

# Notes on Philippians

## Commentary and Application

Anthony Rea

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## DEDICATION

For my children, Emmy and Theo. One day, when I'm long gone,  
you may find that you can still hear your Dad's voice in your head  
saying, "Follow Jesus."

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Sincerest thanks to my wife, Melissa. She has to hear me talk in circles about all of this before anybody else does. I'm positive that without her eyes and ears this would be quite terrible.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is meant to be read with your Bible! Each chapter deals with a portion of Scripture from Philippians and the best way to navigate these pages is using the Bible as your guide. It is my prayer that in so doing your affection for God's Word will grow and you will find yourself in good company with the Berean saints who, "...received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so." (Acts 17:11, NKJV)

## CHAPTER 1 | PHILIPPIANS 1:1-2

Philippians was authored around the year 62 AD by a man named Paul, or Saul of Tarsus, during what we call his first Roman imprisonment.

Paul was well seasoned in his faith by this time. The book would have been written a little less than 30 years after his face-to-face experience with the resurrected Jesus during what is termed the Damascus Road experience. (Acts 9)

Paul wrote this letter while under house arrest in Rome for about two years, where we believe he also wrote Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians – all of which are part of our canon of Scripture.

Collectively these letters, along with Philippians, are referred to as the Prison Epistles within the broader collection of the Pauline Epistles.

This letter to the Philippians is considered to be Paul's last letter to a church, though not the last of his writings altogether, and was written only four or five years prior to his second Roman imprisonment and subsequent execution under Caesar Nero.

As we will see from the text, the Philippian church, that local collection of saints in and around Philippi, had a special place in Paul's heart.

While we find notes of correction and firm rebuke in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, and we find quite a strong tone toward the Galatians, Paul's letter to the Philippians has been described by many as a letter full of joy and wonderfully expressed love – even as it is brimming with profound doctrine.

We gather from Paul's letter to the Corinthians that the Philippian church, along with the other churches in Macedonia, were abundantly supportive of Paul's ministry.

This was a unique characteristic of the Philippians' relationship with him because Paul flatly refused to accept financial support from the Corinthians.

Additionally, the Philippians found great joy in supporting other churches – especially the church in Jerusalem!

Two portions of 2 Corinthians shed light on this situation:

Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. (2 Cor 8:1-4, NLT)

Was I wrong when I humbled myself and honored you by preaching God's Good News to you without expecting anything in return? I "robbed" other churches by accepting their contributions so I could serve you at no cost. And when I was with you and didn't have enough to live on, I did not become a financial burden to anyone. For the brothers who came from Macedonia brought me all that I needed. I have never been a burden to you, and I never will be. (2 Cor 11:7-9, NLT)

The Philippian saints loved Paul tremendously, counting it their great joy to share in the ministry that Paul set his hand to by supporting him spiritually, emotionally, and by providing for him physically as well.

Please take note – their financial support of Paul's ministry was born out of a deep personal connection.

We live in an age where it is commonplace for churches to receive request after request for financial support from far-flung missionaries and workers who are unknown to us.

The required deliverable for those missionaries is to produce a newsletter or periodic update to make sure that the people who have committed to care for them don't forget about them!

What a shame that those we profess to love and support can be so easily forgotten!

The relationship between Paul and the Philippians was not the product of an online newsletter but a deep personal fellowship rooted in the person and work of Jesus Christ and the hope of God's Word going forth to bring others into the kingdom.

This was a two-way relationship marked by Paul caring for the Philippians and the Philippians caring for him.

This is the fellowship of the saints – caring for one another, supporting one another. It is a great joy to us to be able to care for one another in all realms of life.



“The Philippian church is considered to be the first church Paul established in Europe.”<sup>1</sup>

It is positioned just about 40 miles or so away from present-day Bulgaria’s southern border.

The first members of this church were a group of devout women, including a prominent woman by the name of Lydia, probably joined shortly thereafter by the Philippian jailer and his family – what a church plant!

Ministry in Philippi was wild: a group of women meeting by a riverbank, a demon-possessed girl, a riot, a trip to jail, a divine prison break, a suicidal prison guard – all of which was the beginning of this joyful, helpful, faithful church we know as the Philippian church.

The details are recorded for us in Acts...

We boarded a boat at Troas and sailed straight across to the island of Samothrace, and the next day we landed at Neapolis. From there we reached Philippi, a major city of that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And we stayed there several days. On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there. One of them was Lydia from

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<sup>1</sup> Henry H. Halley, *Halley’s Bible Handbook*, 811.

Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. She was baptized along with other members of her household, and she asked us to be her guests. “If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my home.” And she urged us until we agreed. (Acts 16:11-15, NLT)

Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself. But Paul shouted to him, “Stop! Don’t kill yourself! We are all here!” The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household.” And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God. (Acts 16:25-34, NLT)

Some Bible scholars propose that after Paul left, the gospel writer and Paul’s traveling companion Luke “apparently

remained behind.... The presence of the evangelist during the intervening 5 years may have had much to do with the strength of the Philippian church and its steadfastness in persecution (2Co 8:2; Php 1:29,30).”<sup>2</sup>

It is in this context that we begin our study.

V. 1 – Paul AND Timothy – Not just Paul. We know from Acts and the other epistles that Paul often journeyed and worked alongside other believers.

Timothy is a prominent saint in NT literature for several reasons, not the least of which is because of the two epistles bearing his name (1 & 2 Timothy), letters from the Apostle Paul to his protege, a Jewish man named Timothy.

We gather from those letters to Timothy that he was a fellow-worker with Paul and a pastor.

Some believe that Timothy perhaps served as Paul’s scribe or transcriptionist for this letter.

The introduction of this letter finds these men presenting themselves with no pretense or reminder of Apostolic authority as we find in other letters.

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<sup>2</sup> “Philippi,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.

While Paul sometimes introduces himself as “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ,” here he identifies himself and his co-laborer, Timothy, as slaves.

Bondservants = slaves (δουλος, *doulos*) – pertaining to a state of being completely controlled by someone or something – “subservient to, controlled by.”<sup>3</sup>

They are bound to Christ – subject to His will, authority, and purpose.

This is the office of the saints – bondservants, slaves of Christ. Are we prepared to enter into it?

Does this challenge us? Yes! We would much prefer dignified titles and all of the trappings that come with them.

In our American context, the word slave turns our stomachs; yet the term was not too soiled or too low for the Apostles to claim it for themselves.

In fact, the mediocre, lukewarm advancement/growth of some Christians is exactly because we fail to embrace and enter into the office of the bondservant.

