the right things)

“practice these things”

Dwight Pentecost: Maturity in the Christian life is not measured by what a man knows but by what he does. Let that be indelibly impressed upon your mind. **Hebrews 5:12-14** gives us God's definition of maturity. **Maturity is the ability to use the Word so as to determine the course of one's conduct.**

William Barclay: To Paul, God is the *God of peace*. This, in fact, is his favorite title for God (**Romans 16:20; I Corinthians 14:3; I Thessalonians 5:23**). To a Jew peace was

never merely a negative thing; it was never merely the absence of trouble; peace was everything which makes for a man's highest good. Only in the friendship of God can a man find life as life was meant to be. But also to a Jew this peace issued specially in right relationships. It is only by the grace of God that we can enter into a right relationship with God and with our fellow men. The God of peace is the God who is able to make life what it was meant to be by enabling us to enter into fellowship with himself and fellowship with our fellow men.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What contribution does this passage make to the discussion of the role of women in the church and in various forms of ministry? What questions does the passage raise?
- 2) How does the depth of our emotional affinity, the level of our intimacy of love and concern for our fellow believers compare to how Paul regarded the believers at Philippi? How will such love help to resolve disagreements and problems with dissension in the church? (cf. movie title -- *Terms of Endearment* -- how many such terms can you find in **verse 1**?)
- 3) What types of circumstances or people tend to make us anxious? How much do we struggle with worry in our life? How can we be more effective in our prayers in this regard? What are some of our personal barriers to peace that we need the power of God to overcome?
- 4) Have we misplaced the tone of rejoicing and thanksgiving which Paul continually stresses as essential for effective living and praying? Are we too busy to spend time praising the Lord and reflecting on His character (His goodness, wisdom, power ...) and His deeds on our behalf?
- 5) If we ran our choice of television shows, movies, and books through the grid of this criteria for right thinking, would we need to make some changes in what we are allowing to fill our mind? Are we willing to make those changes? Do we really believe that there is a direct connection to God's favor?
- 6) How does the fact that God knows our every thought impact our daily living? Are we only focused on those things that are clearly marked by *excellence* and *worthy of praise*? Do we realize that Satan is conducting a war to try to make inroads into our thinking?
- 7) Do we have some good role models to emulate? Are we digging into the Scriptures to recover the model of the apostolic life with the goal towards imitating it? Do we place a greater value on practicing the truth than on knowing the truth?

8) When have we experienced in a special way "*the God of peace*" being with us to show us His favor and protect us?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

F. F. Bruce: Who is singled out as Paul's *faithful partner*, or “*true yokefellow*”? Plainly it was someone whom it was not necessary to name: everyone, including the person so addressed, would know who was intended.

One very attractive suggestion is that Luke was the person so addressed. If Luke was the author of Acts, or at any rate of the 'we' narrative, it can be inferred that he was in Philippi for part or most of the time between the first evangelization of the city and Paul's brief visit to it before setting out on his last journey to Jerusalem (cf. **Acts 16:17** with **20:5**). If, then, this part of the letter falls within that period (as its affinities with **2 Corinthians** might suggest), Luke might well be the *faithful partner*. Otherwise, the partner's identity must be a matter of even more random speculation.

Robert Mounce: *Syzygos* is best understood as a proper name taken by some convert at baptism.

John Walvoord: In the opening verses of **chapter 4**, the digression from is concluding remarks which began in **3:1** is brought to an end and he resumes the exhortation to rejoice in **verse 4**, first introduced in **3:1**. In the digression he had poured out his heart in warning his beloved brethren in Philippi against Judaistic teachers and against confidence in the flesh, and had extolled the superiority of righteousness by faith, the resurrection power of Jesus Christ, and the need for experiencing spiritual maturity. Now the climax to this exhortation is presented and again Paul declares his love for the Philippians.

Gathering in all the preceding exhortation and the reminder of glory ahead in the word *therefore*.

R. P. Martin: Re **vs. 7** -- Paul uses a military metaphor in describing the activity of God's peace, which is almost personified. *Shall keep, phrouresei*, is better expressed in the military language of “*shall keep guard over*” (cf. **2 Cor. xi. 32** for the verb in this sense). The Philippians, living in a garrison town, would be familiar with the sight of the Roman sentry, maintaining his watch. Likewise, comments the apostle, God's peace will garrison and protect *your hearts and minds*. **Bunyan's** use of this picture in the appointment and patrol of Mr. God's-Peace in the town of Mansoul should be read in conjunction with this verse. “Nothing was to be found but harmony, happiness, joy and health” so long as Mr. God's-Peace maintained his office. But when Prince Emmanuel was grieved away from the town, he laid down his commission and departed also. It is a salutary reminder that we enjoy God's gift only through ... our obedience to Him and submission to his authority.

Warren Wiersbe: If anybody had an excuse for worrying, it was the Apostle Paul. His beloved Christian friends at Philippi were disagreeing with one another, and he was not there to help them... Added to these burdens was the possibility of his own death! ...

What is worry? The Greek word translated "*anxious*" (*careful*) in **verse 6** means "to be pulled in different directions." Our hopes pull us in one direction; our fears pull us the opposite direction; and we are pulled apart! . . .

From the spiritual point of view, worry is wrong thinking (the mind) and wrong feeling (the heart) about circumstances, people, and things. Worry is the greatest thief of joy. It is not enough for us, however, to tell ourselves to "quit worrying," because that will never capture the thief. Worry is an "inside job," and it takes more than good intentions to get the victory. The antidote to worry is the secure mind ... we must meet the conditions that God has laid down. There are three: right praying (**vv. 6-7**), right thinking (**v. 8**), and right living (**v. 9**).

David Roper: When I think of forbearing men, two illustrations come to mind from the Old Testament. The first is Abraham. Abraham was from Ur of the Chaldees in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, an area where the people were idol worshipers with little knowledge of the true God. He was called by God over into the land of Canaan. When he arrived there the Lord gave him the promise of the entire land. It was all to be his. The dimensions of the land are described for us in the book of Genesis - from beyond Mt. Hermon in the north all the way south to the land of Egypt, from the Mediterranean Sea east to the Tigris-Euphrates Valley. God gave him the title deed - the promise which was conditioned on the faithfulness of God.

As the story unfolds you come to the episode when Lot's herdsmen came in conflict with Abraham's herdsmen as their flocks began to multiply. Lot, though he was Abraham's nephew, was a source of strife in the family. So Abraham confronted Lot with the situation. Now, Abraham could have insisted that Lot give him the land, that Lot move his flocks someplace else, because the land was Abraham's. But he didn't do it. He let Lot choose. Lot chose the Valley of Sidon, the area around Sodom and Gomorrah. And the rest of his life is a story of steady decline in the quality of that life. At the very end you find him living in a cave outside the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. He had lost his wealth. He had, for all practical purposes, lost his family - his daughters were hopelessly corrupted by their life in Sodom. He had nothing to show for his choice.

On the other hand Abraham, who let God choose for him, had the whole land. God took him up on a mountain and said, "Abraham, look to the north and the south and the east and the west as far as your eye can see - that is your land." God multiplied his flocks and his family and gave him thousands upon thousands of descendants, because Abraham let God make the choice for him. He let God fight his battles.

I think also of Moses. Moses is described in the Old Testament as the meekest man whoever lived, i.e., he did not insist on his own rights, he didn't defend himself. Whenever conflict would develop in the nation of Israel, whenever he was opposed in his leadership, Moses would go to a little tent he kept off to the side, and he would get on his knees and say, "Lord, what shall I do?" And the Lord would fight his battles for him. Moses never had to defend himself. He never had to insist that he was the leader. He let God fight his battles.

That is forbearance. Paul says, "Let your forbearance be known to all men because the Lord is at hand. The Lord will fight your battles." We don't have to defend ourselves. We may have to defend the rights of others, and we may have to stand up for a principle which is at stake, but where our own rights are all that is at stake we don't need to defend ourselves. God will fight for us. He is at hand.

Robert Gromacki: Faith must lead to constructive action. Negative anxiety must be replaced by positive habits (cf. **Eph. 4:25, 28-29**). After praying, a believer must get involved in right thinking and doing. The two imperatives ("*think*" and "*do*") give these two apostolic directives.... cf. popular axiom:

Sow a thought, reap an action.
Sow an action, reap a habit.
Sow a habit, reap a character.
Sow a character, reap a destiny.