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<sup>3</sup> J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* 2nd edition (New York: United Bible Societies), 1: 471.

We fail to acknowledge the complete authority and lordship of Jesus over our lives as we seek to set up and advance our own personal kingdoms, and so we are left somewhere in between rebelling against our Lord and half-heartedly carrying out His will when it suits us.

What we find in the Scriptures and from the witness of history is that those we consider the most “successful” or committed of saints have embraced the role of the servant of Christ and have embraced the Lordship of Jesus and the advancement of His kingdom – abandoning their own along the way.

Paul addresses this letter to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi. This is about far more than just geography; it speaks to Christian identity as the saints are positioned IN Christ.

This also speaks to our shared bond with one another. “That they all may be one, as You, Father, [are] in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” (Jhn 17:21, NKJV)

Paul also acknowledges and sets forth that the corporate body of believers, the church, is composed of the saints along with distinct members: overseers and deacons.

The term that the NKJV renders as “bishops” means overseers and comes from the Greek term ἐπισκόπος, (*episkopos*).

This term was used early in the church along with another term πρεσβύτερος (*presbuteros*), which meant elder.

Often these terms were used interchangeably to denote the overseers, elders, and pastors of the local church.

Interestingly enough, we have classified various models of church government along these lines. One is called the Episcopal model. Another is called the Presbyterian model. These two distinct models apply to more than just the denominations that bear their namesake; they differ from each other regarding church hierarchy and leadership of the organization.

We learn from Acts 6 that the role of the deacon was also an early responsibility of the saints worshipping together. That role seems to have been focused on the daily practicalities of ministry, including caring for widows while the Apostles, being the overseers of the church in Jerusalem, dedicated themselves to “prayer and the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:1-4)

We say all that just to point out that the Philippian church was apparently operating under some form of organized church governance in the early first century, and Paul recognized that the valid offices of the church included the offices of overseers and deacons.

To ignore those offices and their importance in the body would be irresponsible and unbiblical.

V. 2 – What does Paul commend to this beloved body of saints and workers? The grace and peace that come from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is here that we must pause to reflect on both the common greeting that Paul sets forth in nearly all of his letters and the undeniable substance that is held within.

Remember that Paul also ends many of his letters in the same way. He does so with this letter, too.

In the final line of this letter, Paul writes, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” (Phl 4:23, NKJV)

This is important because all of these theologically rich letters we have in our Bible from Paul are nearly always established BETWEEN GRACE – at the beginning and end.

We must behave in kind.

It is not enough for us to spew forth theology, doctrine, and facts. Any academic can do that.

Without the grace and peace that characterize the saints, these types of theological assertions come across as woefully dry, detached, insincere, and to the worst degree – hurtful.

BUT with the grace and peace of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, these theological declaration are life-changing truths that build up the hearer in grace and peace.

I propose to you then that the framework for our theology and practice is GRACE and PEACE – this is evident to us from the sheer number of mentions within the epistles!

In all 13 of Paul's letters, he begins with grace and peace! Oh, how our individual and shared ministries should be so marked! Oh, that we would never supplant the grace and peace of God with other things!

It is so important that we grasp this. None of our best efforts at presenting doctrine either to the believer or unbeliever will find purchase in our hearts or theirs if they are presented outside of grace and peace.

Consider the vast theology that Paul sets forth in all of his letters.



Consider the corrections. All framed in grace and peace.

In this letter alone, we will deal with such profound topics as: prayer, the preaching of the gospel either for good or ill, life and death (“to live is Christ and to die is gain”), suffering, humility, the nature of Jesus Christ making Himself a slave, Christ as Lord over all creation (“every knee shall bow ... every tongue confess”), obedience, counting all things as loss for Christ’s sake, imputed righteousness, perseverance of the saints, a heavenly citizenship, “be anxious for nothing,” meditate on good things, generosity and giving, and famously, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Do you see the rich treasure that is Philippians?! And yet, we start with grace, and we end with grace. And we pray that the Lord will give us understanding by His Spirit.

AND in any circumstance, we know that the people of God are marked by His characteristics – grace and peace – not condemnation and chaos.

As Matthew Henry wrote:

Here is the apostolical benediction: *Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ* ... the good which is wished is spiritual good, *grace and peace*—the free favour and good-

will of God, and all the blessed fruits and effects of it.<sup>4</sup>

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ – walk in grace, loved ones, walk in peace.

Remember, it is grace to act favorably towards those who are not deserving. That is what makes it grace. No other peace can we carry than the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which certainly does exceed our understanding.

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (Jhn 14:27, NKJV)

So, as we move forward in this letter together, let us prepare our hearts by receiving the grace and peace of our Lord.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2320–2321.

## CHAPTER 2 | PHILIPPIANS 1:3-7

Having set the framework for how Paul relates to the Philippians and, in fact, all the churches, we proceed with Paul's heartwarming introduction.

Remember that in v. 1–2, Paul commends the grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ to the saints and the servants in Philippi.

What a blessed and lovely way to start things off! What if we reframed our interactions with others in these terms – grace and peace? Oh, what a wonderful prospect!

Continuing in the realm of God's grace and peace, Paul then sets forth his personal heart's prayer for them.

V. 3–7 Paul prays for the saints at Philippi – more specifically, he tells them that he has prayed for them and continues to

pray for them. Marked down for all of history to see, Paul professes to thank God for them every time they are brought to his remembrance.

This is kind of sentimental, but it demonstrates his great love for these saints. We understand this to be a sincere declaration of affection towards them as well, not some lifeless incidental comment made to wrap up their conversation but to start the whole thing off.

How wonderful it is to hear the heart of others when they say they've been thinking of us and praying for us. And how wonderful a blessing it is to be able to do likewise!

If ever you feel the tug on your heart to pray for someone and encourage them by letting them know – please do.

Don't listen to that cynical part of our nature that tries to convince us that they don't want to be bothered or that it would be weird to reach out.

We GET the opportunity to love one another. We are SUPPOSED to love one another and encourage each other and build each other up.

We've talked about the false belief that circulates through our culture where we feel like we can't encourage another person

or compliment somebody because, “I don’t want you to get a big head.” What a travesty!

The Bible teaches us the opposite in all kinds of varying circumstances that the early churches dealt with.

Paul writes to the saints in Thessalonika who were questioning the coming of the Lord and the reality of the resurrection, “So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.” (1Th 5:11, NLT)

To the saints in Rome, when discussing how we are not to offend one another, Paul writes, “So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up.” (Rom 14:19, NLT)

While writing of how we are to contend earnestly for the faith, Jude states, “But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Jude 1:20, NLT)

After laying out a grand treatise of how the OT serves as a shadow of the things to come, the author of Hebrews writes of Christ, “And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.” (Heb 10:25, NLT)

In regards to our own humility James writes, “Humble *yourselves* before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.” (Jas 4:10, NLT, emphasis mine)

It is not our responsibility to humble others or to keep them from arrogance but to build one another up in love and encouragement, serving one another for Jesus’ sake.

Jesus taught, “Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” (Jhn 13:35, NLT)

All of this is on full display in Paul’s opening lines to the Philippians – he is full of joy making requests for them, praying for them, thanking God for them in his prayers.

Let us adopt this to our prayer habits as well! Pray FOR one another, loved ones! Pray WITH one another, loved ones! It may feel a little scary at first or socially awkward, but the Bible makes no allowance for us to cling to our reticence and ignore others in our prayers.

Paul was openly prayerful for the churches and for the people he cared about, and he was intentional about letting them know.

We also see that this was personal to him. Paul viewed this time of prayer as a time to come before “my God.” And what a privilege that is!

We have been given this nearly unfathomable access to the Author of all creation whereby we may approach Him at any moment and share our most intimate thoughts, feelings, desires, requests, etc.

Jesus intimates this intimacy that we have when speaking after His resurrection:

Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and [to] My God and your God.’ (Jhn 20:17, NKJV)

There’s no distinction between Jesus’ access to the Father, Paul’s access to the Father, and our own access to the Father.

This is personal! If it’s not, then we must ask ourselves, “What are we doing!?”

Note too that Paul takes this time to be thankful for the other saints! He sees them as a blessing to him, not a hindrance. We often see the reverse! There is so much division, so much criticality – so little grace and peace.

But Paul is clear that he is grateful for them even in the midst of his own distressing circumstances – imprisoned half a continent away. And he makes time for them in his prayers.

Notice he says he gives thanks for them, “always in every prayer of mine.”

A few key thoughts here:

First, the implication is that Paul had a robust prayer life. What a shame it would be if the times he mentioned them in prayer were once a year! The weight of Paul’s language, though, is that they are frequently in his prayers – not rarely.

Second, we can only take Paul at his word – he said that he was sincere in his declaration of praying for them, thanking God for them often, and not just putting on a show.

Often people can feel quite guilty about their own prayer lives – as if they don’t spend enough time in prayer.

Perhaps one of the reasons is that we don’t find any joy in it as Paul did. It’s become tiresome for us to spend time with the Father, or we feel like it’s ineffectual, or we’re just speaking hopeful words without any real consequence into the air.

We’ve all felt these things. May the Lord grant us the understanding and the spark of desire and joy to spend time with Him in our prayers. After all – parents desire to speak with their children.



For Paul, his prayer life was joyful. That is somewhat remarkable given his circumstances.

One of our common arguments about why our prayer lives are so toneless, weak, and inconsistent is that we don't have enough time. Or life gets in the way.

More than being completely false, what that kind of thinking does is reveal our own personal value systems. We value, we enjoy, other things more than prayer.

This isn't a guilt trip – it's a reality check. We do the things that we find joy in, and we procrastinate and dismiss those things that we don't enjoy – like working out.

We know it's good for us and beneficial, but we just can't find the time, we just can't get up and do it – until we find something we enjoy.

We don't HAVE to pray – we GET to pray! But this is one of those things that gets taken for granted with the cross in our rearview mirror.

What is Paul thankful for with the Philippians? Something that makes my pastor's heart so joyful: shared mutual interest, fellowship, IN THE GOSPEL – THE GOOD MESSAGE.

AND, remarkably, the Philippians had a reputation for faithfulness over the long haul, “from the first day until now.”

“The church at Philippi was founded by the apostle Paul on his second missionary journey from Antioch, Syria. The precise time of Paul’s arrival is unknown, but most likely it was around A.D. 51.”<sup>5</sup>

That puts this letter about ten years after the church plant. Ten years of faithfulness is nothing to scoff at.

It is also recorded that the Philippians maintained a vibrant, caring church for much longer!

“The church remained strong into the second century.... Fifty years after Paul’s letter to the church, Ignatius was escorted to Rome by Roman soldiers to be tried for his faith in Christ and he was comforted by the church at Philippi on the way.”<sup>6</sup>

Endurance, loved one! Faithfulness! That is what marks the Lord’s churches. Names change, buildings change, trends come and go, but the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, wherever it may be, endures!

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<sup>5</sup> Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary 32 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 26.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 29.

Paul takes his confidence in the staying power of the saints from the Lord Jesus. It is Jesus who began the good work in them, and it is Jesus who will finish it.

This is so important – especially as we are considering the endurance and faithfulness of the saints. It is Jesus who is responsible for the work. We have a shared responsibility given to us by Him to be obedient to His direction, but it is ultimately His work to complete.

We would do well to remember this! “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

We must resist all temptation to take over, to assume the role of lord over our own domain. We are woefully unequipped for such a role.

We like to do that, though, don’t we? Having come to faith in Christ by no power of our own but by the grace of God, we sometimes come to a place where we believe that we have matured to a state where we can take over, we can finally take responsibility for our own spiritual growth. NOT SO!

We cling to the person and work of Jesus Christ, knowing that our best efforts are fraught with failure if we rely on our own authority and lordship.

We must allow Jesus to complete the work that He has started in us. He is faithful to do so in His timing, on His terms, for His purpose and glory.

In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul spends time addressing the trap into which they fell trying to keep the old covenant and traditions when he wrote, “Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” (Gal 3:3, NKJV)

But the same challenge resonates with us. Are we trying to perfect ourselves by means other than the cross of Christ? Ultimately those attempts will prove unsuccessful and burdensome.

But praise be to our Lord who is faithful when we are not and who has promised to carry out every good work both within us and through us until His day, until the very end.

As one text reads: “The outward cooperation in the work of the gospel is, of course, the outcome and expression of the inward change made at the time of conversion.”<sup>7</sup>

This is incredibly hopeful – what we do, our cooperation in the kingdom, in our shared fellowship in the gospel, matters

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<sup>7</sup> Johannes Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 12.

AND will be accomplished according to Jesus' faithfulness rather than our own. That's amazing!

Jesus will go on completing the work that He started! This informs our understanding of how sanctification or growing in holiness works. It is not a flash in the pan but something we grow in over time, over years of interacting with and responding to the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. We are made righteous by the blood of Jesus, and we are being made righteous, "conformed to His image," (Rom 8:29) until He comes again.

That leads us to consider the when of it all. WHEN is "the day of Jesus Christ" – what does this mean?