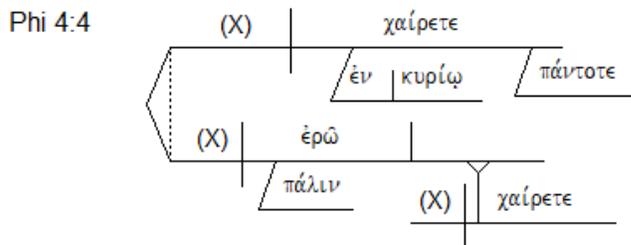
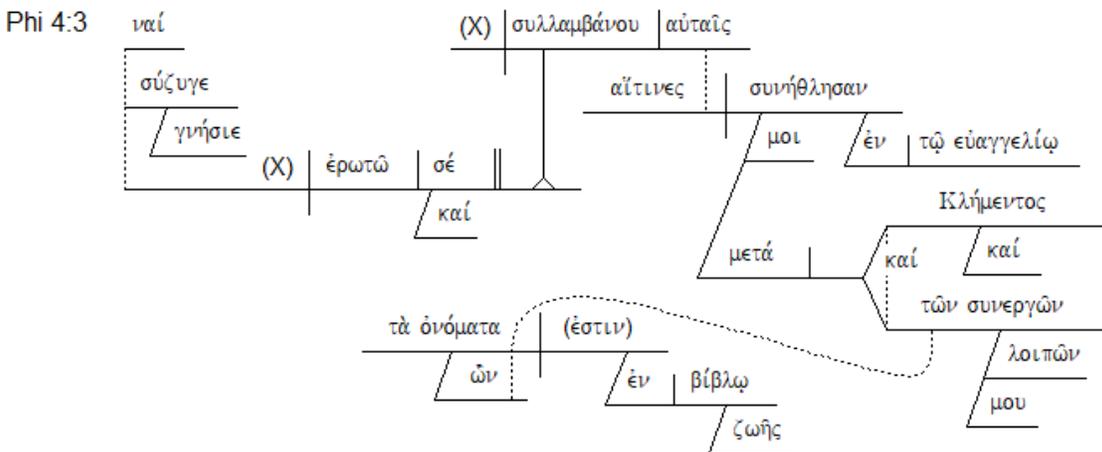
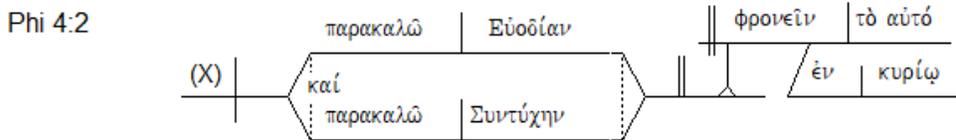
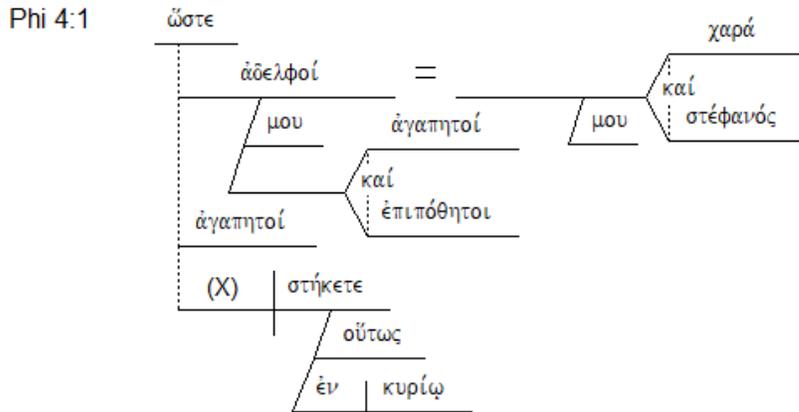
D. A. Carson: Paul is returning to a theme that was very strong in the previous chapter: we are to emulate worthy Christian leaders. In this context, that theme is now applied to the discipline of the mind. We are to emulate Christian leaders who have clearly disciplined their minds. Of course, we have no access to the mind and thoughts of another except through what that mind says and does. But that is the point. Paul is saying, in effect: What was on my mind when I was with you? What did I talk about? What did I read? What was the burden of my conversation? What did I value? What did I do to improve my mind?

James Boice: The virtues mentioned here are pagan virtues. These words do not occur in the great lists of Christian virtues, list that include love, joy, peace, long-suffering, and so on. On the whole they are taken from Greek ethics and from the writings of the Greek philosophers. What does this mean? It means that in using them Paul is actually sanctifying, as it were, the generally accepted virtues of pagan morality. And he is saying that although the pursuit of the best things by Christians will necessarily mean the pursuit of fellowship with God, pursuit of the will of God, pursuit of all means to advance the claims of the Gospel, and other spiritual things also, it will not mean the exclusion of the best values that the world has to offer. The things that are acknowledged to be honorable by the best men everywhere are also worthy to be cultivated by Christians. Consequently, a Christian can love all that is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, wherever he finds it. He can rejoice in the best of art and good literature. He can thrill to great music. He can thrive on beautiful architecture. And he should do it.

R. P. Martin: The use of **ethical lists** was a feature of Stoic religion, and lists of vices and virtues are also found in the book of Wisdom and in Philo. It is, however, more important to note that all the terms used here, except the word translated *good report*, are found in the LXX ... While it is true that, according to **Dibelius**, these ethical expressions are “terms of popular moral philosophy” current in Paul's day, the LXX influence ought to be reckoned with as a strong factor guiding the apostle's thought.

Dwight Pentecost: The greatest area of sin in the believer's life is not the area of actions but the area of thought. There is a whole classification of sins that we would have to call sins of the mind. What was the first sin of Lucifer? It was pride. What is that? A sin of the mind. What is lust? A sin of the mind. What is covetousness? A sin of the mind. Greed? A sin of the mind. Suspicion? A sin of the mind. Discouragement? A sin of the mind. We could go on and on. Those sins are more real to the child of God than such sins as adultery and murder and theft. That is a testimony to the fact there is a warfare going on. Satan is attacking the mind. Therefore this word of the Apostle Paul concerning the use we make of our minds is so relevant to us today: meditate, ruminare, dwell on these things.

Leedy Greek NT Diagrams:

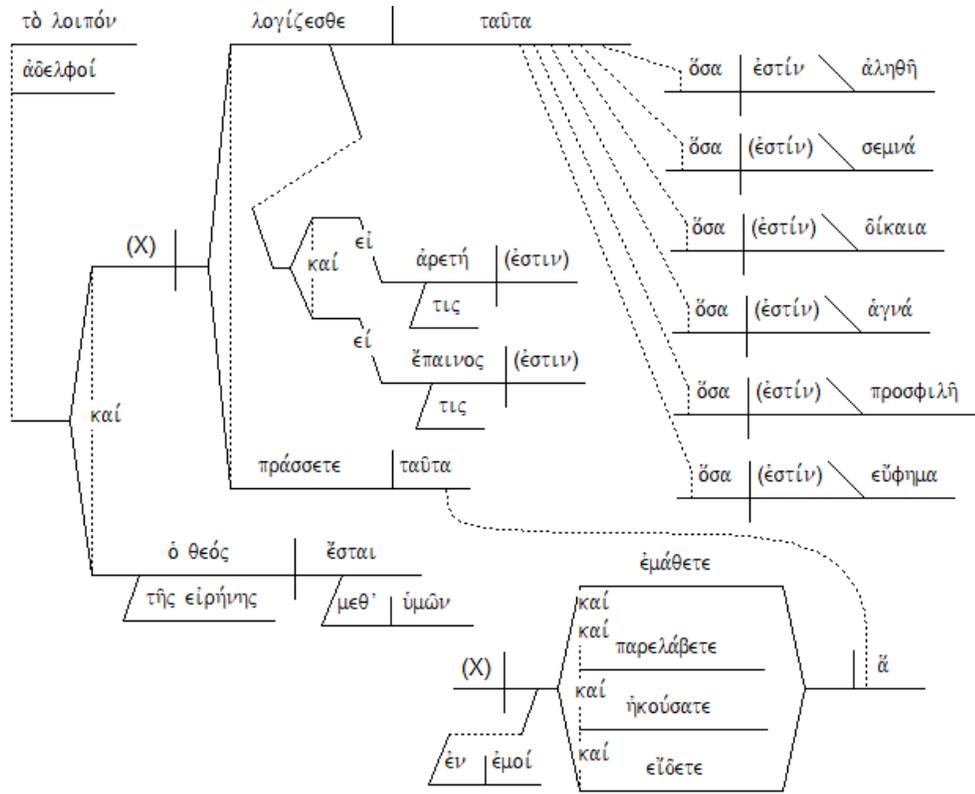


Phi 4:5 τὸ ἐπιεικές | γνωσθήτω ὁ κύριος | (ἐστὶν)
 ὑμῶν | ἀνθρώποις | ἐγγύς
 πᾶσιν