"The Lord's coming, designed by God in every age of the Church to be regarded as near, is to be the goal set before believers' minds rather than their own death."<sup>8</sup>

*"The Day of Christ Jesus* is not a reference to the day of one's death, but to the Parousia, or the return of Christ."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 2: 360.

<sup>9</sup> Louw and Nida, *Handbook on Philippians*, 13.

We, as Jesus followers, are to live in a state of expectancy. It's not as if the early church was duped or had bad theology since they expected the Lord to return at any moment.

We are hopeful of the same thing! That is what lends urgency to our witness, to our labor for the kingdom – that more may be saved while the patience of God continues.

“This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is; time is running out. Wake up, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.” (Rom 13:11, NLT)

V. 7 Paul's affection and prayers for the saints are not misplaced, nor out of line, nor is this some form of flattery to be avoided.

It is right and good to have affection for the saints – and we would do well to remember that and internalize it!

Paul doesn't shy away from this type of tenderhearted language.

We know from his other writings that he certainly does not hold back in saying the hard things, good or bad. Paul speaks truth, and it is good for us to both speak these things in sincere love for one another and hear these things from others.

Even though Paul found himself in trying circumstances, he took great comfort in his relationship with the saints, going so far as to say, “I have you in my heart.”

We understand what deep affection this communicates. AND we find that the foundation of this affection was the grace of God that they shared.

We share in God’s grace individually but also collectively.

When we recall that these fellow saints who are being shaped by Jesus in the kingdom with us are joint heirs and joint recipients of God’s favor, that has a unique way of shaping how we interact with one another and how we hold people in our hearts.

We are sinners! Yet we are loved by God, saved by grace, and we’re all in this together. Let us then endeavor to keep one another in our hearts, in our prayers, and to lean into this blessed fellowship in the gospel that the Lord has established for us.

## CHAPTER 3 | PHILIPPIANS 1:8-11

V. 8 – We return to Paul’s affection for the saints in Philippi.

His love for them was evidenced by his deep desire to be with them. His affection for the Philippians, we see, is like “the affection of Jesus Christ.”

The love of Jesus Christ is that intimate, connected, sacrificial love extended to us based solely on His prerogative and initiative.

This is not superficial love, seasonal love, or romantic love but profound care that is felt and carried deep in the gut, the pit of the stomach, or as the original language indicates to us – the bowels (σπλάγχνοις, *splagknois*).

This is how Paul classified his love for the Philippians! What an encouragement! The Philippians are more than just some



church to Paul. AND they are more than just some church to Jesus.

They are deeply loved and cared for. We are too, church!

What's more – this is an affection that is observable by God. He is the one who sees our fellowship, our affection for Him and for one another.

God is the eyewitness of our love. I find this to be especially pertinent in our documentarian culture, where exhibitionist outreach is not only the norm but encouraged both in our society and in the church at large.

V. 9–11 Here is Paul's continued prayer for the Philippians – that their own holy expressions of love would find root in their lives and grow!

He prays, “that your love may abound still more and more.” Paul desired that the saints at Philippi would continue maturing as believers.

Even so, we are to be growing as believers.

None of us are called to devolve into stagnant, cold, curmudgeonly, wretched believers. We are not called to love one another theoretically but to truly, practically love one another. To be warm and gracious like Jesus.

Likewise, there is no indication that we are called to adopt the disposition of room-temperature hot dog water in our love, knowledge, and discernment.

Rather we are to grow! How much? More and more!

You may know that the Bible is filled with agricultural metaphors – which preaches quite well in the South!

As we go through the Bible, we are constantly presented with holy truth through the example of fruit, harvests, seeds, birds, plows, sowers, soil, rocks, trees, rain, vines, gardeners, etc.

That's on purpose! God is communicating to us in terms that we can observe and understand.

One such place is Psalm 1:1-3, NKJV:

Blessed [is] the man  
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,  
Nor stands in the path of sinners,  
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;  
But his delight [is] in the law of the LORD,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.  
He shall be like a tree  
Planted by the rivers of water,  
That brings forth its fruit in its season,  
Whose leaf also shall not wither;  
And whatever he does shall prosper.

Grow, loved one! Come to life! Grow as you consider God's Word and respond to it.

As we sit with God's Word, meditate on it, and respond to it, we find that it is not in our own strength or by our own devices that we are growing, but it is by God's Spirit.

In what areas are we to grow?

First and foremost, our love is to multiply, to become abundant, to overflow – bigger, warmer, more frequent, more often toward those who don't deserve it. In short, love like Jesus!

That's how the world will know that we are Christ's disciples.

AND that love is to grow IN knowledge AND all discernment.

There are many poignant layers to this request for love to abound and grow in knowledge and judgment, including the relationship BETWEEN love, knowledge, and judgment, and how these three are practically carried out both individually and jointly with or without the other named characteristics.

For example, it's possible to love with or without judgment; it's possible to execute judgment with or without love. The same goes for knowledge.

One commentator remarks on this portion of Scripture:

The words 'knowledge and depth of insight [discernment]' provide the twofold environment in which love may grow. They are, in fact, the most basic elements which foster love.... These two terms provide a collective environment which fosters growth. If either is lacking, love will not grow.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, I have observed a nasty, lazy streak found throughout the kingdom among those believers who are drawn to the lukewarm, neither loving nor learning. This is marked by a sort of arrogant piety devoid of knowledge that is both opposed to study and cannot be moved to caring for others.

This is the movement that says in the middle of the most trying human experiences, where love is the most needed, "you just gotta have faith" or some other bland, lifeless spiritual sounding cliché – all delivered in the most dismissive terms, unwilling to press into that moment lovingly.

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<sup>10</sup> Melick, 65.

And in regards to knowledge and judgment, they continue to avoid committing to true teachable discipleship by saying in the most presumptuous way, “I don’t need anybody to teach me anything; I’ve got the Spirit and my Bible.”

We have described the unloving and unlearned – marks of which we have all carried, marks of which dot churches across the land. Unfortunately, we know all too well what this looks like. Forgive us, Lord.

“C. H. Spurgeon ... countered such pretension with some advice to budding preachers.... ‘It seems odd, that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves, should think so little of what he has revealed to others.’”<sup>11</sup>

A working love is a love that grows in knowledge and judgment.

On this point, one might reply, “Well, doesn’t the Bible also say, ‘knowledge puffs up, but love edifies’ or ‘knowledge makes us arrogant, but love builds us?’” (1 Cor 8:1)

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<sup>11</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries* (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1876), 11, quoted in William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 206–207.

This line of thinking is a blatant attempt to paint the two – knowledge and love – as incompatible even as we find that Paul succinctly pairs the two together here in our text.

We must do our best to let the Scriptures stand as they are presented.

We have this insatiable desire to harmonize things within God's Word that are not presented to us in a harmonized form.

We believe we see contradictions where none exist.

Is it possible to study God's Word, to grow in the knowledge that will allow us to have a more scriptural discernment and judgment and remain loving? Yes.

Is it possible that along the way, we will become arrogant and prideful in those things we learn? Also, yes.

Haven't we seen both of these things in our own experience – yes!

Nevertheless, are we not called to obedience? Or are we so afraid that we are going to stumble into arrogance that we don't do anything at all?

This is like the argument by those who have been wounded by somebody within the church, so they throw out the baby

with the bathwater when there is no scriptural allowance to do so.

In response to this feigned pursuit of humility and aversion to study because of the risk of becoming arrogant, I propose that before Christ, we weren't all too humble to begin with!

It is not by growing in the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we become more arrogant, more prideful. Instead, He is the cure to our intrinsic human sickness – self-importance.

And to His praise, He is holding on to us in the midst of our arrogance. We can be certain that as we grow into His likeness, we will leave those ugly characteristics behind.

On the topic of growing in knowledge, Peter writes, “For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge.” (2 Pe 1:5, NIV)

We are to grow in knowledge; that much is clear.

AND – we must consider that as God unites love, knowledge, and discernment, in the same manner, His love comes to us as a whole package — with knowledge (He knows us!). God's love for us is not a blind love but a perfectly informed love.

From a human perspective, when we love people blindly, we aren't truly loving them as God does. Unconditional love and blind love are not the same.

Matthew Henry writes about this: "It is not a blind love that will recommend us to God, but a love grounded upon knowledge and judgment. We must love God because of his infinite excellence and loveliness and love our brethren because of what we see of the image of God upon them. Strong passions, without knowledge and a settled judgment, will not make us complete in the will of God, and sometimes do more hurt than good."<sup>12</sup>

We also find the WHY of Paul's desire that the Philippians would grow in love, knowledge, and discernment: "That you may approve the things that are excellent."

When we come to Christ, we are learning to see with new eyes; we are learning to think with new minds – the mind of Christ.

We are learning that how we once viewed things may be skewed by sin and a fallen creation. But He is teaching us to make a distinction between that which is common and that which is excellent in a spiritual sense.

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<sup>12</sup> Henry, Phil. 1:9.



It's incredible to watch the worldview of believers change because of Jesus. We shudder to think of those things we once believed to be good and right, knowing now how fraught with sin they were.

Additionally, we see that part of our growth results in sincerity of belief.

As we grow and learn and understand, we come to find that the faith we profess is not as fragile as some propose.

These are not just fairy tales but battle-tested truths that have been scrutinized, maligned, and twisted over the millennia, and yet they remain because they are true!

Take courage, loved one – this faith is true and not just because of a feeling, a hunch, or because somebody else said so, but because what we hold to be true actually occurred and is occurring in the present.

Those things that lay the foundation of our faith – the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – were witnessed and recorded for us.

As John writes:

We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, **whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him**

**with our own hands.** He is the Word of life. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and **we have seen him.** And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. We proclaim to you what **we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us.** And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy. (1 Jhn 1:1-4, emphasis mine, NLT)

It is the truth of the gospel, God's reconciliation of man and the reality of His Word, that stirs up sincerity within us and keeps us from offense. Not that we shall never fail – but that we are secured by God's grace, and He shall keep us until the end.

Keep in mind – it is not sincerity alone that wins the day! There are many sincere people who have offended God, who are yet to be reconciled to Him.

“Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” (Rom 10:1-2)

This lends urgency to disciple-making! That our love might grow in knowledge and discernment that we might grow into Him in sincerity and without offense.

FOR HOW LONG? How long are we to be growing and maturing?

When do we get to retire from discipleship? Until the day of Christ (ref. v. 6) – when we shall finally be made complete, and His kingdom shall continue in perfection forevermore.

Until that day, the result of our growth and God’s gift by the Spirit is that we are filled, inculcated, and engrained with the fruit of righteousness.

This reminds us of the “fruit of the Spirit” found in Gal 5:22. Without taking a detour to examine that at length, we do recognize that the Scriptures teach us that the life of the one following Jesus is changed and is recognizable by the fruit born therein.

Where does that fruit come from? Where do good works, reformed character, holiness come from?

Some suggest that it is cultivated by our own choices or perhaps by our own moral agency. Some propose that we can try hard enough to be good people, and in doing so, we may represent Jesus Christ adequately.

Unfortunately, many have found out the hard way that such a life is often found to be fruitless in the most practical sense; the spiritual cupboards run out of stock quickly.

That well-intentioned yet hungry saint is found scraping the bottom of the barrel to present themselves as full and having everything they need — productive, and brimming over with good works — while, in reality, they are empty, fruitless, withering away.

Jesus taught the disciples how to bear fruit.

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. (Jhn 15:4-5, NLT)

So then, the source of this fruit in our lives is Jesus Christ.

“These are the natural consequences of being restored to a right relationship with God. Paul is careful to add that this quality is not something that a man can acquire for himself; it is something which *only Jesus Christ can produce*.”<sup>13</sup>

To what end? The glory and praise of God.

So, then we finally come face to face with the chief purpose of our growth in love, knowledge, and discernment.

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<sup>13</sup> Louw and Nida, *Handbook on Philippians*, 18.

In that growth, we find sincerity, we find a life free of offense, but ultimately, we are carefully cultivated trees, bearing fruit that is brought forth by the master gardener of human souls – God Himself.

The good work He is working within us, that good fruit He is growing in us, that good work He is bringing out of us is a testament to His perfection and glory.

The idea is that when others look upon the saints, they see the wondrous works of God and glorify Him for what HE has done and is doing.

This nicely ties up our discussion on growing in knowledge – the question one might ask themselves is, “Why do I desire to grow in knowledge?” Is it for the glory of God or ourselves? Is it out of obedience or ambition?

It is certainly possible for people to hold mixed motives, but every indication here is that we are supposed to be growing up.

Or, as we read in Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesians:

...we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ. (Eph 4:14-15, NKJV)

The end result of our growth, the fruit of righteousness, growing in love and knowledge, is ultimately for the glory and praise of God.

Let Him be high and lifted up in our every endeavor.

Let His name be praised for His faithfulness, His holiness, His glory.

And rejoice that we get to be a part of that! That He has not left us as some brain-dead amoeba to sleep through eternity but that He has called us to grow, to adopt His nature and character, to bear fruit, and to have the mind of Christ.