Phi 4:6 (X) | μεριμνᾶτε
 ἀλλ' | μηθέν
 τὰ αἰτήματα | γνωρίζεσθω
 ὑμῶν | πρὸς | τὸν θεόν
 ἐν | παντί | τῇ προσευχῇ
 καὶ | τῇ δεήσει
 μετὰ | εὐχαριστίας

Phi 4:7 καὶ | τὰς καρδίας
 ἡ εἰρήνη | φρουρήσει | ὑμῶν
 τοῦ θεοῦ | ἐν | Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ | καὶ | τὰ νοήματα
 ἡ ὑπερέχουσα | νοῦν | ὑμῶν
 πάντα

Phi 4:8-9



TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 4:10-23

TITLE: TRUE CONTENTMENT -- GOD SHALL SUPPLY ALL YOUR NEEDS

BIG IDEA:

GOD CAN BE TRUSTED TO PROVIDE ALL MATERIAL NEEDS FOR THOSE WHO PARTNER IN THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION:

Paul and the Philippian believers were partners in the ministry of the gospel.

Gerald Hawthorne: It is known from elsewhere that although Paul championed the right of an apostle to be supported financially by those to whom he preached the gospel and he never renounced that right, he preferred to support himself and his mission by manual labor. He jealously insisted on doing so in order that

- (1) he might offer the gospel of God's free grace without charge (**1 Cor 9:18**),
- (2) no opponent of his could ever accuse him of using his mission as a pretext for greed, and
- (3) he might set the proper example for others to follow (see **1 Cor 4:8-13**, esp. v 12; **8:1-18**; **2 Cor 11:7-10**; **1 Thess 2:5-12**, esp. v 9; **2 Thess 3:7-12**, esp. vv 8-9; cf. **Pratscher**, NTS 25 [1979] 284-98).

Paul had no hesitation about asking for money from his churches to aid others, e.g., the needy Christians in Jerusalem (**1 Cor 16:1-3**; **2 Cor 8-9**), but he refused to do so for himself (see **Dodd**, "Paul and Money"). And yet the Macedonian Christians, who surely would have included the Christians at Philippi, not only made a generous contribution out of their own deep poverty to the needy saints' fund (**2 Cor 8:1-5**; for the "collection for the saints" see **R. P. Martin**, 2 Corinthians, WBC [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986] 248-96, and bibliography there), but they also more than once (**Phil 4:16**) made generous contributions to Paul's own personal funds (**2 Cor 11:8-9**). It may be suggested, therefore, that this violation of one of Paul's strict principles, entailing giving of a personal gift to him which was not only unsolicited, but which the Macedonian churches knew from personal experience he opposed (**1 Thess 2:9**; **2 Thess 3:8-9**), was the very thing that prompted him to leave this matter of the gift until the last. It was this that caused him to write a careful reply that combined cautious gratitude with a gentle but firm demand that they not henceforth infringe on his own self-reliance. Not elsewhere in all of Paul's letters, nor in all of the letters of antiquity that have survived until the present, is there any other acknowledgment of a gift that can compare with this one in terms of such a tactful treatment of so sensitive a matter (**von Soden**; see **Plummer**; **Michael**; **Best**, **Paul**, 99-104).

John MacArthur: **Contentment** is a highly prized, but elusive virtue. Though it comes only from being rightly related to God and trusting His sovereign, loving, purposeful providence, people nevertheless seek it where it cannot be found—in money,

possessions, power, prestige, relationships, jobs, or freedom from difficulties. But by that definition, contentment is unattainable, for it is impossible in this fallen world to be completely free from problems. In sharp contrast to the world's understanding of contentment is this simple definition of spiritual contentment penned by the Puritan **Jeremiah Burroughs**: "Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition" (*The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* [Reprint; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1964], 19). . .

In **verses 10–19**, as he thanked the Philippians for their gift, he indirectly offered himself as an example of contentment. Paul knew how to rejoice in every circumstance and be free from anxiety and worry, because his heart was guarded by the peace of God and the God of peace. His example is especially relevant to our utterly discontented culture.

Five principles of contentment flow from this seemingly mundane conclusion to Paul's letter.

1. A contented person is confident in God's providence,
2. satisfied with little,
3. independent from circumstances,
4. strengthened by divine power,
5. and preoccupied with the well-being of others.

Tony Merida: Main Idea: As Paul expresses his gratitude to God for the church's support, he carefully highlights some important Christian aspects of giving and receiving.

I. Six Words on Giving and Receiving (4:10-20)

- A. Gratitude: Thank God for the generosity of other believers (4:10).
- B. Contentment: Pursue this rare jewel (4:11-13).
 1. Contentment is unconnected to our circumstances (4:11-12).
 2. Contentment is learned (4:11-12).
 3. Contentment flows from union with and reliance on Christ (4:13).
- C. Partnership: See the inseparable relationship between financial support and gospel partnership (4:14-16).
- D. Fruitfulness: Understand the spiritual and eternal importance of giving (4:17).
- E. Worship: Bring pleasure to God through sacrificial giving (4:18).
- F. Faith: Trust in God's provision (4:19-20).

II. Warm Greetings and Gospel Encouragement (4:21-23)

As you scan through **verses 10-20**, you will notice something interesting. Paul never explicitly says "thank you" directly to the Philippians. Some think Paul is saying, "Thanks . . . sort of." Does Paul lack gratitude for them? Absolutely not! Paul conveys his gratitude in a triangular fashion, between himself, the Philippians, and the Lord. By

communicating gratitude in this fashion, he avoids three common pitfalls associated with talking about money: **manipulation, flattery, and silence.**

I. (:10-16) CONTENTMENT AND COMMENDATION EXPRESSED TO SUPPORTERS

Max Anders: Expressions of love from fellow believers encourage us, but contentment comes not from physical circumstances but from relying on divine strength. . .

He is content no matter what his circumstances. What is such contentment? It is a term apparently taken over from Stoic philosophers describing an inner spirit of freedom and discipline, the ability to conquer circumstances and situations rather than be conquered by them. Such an attitude is the exact opposite of worry and anxiety.

A. Contentment -- The Lesson of Contentment Must be Learned by Christian Workers and Communicated to Supporters

Gordon Fee: What is striking, of course, is his insistence that he knows the secret of both plenty and want. His various “hardship lists” make it clear that he has experienced “plenty” of “want.” But in contrast to some of the Cynics, he did not choose “want” as a way of life, so as to demonstrate himself *autarkēs*; rather he had learned to accept whatever came his way, knowing that his life was not conditioned by either, and that his relationship to Christ made one or the other essentially irrelevant in any case. Where we otherwise lack direct evidence from him are situations in which he “*abounded*” in “plenty”—at least on the material side of things, although in this letter he may very well be alluding to the generous patronage of the Philippians, both when he and his co-workers lived in Lydia’s household and when they repeatedly supplied his material needs in Thessalonica and Corinth, and perhaps elsewhere.

G. Walter Hansen: His joy in the Lord was not heightened by prosperity or diminished by poverty. His concern for the welfare of others was not distracted by living in plenty or in want. His contentment in prosperity did not lead him to self-indulgence or self-aggrandizement: having material things did not become his reason for joy; acquiring material things did not make him greedy; protecting material things did not make him anxious.

George Hunsinger: What is the **secret** into which Paul has been “initiated” (*memyēmai*)? Here are some possible aspects of his faith in divine providence:

- Receive everything as from the hand of God.
- Keep your focus on the Lord.
- Cling to the promises of God.
- Be steadfast in prayer.
- Expect new life. A way will open out of adversity. Evil will be reversed into good.

Here are some corresponding dispositions:

- Thanksgiving in all things (*eucharistia*).
- Patience or perseverance (*hypomonē*).
- Freedom from anxiety (*parrēsia*, *boldness*).
- Freedom from anger and the root of bitterness (*chairō*, *rejoicing*).

1. (:11) Summary: Contentment vs. Complaining Despite the Circumstances

*"Not that I speak from want;
for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am."
"in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret"*

Steven Lawson: When Paul writes, "I have learned to be content" (**Philippians 4:11**), this speaks of a calm acceptance of his present lot in life. To be discontent would mean that Paul wants to be somewhere else than where the sovereign hand of God has placed him, and to have more than the sovereign hand of God has chosen to give him. To be content is to have a peaceful acceptance of where God has providentially placed him. "Content" (*autarkes*) was used of a country that had everything that it needed and where nothing had to be imported. Such a country had all the resources and natural products needed to be self-sufficient. Nothing else was needed from the outside.

Richard Melick: The first reason Paul did not need the gift was his own **contentment**. Twice in these verses he stated that he had learned contentment. One word, *emathōn*, was natural to use. It speaks to having arrived at a fact of understanding. The other word, *memy mai*, often appears in the mystery religions. It means to learn the secret and conveys the idea of a secret knowledge to which adherents of the mystery religions aspired. The word conveyed what Paul desired. **Contentment is learned through experience.** Paul used another rare word for "to be content." The etymology means "self-reliant," and the context supports that meaning. It is a self-sufficiency because of Christ, however, as Paul clearly stated in **4:13**. He meant that he came to grips with his circumstances and fared well in and through them because of his own relationship to Christ. He did not need help.

2. (:12a) Contentment in Hard Times

*"I know how to get along with humble means"
"I have learned the secret of going hungry"
"and of suffering need"*

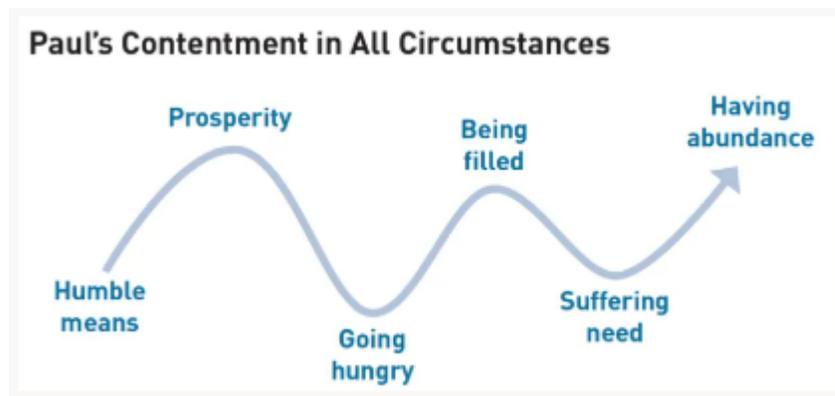
3. (:12b) Contentment in Prosperous Times

*"and I also know how to live in prosperity"
"I have learned the secret of being filled"
"both of having abundance"*

Dennis Johnson: The fact that Paul has "learned" contentment shows that his calm response to life's ups and downs is a skill honed through practice. The author to the Hebrews uses the same term, writing that Christ himself, "although he was a son, learned obedience through what he suffered" (**Heb. 5:8**). The eternal Son of God

entered the world ready to fulfill the Father’s will (10:5–10), but his holy resolve was tested and proved through his obedient suffering. In this sense he “*learned*” in practice what obedience entailed, and what it cost. Christ-centered contentment is not preinstalled on our hearts, like a software program preloaded into a new computer. Nor is Christian contentment injected in a single dose, as though it were a vaccine that could make us immune to a complaining spirit. It takes practice. **Contentment grows over time**, as we face adverse situations—in finances, health, relationships, or other areas—and seek Christ’s strength to release our grip on his gifts, while we strengthen our grasp on his grace. Yet cultivating Christian contentment is not merely a matter of following an exercise regimen to reprogram our attitudes. Contentment is a secret that has been shared with Paul by Another. Our version’s “*I have learned the secret*” represents a single Greek word, which could also be translated “*I have been initiated.*” This is the only place in the whole New Testament that this word appears. In Paul’s day it was associated with the bizarre initiation rituals of the pagan “mystery religions.” (In fact, the verb is related to the Greek noun *mystērion*, from which we get mystery in English.)

Charles Swindoll: Paul describes some of the conditions he had faced over the years—the roller-coaster-like ups and downs. He had learned contentment by experiencing various—often intense—circumstances (4:12). If we were to chart this verse, it would look something like this:



Through it all Paul learned how to get along in whatever circumstances life gave him. He didn’t lose faith when he slept on hard ground with an empty stomach. And when he was hosted in a comfortable home, receiving hot meals every day and a warm bed each night, he didn’t forget that God alone is the source of all things. He learned how to handle both extremes, and everything in between.

4. (:13) Secret of Contentment

"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me"

Gerald Hawthorne: Paul adds a most important qualifying phrase ἐν τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντί με, “*in union with the One who continually infuses me with strength.*” And thus is established a grand paradox. The secret of Paul’s independence was his dependence upon Christ. His self-sufficiency came from being in vital union with the One who is

all-sufficient. Who is this Other, this all-sufficient One? Paul does not say. He simply identifies the source of his confidence by means of a present active participle used as a noun: τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντι, “*the One who continually infuses with strength.*” The verb ἐνδυναμοῦν, “*to infuse with strength,*” however, is used elsewhere to denote the powerful activity of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. **Eph 6:10; 1 Tim 1:12; 2 Tim 2:1; 4:17**). Thus, those later scribes who added Χριστῷ, “*Christ,*” to the text properly understood Paul’s intent. He whose life was seized by Christ, who gladly gave up all for Christ, who paradoxically gained all by losing all for Christ, who longed to know Christ and the power of his resurrection (**3:7–10**), could only envision Christ as his true source of inner strength. So although Paul had carefully disciplined himself and had discovered within himself untapped resources of power that, when drawn upon, made him independent of outward circumstances, he could never bring himself to deny his need of Christ and his reliance upon the strength that Christ supplied. The truth of the matter is that in himself Paul did not perceive a strong, independent life. But united with Christ, the source of ultimate power, he was able to face life bravely. In **2 Cor 12:9–10** Paul speaks of his weaknesses as advantages because they made him all the more receptive of Christ’s strength, which is made perfect in weakness (see **Black**, Paul, Apostle of Weakness; cf. **Beare**): “*Most gladly, then, will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses . . . and hardships for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then am I strong*” (Hawthorne’s paraphrase). Paul, thus, never allowed his weaknesses or perceived weaknesses to be an excuse for inactivity or for a failure to attempt the impossible task. They, in a sense, became his greatest assets, and in surrendering them to Christ he discovered that they were transformed for his own enrichment and for the enrichment of others. As **Bousset** observes, “The work is great, but help is equal to the task. God, who calls you, even though he is so high, lends you his hand. His son, his equal, comes down to carry you” (cited by **Plummer**, 102; author’s trans.).

R. Kent Hughes: Sadly, **Philippians 4:13** has been widely misused as it has been removed from its context and employed as an inspirational snippet to say, “I can do anything through Christ who strengthens me” or “I can do everything (especially extraordinary things) through Christ who strengthens me.” It has been especially abused by those who view their Christianity through the lens of triumphalism, who think that through Christ they become superhuman.

As with every other line of Scripture, the assertion “*I can do all things*” is controlled by the **context**. Thus what Paul says is that in whatever circumstances I find myself, in whatever extremes—whether experiencing abundance with the wealthy or fellowshiping with the poor or struggling to proclaim the gospel to people who don’t want to hear or enduring the wrath of the establishment or bringing peace to the church or languishing in prison—I can be content and “*can do all things through him who strengthens me*” (v. **13**). Paul is confident that he will be divinely strengthened to do anything and everything that God calls him to do.