Amen.

## CHAPTER 4 | PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18

V.12–14 Paul’s personal report – the furtherance of the gospel through his difficult circumstances.

We must remember that at this time in Paul’s ministry, the entire “worldwide” ministry of the gospel, limited as it was, existed and advanced in the face of hostile governments and very little power or influence in the world.

It wasn’t until a few hundred years later (c. 4th century AD) that Christianity made a strange bed-fellow with the imperial Roman government. We know now that produced mixed results and gave rise first to the Roman Catholic church with its intermingling of Roman mysticism and idolatry and then to its eastern off-shoot (Greek Orthodox) with its reverence of images called icons.

That form of Christianity, no doubt with a faithful remnant still intact, persevered for over a thousand years. And, with Christians holding the levers of power across their disparate geographic regions, this union resulted in much bloodshed, persecution, and death even among their own brothers and sisters.

So, we say all of that in a very simplistic way just to say in a further reduced way: the grass is always greener on the other side.

When Christians lack worldly power and influence, we sometimes long for it, believing that we are best equipped to wield it and that we will usher in unprecedented eras of peace and prosperity.

We sometimes suppose that if we could just change the balance of power in our favor, we might be able to do more for the gospel's sake (whatever our motives may actually be).

When we do have worldly power and influence, as has happened in the “west” over the past several centuries, we long for the days of the sincere worship and dedication that we read about among the persecuted and underground churches of history.

We lament the current state of affairs, corporatized faith, and lukewarm believers.



Rarely has our longing for greener pastures played out in the idealized forms that we imagine on either end of the spectrum.

AND, contrary to that line of thinking, Paul tells his beloved family at Philippi that it is through his less-than-ideal circumstances –riots, shipwrecks, arrests, beatings, threats, uncertainty, fake believers, etc. – that the gospel, the good message, advanced!

This should re-center our expectations and lives as well. No matter our circumstances God is not blind to them, and He is perfectly capable of advancing His message.

Who among us can claim Paul’s affliction?! Very few, if any. And yet, we tend to feel as if the world has finally stopped the gospel and is chipping away at the church when we encounter the slightest bit of resistance.

But Paul saw this as actually *advancing* the gospel. Paul saw his situation as progress! To add a bit more detail to Paul’s thinking:

“The term ‘advanced’ (προκοπήν, *prokopēn*) was used in the Greek-speaking world to describe blazing a trail before an army.... Paul, therefore, saw the events as forging new territory for the gospel. They took Paul into contact with a

select group of people, soldiers and Roman officials, who otherwise would have had no relationship to him, and they also prompted a renewed evangelistic effort in the city. While others may have seen the end of missionary activity, Paul saw the new ways the gospel could advance. The events which seemed to inhibit the freedom of the gospel became its springboard. Paul did not say ‘in spite of’ these events, but rather ‘through them.’”<sup>14</sup>

Lest we make the wrong conclusion that this is the only way God operates, by allowing the saints to be thrown in jail, let me remind you of the life of Joseph from Genesis. He actually *did* hold quite a bit of power and influence.

Pharaoh asked his officials, “Can we find anyone else like this man so obviously filled with the spirit of God?” Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has revealed the meaning of the dreams to you, clearly no one else is as intelligent or wise as you are. You will be in charge of my court, and all my people will take orders from you. Only I, sitting on my throne, will have a rank higher than yours.” Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I hereby put you in charge of the entire land of Egypt.” Then Pharaoh removed his signet ring from his hand and placed it on Joseph’s finger. He dressed him in fine linen clothing and hung a gold chain around his neck. Then he had Joseph ride in the chariot reserved for his second-in-command. And wherever Joseph went, the command was

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<sup>14</sup> Melick, 70

shouted, “Kneel down!” So Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of all Egypt. And Pharaoh said to him, “I am Pharaoh, but no one will lift a hand or foot in the entire land of Egypt without your approval.” (Gen 41:38-44, NLT)

But remember the suffering Joseph endured along the way!

After all that Joseph experienced, he spoke to his own brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.” (Gen 50:20, NLT)

I bring this up to demonstrate that in our lives, as God is working all things out for His own glory, He uses many diverse situations and circumstances to position His people to do His work according to His will.

In Joseph’s case, God used terrible tragedy to bring Joseph to a position of power, to demonstrate His own glory, and to provide for the burgeoning nation of Israel – His special people.

In Paul’s case, God used terrible suffering and hardship to bring the message of reconciliation to the highest levels of governmental power, with the end result being Paul’s death.

He uses ALL THINGS for His will – the good and the seemingly bad.

Consider this: it is death, the shameful death of Christ, that reconciles us to God in the first place!

It is the hard uncertainty and grind of life that results in a strengthened faith and perseverance among the saints.

“we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance.” (Rom 5:3, NKJV)

AND —

Blessed [are] those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great [is] your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matt 5:10–12, NKJV)

This might seem counterintuitive to us. We might ask, “Why would a good, kind, loving God choose to advance His message of reconciliation through broken, messed up, stressful, anxiety-inducing, trying circumstances?”

AND yet, our lives serve as the object lesson – we are the proof that is in the pudding!

God has wrought such a glorious work in our own fallen lives. This is how He works, taking the seemingly

irredeemable and transforming it into something glorious, beautiful, and holy.

AND people who are outside the kingdom get to encounter the gospel as we operate in those areas of life that are marked by distress, anxiety, uncertainty, and death because we worship the Living God – the God of the resurrection.

What began as death in our lives turned to life, and this promise of life is extended to all.

That is why Paul was able to maintain a sense of hope even during his imprisonment and pass that hope on to others.

V. 13 He communicated this hope to everyone, from the soldiers who were personally guarding him to anyone else he met; they all came to know that Paul was a prisoner of Jesus Christ FIRST regardless of what his physical captivity may indicate.

This is remarkable because rather than being seen as a poor, pitiful, persecuted Christian, or even a political criminal, these people came to view Paul's circumstances as uniquely positioned in Christ.

And, in this situation, rather than petitioning the believers in Rome and Philippi to do their best to bust him out, it appears that Paul reveled in his captivity in Jesus.

Paul wasn't some criminal getting what he deserved but a Jesus follower who was on a mission, appointed by God to bear Jesus' name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. (Acts 9:15) And he did so enthusiastically!

V. 14 Paul was doing more than spreading the gospel to unbelievers throughout the area. His circumstances, as rough as they were and as restricted as his movements and activities may have been, actually bolstered the confidence of fellow believers! They saw what God was doing through Paul.