B. Commendation -- Repeated Commendation Should be the Response to Repeated Generous Gifts

1. (:10) Commendation for Concern Shown As Opportunity Allows

"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."

John MacArthur: Paul's gracious attitude reflects his patient confidence in God's sovereign providence. He was certain that God in due time would arrange his circumstances to meet his needs. There was no panic on his part, no attempt to manipulate people, no taking matters into his own hands. Paul was content because he knew that the times, seasons, and opportunities of life are controlled by the sovereign God "who works all things after the counsel of His will" (**Eph. 1:11**), thereby causing "all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (**Rom. 8:28**). Those who seek to control their own lives will inevitably be frustrated. A confident trust in God's providence is foundational to contentment.

Providence and miracle are the two ways God acts in the world. A miracle is God's direct, sovereign intervention into the natural world. It is an event so contrary to the normal course of events that there is no scientific or naturalistic explanation for it other than the power of God. There is no natural insight to explain the parting of the Red Sea, restoring the sight of those blind from birth, or raising people from the dead.

On the other hand, God's providence is not miraculous in the sense that it interrupts the natural order. Rather, it allows for all the contingencies, events, words, acts, decisions, and elements of normal life. God supernaturally weaves them all together to fit His purpose exactly. This is as supernatural as a miracle.

2. (:14) The Principle of Contentment Does Not Nullify the Need for Support

"Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction."

G. Walter Hansen: The Philippians could have taken Paul's assertion that he was content without their support to mean that he did not value their support. Paul precludes such a negative perception of his contentment by expressing his appreciation of their relationship with him: *Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles*. The adversative conjunction *yet* at the beginning of the sentence stands as "a marker of something that is contrastingly added for consideration." By using this conjunction, Paul is "breaking off a discussion and emphasizing what is important." Paul turns from his discussion of learning to be content (**4:11-13**) and returns to the important theme of **partnership**.

Grant Osborne: Paul's joy is centered on their wonderful friendship more than on the gift itself. The gift was anchored in their loving care, so his gratitude is grounded in their feelings for him, not in the tangible expression of that affection. Several interpreters have pointed out the commercial language Paul uses here. The Greek term for showing "concern" (*phroneo*) also means "have the same mindset," as in a business partnership (see **1:4**, "*partnership in the gospel*"), so Paul is emphasizing the closeness of his ties with this loving church. They truly had become his partners in the gospel! . .

The Philippians' gift was a wonderful blessing that showed their deep affection for Paul, but he was acutely aware that it was Christ who had bestowed the gift, working through the Philippians. Ultimately, Paul was dependent on Christ, not his friends. Christ alone was empowering Paul to rise above his circumstances, giving him peace and contentment whether in times of hardship or abundance. This does not mean it is wrong for us to be thrilled with gifts and help from others; clearly, Paul was overwhelmed with joy at the Philippians' generous gift. But he saw the hand of Christ in it, as well. He was grateful for the loving support of his friends, but even more so for the power of Christ.

3. (:15-16) Commendation for Repeated Faithfulness in Supporting Paul

"And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs."

David Garland: More than once the Philippians came to his aid when he was working to establish the gospel in Thessalonica. Their help allowed him to offer the gospel to others free of charge, so that potential converts would not resist accepting a gospel that then required of them financial support of the missionary. Their support reveals that they were concerned for both the welfare of Paul and the spread of the gospel.

R. Kent Hughes: What are we to conclude from the fivefold usages of fellowship-related words in Philippians? For starters, while the Apostle Paul no doubt had at times fellowshiped over a tasty dessert with the Philippians, fellowship for him (apostolic fellowship) was not a cup of Starbucks and biscotti! Fellowship involved (1) participation in the great task of getting the gospel out; (2) the grace of participation in others' suffering for the sake of the gospel; (3) participation in the Holy Spirit, through whom we are all baptized into one body; (4) the longing to participate in the sufferings of Christ; and (5) participation in the spread of the gospel through the generous giving of material resources.

Thus we conclude that these five elements must all be included under Paul's opening phrase "*partnership [fellowship] in the gospel*" (1:5). This fellowship was united in an epic quest that involved sharing in the gospel—in each other's sufferings—in the Spirit—in Christ's sufferings—and sharing from that which they had.

II. (:17-20) PROFIT AND PROVISION

A. Profit -- Who Ultimately Profits More from the Gift?

1. (:17) The Giver

*"Not that I seek the gift itself,
but I seek for the profit which increases to your account."*

Warren Wiersbe: Paul looked upon their missionary gift as an investment that would pay them rich spiritual dividends. The word “*communicate*” is our familiar word “*fellowship*.” The church entered into an arrangement of “*giving and receiving*”; the church gave materially to Paul, and received spiritually from the Lord. The Lord keeps the books and will never fail to pay one spiritual dividend! That church is poor that fails to share materially with others.

George Hunsinger: We are back to the social complexities of Paul’s position. A more overt expression of thanksgiving might make it seem as though he were fishing for financial aid. He needs to find a way to thank his friends without leaving the impression of an ulterior motive. He thus expresses his thanksgiving in an oblique manner. Another reason he is not fishing for aid is that in principle he believes he does not need it. He is convinced that God’s grace is sufficient for him.

Richard Melick: Paul commended them because their gifts were an **investment**. Financial terms dominate this passage. The gifts were an investment in the work of God and in their future. Some believers may have mistakenly assumed that Paul sought gifts, but he clearly stated he sought the blessings it would bring to the givers. Paul saw beyond the physical act to the spiritual transactions taking place. Even in acknowledging their support, his servant attitude surfaced. He thought of their growth and blessings.

2. (:18a) But the Recipient Profits as Well

*"But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance;
I am amply supplied,
having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent"*

3. (:18b) More Importantly, God is Well Pleased

"a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God."

Gerald Hawthorne: Suddenly Paul turns from the vocabulary of banking to the language of worship in order to finish his description of this gift from the Philippians. Of first importance is Paul’s remark that although he himself was the immediate recipient of their generosity, the ultimate recipient was God (τῷ θεῷ, “*to God*”). With this statement he lifts their gift from the level of mere mutual courtesy and compassion and looks upon it in its relation to God (**Jones**). At the same time he enunciates an important principle, namely, that whatever is done for the servant is in reality done for the Master; that whatever is given to a child of God is given to God himself (cf. **Matt 10:40–42; 25:31–40; Acts 9:3–5**).

Grant Osborne: The horizontal, earthly deed had become a vertical, heaven-oriented worship event. To express the significance of the church’s gifts, Paul gives three figurative descriptions:

- “*They are a fragrant offering*” – This builds on Paul’s earlier portrayal of his possible execution as a “*drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from*

your faith” (2:17). The language of a “*sweet-smelling savor*” (KJV) depicts an animal sacrifice being burnt on an altar, giving off an aroma that was pleasing and acceptable to God (Lev 1:9, 13). In Ephesians 5:2 Paul calls the sacrifice of Christ a “*fragrant offering*,” and here he uses the same metaphor to show that the Philippians’ support was more than financial; it was sacred, **bringing pleasure to the Lord** as well as to Paul.

- “*an acceptable sacrifice*” – This phrase translates the first metaphor, pointing again to “*the sacrifice and service coming from your faith*” (Phil 2:17). The Philippians’ gifts to Paul constituted a **demonstration of faith**, not just a monetary transaction. This was especially true in light of the church’s poverty (2 Cor 8:2). For these persecuted Christians, sending such a generous donation was truly an act of sacrificial giving.
- “*pleasing to God*” – God was even more pleased than Paul at the Philippians’ selfless generosity. This third phrase enhances the sense of **sacredness** regarding their offering, both to Paul and to God. The idea of pleasing God is at the core of New Testament ethics, which Paul expresses well in **Romans 12:1-2**, describing believers’ obedience as “*a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God*,” and their transformation in Christ as proof that God’s will is “*good, pleasing, and perfect*” (compare Eph 5:10: “*find out what pleases the Lord*”).

B. Provision -- Who Ultimately Must Trust God for Material Needs?

1. (:19) Both the Giver

"And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Dwight Pentecost: Examples of God supplying needs --

- Israel in the wilderness for 40 years
- 12 disciples sent out to preach (Luke 9:2,3; 22:35; Matt 6:25-33)

Peterman: [Paul makes it clear] he has not become socially obligated, and thereby in a sense inferior, by accepting their gifts. Rather, because he has accepted their gifts, they have been **elevated to the place of partners in the gospel**. Though Paul is in receipt of their gift and can mention his own benefit from it (4:18a), in 4:17b he rather makes it appear that they are actually the ones benefited. Their gift does bring them a return. It is an investment that reaps spiritual dividends, but ultimately the responsibility to reward them rests not with Paul but with God (4:19).

G. Walter Hansen: Paul’s awareness of the Lord’s faithfulness in the provision of these gifts causes him to rejoice greatly *in the Lord*. Good gifts never divert Paul’s central focus from rejoicing in the Lord, the ultimate Provider of all good gifts. His focus on the Lord’s provision is the basis of his assurance to the Philippians: *God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus* (4:19). This central focus on God transforms the transaction of giving and receiving among Christians from a human, horizontal exchange to a divine-human, triangular interaction. God initiates

giving, empowers givers, supplies gifts, and meets needs. Participating in the activity of God by giving and receiving leads to rejoicing greatly in the Lord.

R. Kent Hughes: Looking to the immediate context, this meant for the Philippians that God would meet any material need created by their great generosity to Paul. Furthermore, in regard to the spiritual concerns laid out in this letter, God would supply the need for joy and for steadfastness and for endurance and for humility and for concord and for peace and for the ability to face all circumstances. The stunning scope of the promise is that there is not one thing that they (and all faithful Christians) truly needed that God would not give.

John MacArthur: The phrase *according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus* reveals the extent to which God would supply the Philippians' needs. He would do so **according to His riches**, not out of them; His giving to them would be relative to the immensity of His eternal wealth, that is, as generously as is consistent with *His riches in glory in Christ Jesus*. The New Testament repeatedly presents **Christ Jesus** as the source of all of God's riches. In Him "*are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" (**Col. 2:3**); to the Colossians Paul wrote, "*For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him. . . . For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form*" (**Col. 1:19; 2:9**). "*The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*" (**Eph. 1:3**). In **Ephesians 1:23** the apostle described Jesus as "*Him who fills all in all,*" and he reminded the Corinthians of "*the grace of God which was given [them] in Christ Jesus, that in everything [they] were enriched in Him*" (**1 Cor. 1:4–5**). Echoing that thought, Peter wrote, "*His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence*" (**2 Peter 1:3**).

2. (:13) And the Recipient

Repeat: "*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*"

(:20) Doxology

"Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Max Anders: Paul concluded the body of the letter with a doxology praising God. The thought of God's providing our needs in Christ naturally led to praise and thanksgiving. The God of glory and honor is not far removed from us, however. He remains our . . . Father ready to bring love and resources to meet our needs. Thus, glory belongs to him forever—into the unseen ages.

G. Walter Hansen: The **glory of God** is the revelation of God's attributes in the creation of the world, in the redemption accomplished through Christ, and in the final consummation of all things.

John MacArthur: Doxologies in Scripture are fitting responses to doctrinal truth. This one flowed from Paul's exuberant joy over the magnificent truths he had been inspired by God to expound in this letter. True worship flows from divine truth.

Grant Osborne: The next aspect of this doxology is "*for ever and ever*," referring to the **eternal aspect** of God's glory – which is part of his nature, a divine attribute. The glory of God is not a created entity that came into being at creation or at the incarnation of Christ. It belongs both to the eternal past and the eternal future. To use the language we have been employing, it is the "already" and the "not yet." During the exodus from Egypt, the Shekinah glory was observed in the pillar of fire at night and in the cloud by day; this was the same cloud that filled the tabernacle and later enveloped the mountain at Jesus' transfiguration. The exalted Lord Jesus will return on the Shekinah clouds at his second coming, and we will live in God's glory for all eternity. It is indeed "*forever and ever*."

Paul closes the doxology with *amen* – the Greek transliteration of a Hebrew liturgical affirmation meaning "yes" or "may it be so." Each of the four sections of the psalms ends with a doxology that closes with "*Amen*" (**Pss 41:13; 72:19; 89:52; 106:48**), and this word also frequently concludes worship and doxologies in the New Testament (**Rom 9:5; 11:36; Gal 1:5; Eph 3:21; 1 Tim 1:17; Rev 7:12**). Here in Philippians, Paul intends for the reader to join him in worship and, as we do in churches today, affirm together God's eternal glory: "**so be it.**"

(:21-23) CLOSING GREETINGS AND BENEDICTION

G. Walter Hansen: Paul's final greetings and blessing communicate the warmth of his love for his friends and the depth of his commitment to Christ. He reaches out through his words to embrace each member of the church, to express the strong bond of friendship between his present circle of friends and the community in Philippi, and to assure believers that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with them.

John MacArthur: Paul's threefold repetition of the word *greet* implies a strong bond of fellowship. As he closed his letter to them, Paul expressed his love for the members of the Philippian congregation and his concern for their spiritual well-being. His injunction was specifically for the leaders of the Philippian congregation (**1:1**), who would receive the letter from Epaphroditus. The apostle charged them to greet the individual members of the congregation on his behalf, and assure them of his love and concern for their spiritual well-being.

A. (:21-22) Mutual Greetings

1. (:21a) Giving the Greeting

"Greet every saint in Christ Jesus"

2. (:21b-22) Receiving the Greeting

"The brethren who are with me greet you."

All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household."

George Hunsinger: Besides the inner circle of his coworkers, there is a larger circle of friends (“*saints*”) around Paul as well. While it is fitting to mention the inner circle first, it would not have been fitting to leave the larger circle out. They all send greetings to the Philippians and share in the reciprocated good will.

Steven Lawson: These were men and women who served Caesar in the royal palace in Rome. This represented a significant number of people that extended beyond Caesar’s own family—including slaves, cooks, food-tasters, musicians, custodians, builders, stablemen, accountants, soldiers, guards, judges, messengers, and heralds. It was a large contingent that found themselves in close proximity to Caesar. They served his needs and kept up with his business. Many of these workers had come to faith in Christ. Paul led some of the praetorian guards—assigned to guard him in this imprisonment—to Christ; they, in turn, carried the gospel back into the palace. This is no doubt intended to be an encouragement to the church in Philippi. There are the saints in Caesar’s household who send their greetings. This shows the power of the gospel to reach into the Roman Empire, even into Caesar’s own palace. This explosive power is still inherent in the gospel even today.

These new believers in Caesar’s household are trophies of God’s saving grace. They are in Caesar’s household, and yet they are a part of a much larger household, the household of faith. They serve in Caesar’s palace but yet they have access to a much greater throne above. They are in Rome, but they have brothers and sisters in Christ all over the known world. No doubt they have heard about the Philippians through their contact with Paul, and they must have urged Paul to communicate to the Philippians their greetings. They are in this together with the rest of the body of Christ. This is what we are to take from **verses 21-22**. These verses are not incidental but a reminder that whoever and wherever we are, if we are "*in Christ Jesus*," we are in the family of God together. You may travel anywhere in this world, far away from your earthly family, but you are never far from your heavenly family.

B. (:23) Benediction – Focusing on the Spiritual Resource of Grace

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."

John MacArthur: The resource all believers need most is the **grace** that comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace is the unmerited favor or undeserved, beneficent love of God in Christ that brought about believers’ redemption (**Eph. 2:5, 8; Rom. 3:24; 2 Tim. 1:9**). God’s work of grace in believers’ lives will continue until their glorification. Paul expressed that truth in **Romans 5:2**: “*Through [Christ] also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.*” Believers are not only saved by grace, but also sustained by grace. They are governed by grace, guided by grace, kept by grace, strengthened by grace, sanctified by grace, and enabled by grace. They are constantly dependent on the forgiveness, comfort, peace, joy, boldness, and instruction that come through God’s grace.

Richard Melick: In an epistle which presents clearly the polarities between law and grace, works and faith, and self-righteousness and divinely imputed righteousness, it is significant that the final line should be **grace**. Fittingly he reminded them that everything good they had came because of God's grace.