MOST (although not all) of the brethren grew more confident because of Paul's situation.

Notice that not everybody was on board with this – as is always the case. There will always be hold-outs, half-committed people, nay-sayers, and grumps.

But MOST of the believers saw a boost to their own confidence by observing Paul's conduct. What a glorious ministry! Paul's chains didn't dissuade them or cause them to cower but built them up!

“The fundamental change expressed ... must be rendered in some languages as ‘becoming bolder constantly,’ or ‘are constantly more and more bold.’”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Louw and Nida, *Handbook on Philippians*, 21.

They saw that earthly chains were insufficient to bind God's Word.

They were moved to say something! What were they saying?

THE WORD! τὸν λόγον (*ton logon*) – “This absolute use of ‘the word’ occurs frequently in Paul to describe the gospel, the message about Christ.”<sup>16</sup>

This speaking forth of the Word they did without fear. It's not that they had never been afraid, but what they were witnessing removed their fears. It's almost as if seeing Paul continuing to preach and teach and labor even in his chains showed them the real power of the gospel and the reality of their calling and faith.

What was there to be afraid of? Well, chains, for one thing!

Persecution, hardship, death.

We still fear to speak the gospel today as well – for much more minor afflictions. We fear we might be misunderstood or stereotyped. We fear we might be excluded. We fear we might lose our tax-exempt status as a church. We fear we

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<sup>16</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 116.

might be scorned or laughed at as outdated relics of an ancient faith.

We want so badly to fit in, but we've literally been called to stand out, to be a special, unique people.

But you [are] a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once [were] not a people but [are] now the people of God. (1Pe 2:9-10, NKJV)

We've been called to proclaim His praises, to speak the Word boldly, to say something!

Please note that we are not called to say just *anything*, but the one thing – the good message, the gospel. God has reconciled us to Himself by the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And we are not called to be people of fear regardless of the chains that await us.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of **power** and of **love** and of a **sound mind**. Therefore do not be ashamed **of the testimony** of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called [us] with a holy calling. (2 Ti 1:7–9, NKJV, emphasis mine)



However, even as MOST of the family of God were moved to boldness, shed their fear, and speak forth the Word – others did something a little different.

V.15–17 The gospel is preached from both good and bad motives.

Paul, and the Scriptures as a whole, are not naive to the human condition. Where there is an opportunity to seize a position of relative advantage over others for one purpose or another – control, money, ego, etc. – humans will seize that opportunity.

“[E]mboldened by Paul’s imprisonment, ... the motive of some is less out of love for the gospel than it is out of a desire to rub salt in his wound.”<sup>17</sup>

Many have found some measure of ugly success doing just that with the gospel.

I want to be careful to make a distinction here about what Paul is saying.

We find in these verses that Paul does not issue a scathing rebuke to those who preach the gospel from a position of envy, selfish-ambition, insincerity, who are literally seeking to

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<sup>17</sup> Fee, 117.

kick a man while he's down. This is a bit confounding because we know from other writings just how much Paul opposes false teachers.

BUT what are they preaching? The gospel.

Can men with evil motives preach the gospel? Yes. Does this happen today? Perhaps more than we will ever know. Ministry attracts all kinds of people for all sorts of reasons – not the least of which is because of the platform!

It is an ugly reality that there are people in ministry who are doing it for really terrible reasons.

NOW this is not the same as those who are preaching “another” or a different gospel. (Gal 1:6)

From what is discernible from this portion of Scripture, we see that the gospel is actually preached. So, we have to balance these thoughts: do we pray that all people would preach the gospel from sincerity and goodness? Yes! Are we guaranteed that will happen? No.

Also, we must understand when we are to “call a spade a spade” and when we are to discern the wolves in sheep's clothing who aren't preaching the gospel at all but some mutilated form of the gospel meant to prey upon people.

Paul even states that he “has been appointed for the defense of the gospel.” (v. 17)

God’s Word is clear about discerning false prophets and teachers. “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.” (Matt 7:15, NKJV)

AND—

I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 1:3–4, NKJV)

Further still—

“Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!” (Phl 3:2, NKJV)

So, we wouldn’t give license to Joel Osteen or Kenneth Copeland or Benny Hinn to continue taking advantage of God’s people and claiming it’s the gospel because what they teach isn’t actually the gospel. It’s not actually God’s Word; it’s garbage decorated with religious-sounding language and presented to hurting people in order to take advantage of them.

The beauty of those kinds of false teachers is that you can typically discern their falsehoods through careful Bible study.

Whereas the guy preaching the gospel straight up and down, week in and week out with bad motives, is frequently indiscernible, unknowable because that motive lives hidden in his heart, not exposed on his sleeve.

We ourselves revolt at the thought! But Charles Simeon (a late 18th and early 19th century Anglican preacher) challenges us to introspection: “Few, indeed, would acknowledge that they were influenced by such vanity as this: but, if they would mark what inordinate satisfaction they feel in a crowded audience, and what disappointment in a thin attendance, they might see, that, to say the least, their motives are very questionable.”<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand – by God’s grace, *some* preach out of love – this division of hearts in the pulpit continues today. And what can we say about it? Matthew Henry writes:

“It is God’s prerogative to judge of the principles men act upon; this is out of our line. Paul ... rejoiced in the preaching of it [the gospel] even by those who do it in pretence, and not in truth. How much more then should we rejoice in the preaching of the gospel by those who do it in

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Simeon, *Horae Homileticae: Philipians to 1 Timothy* (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1833), 18: 19.

truth ... *though it should be with much weakness and some mistake!*" (emphasis mine)<sup>19</sup>

Those who preached out of love understood Paul's place in the kingdom – it's not a competition.

V. 18 What then? What is the conclusion of this dichotomy of good and bad motives? So what?

*Only* that in *every way Christ* is *preached*.

The idea here is not that Paul approves of false teachers teaching a false message, but that insincere, duplicitous teachers are proclaiming Jesus – with a right message but a wrong heart.

Now listen, that matters. Those people shall answer for their trespasses.

"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment." (Jas 3:1, NKJV)

But at least the gospel goes forth. What's amazing about that is that God can do so much with so very little.

As long as Christ is declared – Paul has reason to rejoice – and so do we all. Be filled with the fruits of righteousness so that you can confidently say, "I have preached Christ from

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<sup>19</sup> Henry, 2322.

sincerity, love, and truth.” And know that God is building His kingdom, even with broken tools like us, even in the midst of circumstances that we find trying. No chains shall ever hold the gospel. No prison cell shall ever silence Christ’s messengers.