Frank Thielman: Paul concludes the letter (v. 23) in much the same way as he began it (1:2), with a reference to “*the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ*.” The same grace that transformed Paul from a persecutor of the church into its apostle (1:7; 3:6) will sustain the Philippians as they seek to “*stand firm in one Spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel*” (1:27). This benediction, then, serves as much more than a rote formula tacked onto the end of the letter. It leaves ringing in the Philippians’ ears the message that the gospel, because it reveals God’s grace (*charis*), is good news and reason enough to rejoice (*chairein*) in the Lord.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are we aggressive in taking the initiative to invest in the Lord's work and making the most of our opportunities? Do we believe that the Lord will respond *with "profit which increases to our account"*?
- 2) How would our lives be changed if we experienced the same type of deprivation that Paul did and had to learn to trust the Lord in such circumstances of "*going hungry*" and "*suffering need*". What kind of lessons about themselves do the people on the TV series *Survivors* learn about themselves?
- 3) How is **verse 13** sometimes used out of context? What is the right application for this precious promise of God?
- 4) Is God well-pleased with the types of sacrifices that we have been presenting to Him?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gordon Zerbe: Outline

First Acknowledgment: Joy in Their Mindfulness, 4:10–13

4:10b Clarification from Their Side: “Lack of Opportunity”

4:11–13 Clarification from Paul’s Side: “Not That I Speak according to Lack”

Second Acknowledgment: The Blessing of Partnership, 4:14–17

4:15–17 Commendation and Clarification

Third Acknowledgment: A Commercial Receipt for Receiving an Abundance, 4:18
4:18b Clarification: The Fragrant Aroma of a Sacrifice Pleasing to God

Concluding Promise and Doxology, 4:19–20

4:19 Assurance: God the Ultimate Provider

4:20 Doxology

Final Greetings and Grace Blessing, 4:21-23

Greetings to All Those in Philippi, **4:21a**

Greetings from All Those with Paul, **4:21b-22**

Grace Blessing, **4:23**

Dwight Pentecost: To be content is the opposite of to be covetous, to be greedy, to be worldly, to be materialistic. When Paul met the Lord Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road, the greed that had characterized his life was suddenly taken out, and his life was filled with Jesus Christ.

William Barclay: By *autarkeia* the Stoics meant a state of mind in which a man was absolutely and entirely independent of all things and of all people, a state in which a man had taught himself to need nothing and to need no one. The Stoic proposed to reach that state by a certain pathway of the mind.

(i) He proposed to eliminate all desire. The Stoic rightly believed that contentment did not consist in possessing much but in wanting little. “If you want to make a man happy,” they said, “add not to his possession, but take away from his desires.” Socrates was once asked who was the wealthiest man. He answered: “He who is content with least, for *autarkeia*, *self-sufficiency*, is nature's wealth.” The Stoic believed that the only way to contentment was to abolish all desire until a man had come to a stage when nothing and no one were essential to him.

(ii) The Stoic proposed to eliminate all emotion, all feeling, until he had come to a stage when he did not care what happened either to himself or to anyone else...

(iii) How was this to be done? It was to be done by a deliberate act of will which saw in everything the will of God. The Stoic believed that literally nothing could happen to him or to anyone else which was not the will of God...

We see at once the difference between the Stoics and Paul. The Stoic said, “I will learn contentment by a deliberate act of my own will.” Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ who infuses His strength into me.” For the Stoic contentment was a human achievement; for Paul it was a divine gift. The Stoic was self-sufficient; but Paul was God-sufficient. Stoicism failed because it was inhuman; Christianity succeeded because it was rooted in the divine.

Robert Gromacki: Paul never asked for support, but he did not refuse it if it came unasked from outside sources. He never took money from the people to whom he was

presently ministering.

John Walvoord: In a sense, every gift is an act of faith because, in many cases, justification could be found for retaining the gift for the selfish benefit of the donor. However, having shared with Paul and thus depriving themselves of what benefit their offering might have been to themselves, they also placed themselves in a faith relationship to God where they could in a special sense depend upon God's supply of their own needs. This would be in keeping with the riches to be found in the glory in Christ Jesus, that is, according to the infinite resources of God.

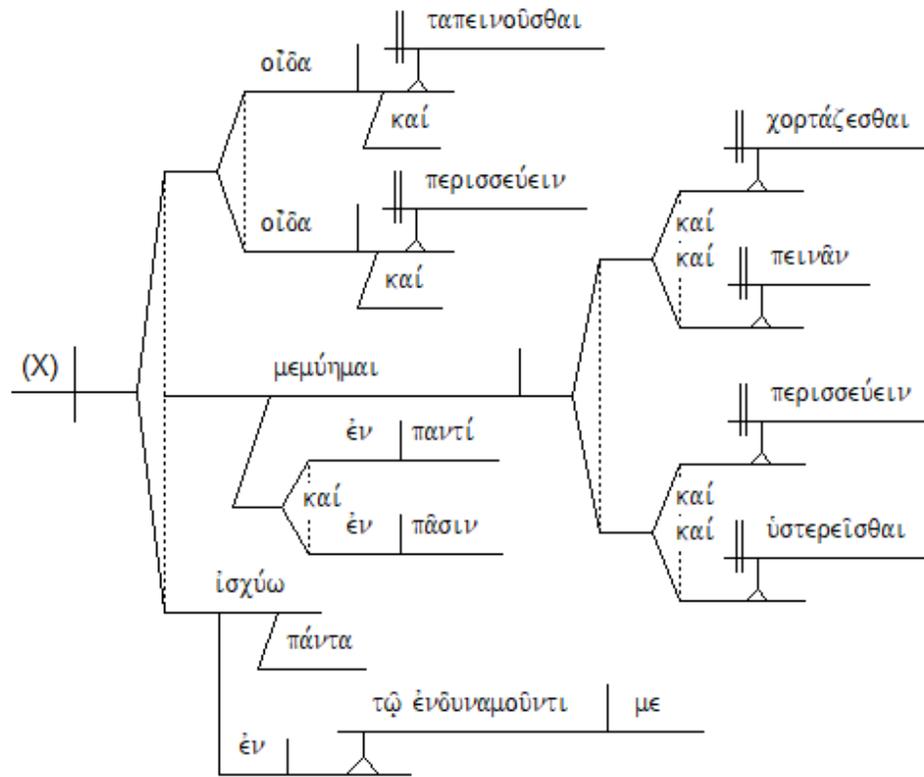
Warren Wiersbe: All of nature depends on hidden resources. The great trees send their roots down into the earth to draw up water and minerals. Rivers have their sources in the snow-capped mountains. The most important part of a tree is the part you cannot see, the root system, and the most important part of the Christian's life is the part that only God sees. Unless we draw upon the deep resources of God by faith, we fail against the pressures of life. Paul depended on the power of Christ at work in his life.

Alec Motyer: But the key to it all is *in Christ Jesus*. He mediates to us all the benefits and blessings of God. More than that, he is himself the sum of all the blessings, for the preposition is not "*through*" but "*in*". He is not a channel along which they flow, but a place in which they are deposited. It is finally because of Christ that Paul is contented, and it is Christ whom he offers to us as the means and guarantee of our contentment. For Paul, the person who possesses Christ possesses all.

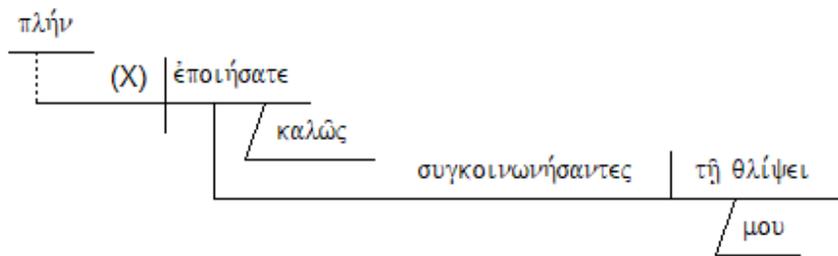
John Walvoord: Taken as a whole, the epistle to the Philippians contributes immeasurably to Christian doctrine and triumphant experience. In one sense it revolves around the principal characters -- Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus. In another sense it centers in the Philippian church, whose ten years of history were an epic in the grace of God. In the deepest sense, however, Christ is the center of this epistle. It is the mind of Christ, His love, His humiliation, His willingness to suffer, and His exaltation which constitute the supreme illustration of obedience to God, and the reminder that after suffering comes the glory. A proper relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ would bring about the experiencing of the mind of Christ by the Philippian church, with resulting unity and love for each other and the minimizing of internal conflicts and friction. In Christ also is found supremely the doctrine of grace -- grace as a way of salvation and as a way of life -- in contrast to the Judaizing teaching which Paul rebukes, and in even sharper contrast to the antinomian sects which have not apprehended the grace of God at all.

Above all, the apostle wants the Philippian church to experience triumphant peace -- peace among themselves, peace of heart, peace of mind, and peace in relation to earthly things and circumstances. In this his exhortation is an extension of his own experience and his own triumph.

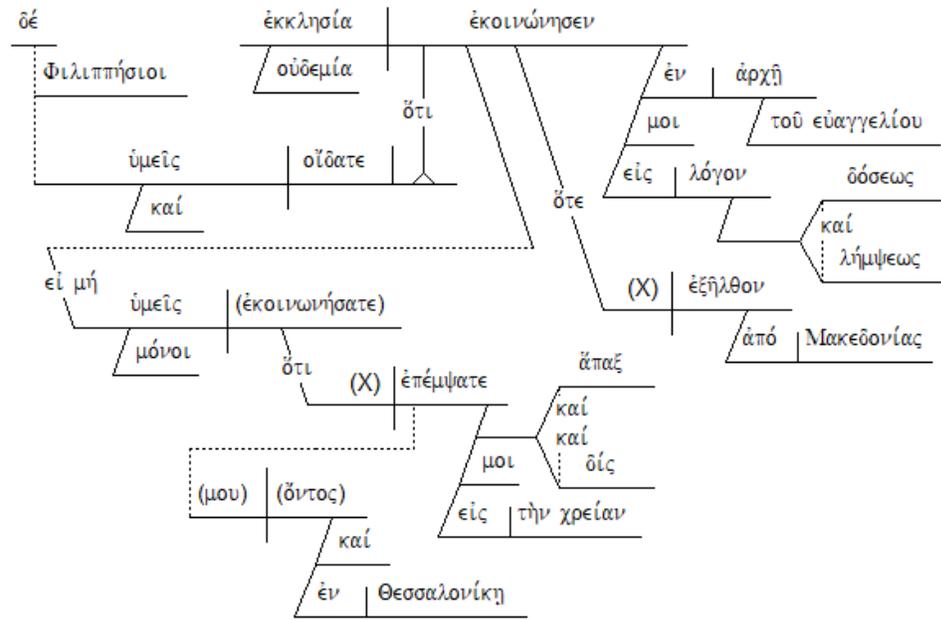
Phi 4:12-13



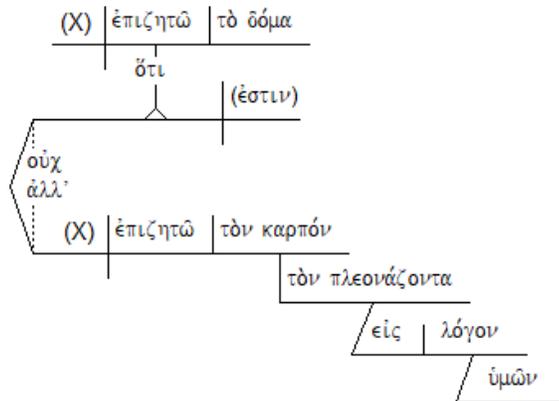
Phi 4:14

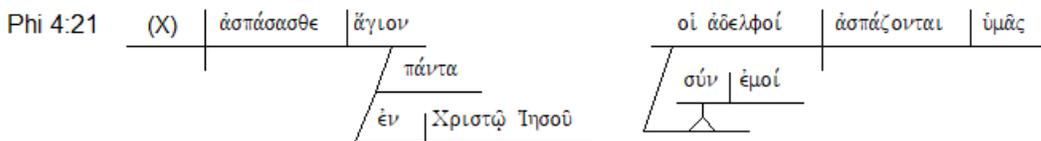
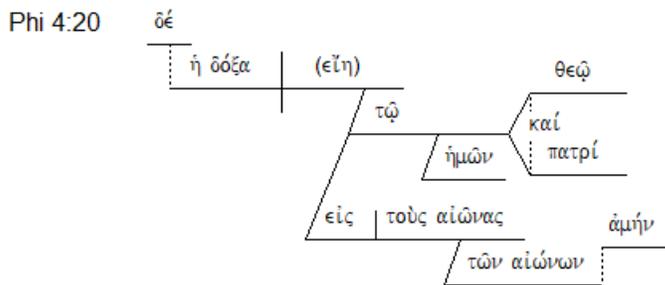
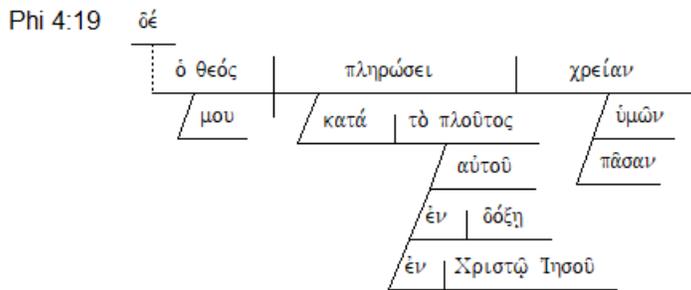
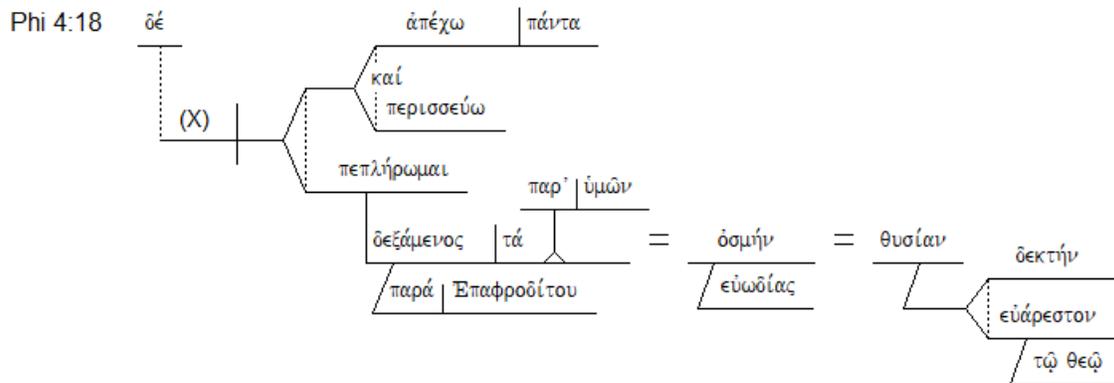


Phi 4:15-16

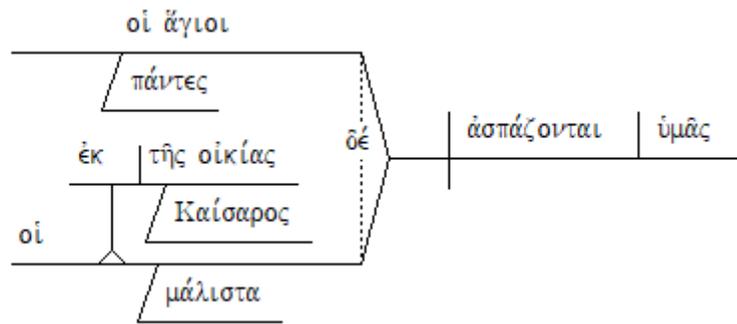


Phi 4:17

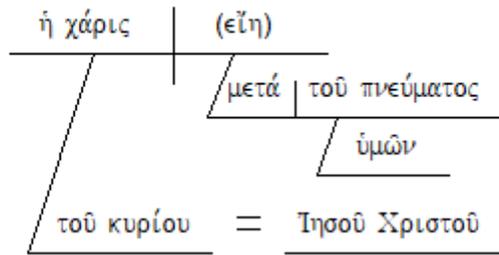




Phi 4:22



Phi 4:23



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