## CHAPTER 5 | PHILIPPIANS 1:19-30

### **Life, death, striving for the faith of the gospel, suffering.**

V. 19–20 are directly connected with v. 18. Paul rejoices because in every way Christ is preached AND, in v. 19 because he is confident that even though his current circumstance is his own imprisonment, he is certain of his deliverance.

This sentence has been called “one of the more complex sentences in the Pauline corpus.”<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly, some scholars believe that Paul intentionally borrowed language from Job 13:16 here in verse 19, making his language much more impactful and dramatic.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Fee, 138.

<sup>21</sup> “Paul’s first clause is a verbatim borrowing from Job 13:16 (LXX); LXX Septuagint.” Fee, 130.

LXX: τοῦτό μοι ἀποβήσεται εἰς σωτηρίαν (Job 13:16)

GNT: τοῦτό μοι ἀποβήσεται εἰς σωτηρίαν (Phil 1:19)

It would call to mind the sufferings of righteous Job as a divinely elected representative of God the Father in the face of tremendous adversity and a vitriolic accuser.

And don't we love to compare ourselves to Job!

The encouraging part for us is that Paul likely kept this view in his own mind, hoping in the providence, sovereignty, and provision of God through both the Holy Spirit and the prayers of the saints.

AND more than just hope, Paul held on to an “earnest expectation.” He believed, even expected, that he would be vindicated justly by God. This is where we must point out the textual issue of the term “deliverance” from v. 19.

The term used is σωτηρίαν (*soterian*), which holds within its semantic range the idea of “deliverance, preservation, w. focus on physical aspect; [and also] salvation, w. focus on transcendent aspects.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 985.



Some believe that Paul is referring only to his physical release, while others believe that Paul is referring only to his once and for all spiritual salvation.

Could it be possible that Paul holds both of these ideas in his head at the same time? I believe so.

It is certainly possible that Paul is speaking only of his physical deliverance. Still, the sense we get from what we are looking at here is that Paul isn't overly concerned with his physical circumstances.

In fact, that is the sense we get from the majority of Paul's writing.

He endured much hardship. And since he was able to continue to preach the gospel in light of his circumstances, he was content to do so.

Paul even committed to continued boldness in order to magnify Christ in his own body come what may – life or death. He was placing himself firmly under God's hand, trusting in His sovereignty.

We must also take a moment to reflect upon the idea of "magnifying Christ." That is certainly our desire!

Whatever circumstances awaited Paul, he boldly proceeded to enlarge Jesus and bring Christ into greater focus rather than bringing himself and his own desires into greater focus.

This is an attitude shared by the faithful and may be best encapsulated in John the Baptist's proclamation, "He must increase, but I [must] decrease." (Jhn 3:30, NKJV)

Paul even realizes that death is a genuine possibility which brings us to the quite famous and theologically rich declaration in v. 21.

V. 21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Oh, how far do we have to go, Lord, to learn this lesson? How much must we mature before we grasp this truth? – even as we look toward our example, Christ who bore the cross to Calvary.

Even this truth, "to live is Christ," is no guarantee of comfortable living. How much of Christ's life was marked by comfort and abundance? Remember what Isaiah wrote of the Messiah, "[W]e esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted." (Isa 53:4)

And yet, we who magnify Christ are a benefit to this world each day we wake up with breath in our lungs because of the

message we bear – the gospel – the chance for reconciliation and a new life.

The NLT reads, “For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.” (Phil 1:21)

Let that thought blow your mind. Paul is saying that he sees dying and being with Jesus as a greater blessing than continuing to live.

So, was Paul some kind of suicidal crazy person?

We must take care to balance this idea with the entirety of Scripture, Paul’s rejoicing in v. 18, and the further joy and faith that we see in our text.

Christians aren’t called to be some fatalistic, morose cult with a death wish. Instead, we find peace in understanding that what we experience here is not the standard of eternal beauty and completion but a fallen creation! Those things that are most beautiful to us in this life are still fractured and marred by sin.

Paul explains his thinking further in the following verses.

V. 22–24 The dilemma of a life of labor and being with the Lord.

We get the sense that Paul is conflicted. Now, we should say that even as Paul indicates that this is confounding to him – the pull of desire between laboring for the Lord in this life and longing to see Jesus in eternity – he doesn’t actually get to choose.

Some translators and commentators have proposed that Paul is trying to communicate the idea that “he dares not venture to decide between the alternatives, but the choice must be left to the Lord.”<sup>23</sup>

Paul has already given us that idea in v. 20: “Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.”

But consider that in his captivity, he has had much time to consider the very real possibility of death and his own mortality while facing a government that is less than enthusiastic about the gospel.

Blessedly, we see that Paul’s focus and attention are on Christ no matter what. If he survives, then he is able to continue to labor for Jesus’ sake. If he dies, then he gets to be with the Lord!

This is a much different perspective than the universal notion of self-preservation built into every human’s DNA.

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<sup>23</sup> Louw and Nida, *Handbook on Philippians*, 33.

This willingness to face death head-on is only something that becomes ingrained within us as we are grasped by the Holy Spirit, and God plants the insatiable desire for the furtherance of the kingdom within our spirit!

Paul is not focused on continuing to exist on planet Earth for his own betterment but for others – and specifically, he understands that the Philippians would benefit from his continued service to them.

V. 25–26 We really feel Paul’s deep love and affection for the Philippians here, even in the midst of his hardship.

We see Paul’s faith on display as well. Even though there is some uncertainty, he is confident that the Lord will abandon neither him nor the church; but He will work all things out for His own good pleasure – caring for His people as we magnify His name.

Remarkably, Paul was released from his captivity – some believe around the year 62 AD – because “the Jews who had accused him ... didn’t press their case before the emperor.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Derek G. Jeter, “Historical Background of Paul’s Final Imprisonment,” *Insight for Living* (August 2017). <https://insight.org/resources/article-library/individual/historical-background-of-paul-s-final-imprisonment>.

So, we find that Paul's words were not in vain; he was not wrong to trust, hope, and expect that he would see the Philippians again and that he would be able to build them up in their faith.

Additionally, from the perspective of the Philippians, this informs our understanding of Christian living today.

We need teachers. We need people to build us up. It is necessary for us to receive instruction in the faith both by God's Word and by personal example.

Paul wrote about this to the Ephesians:

And He Himself gave some [to be] apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph 4:11-12, NKJV)

Paul expected to serve them further and help them grow in their faith, and that continuation of their mutual faith was to be marked by progress and joy!

That's such a timely reminder! And why shouldn't we rejoice!?

Whether by life or death, Christ is magnified! People are saved! Lives are changed! The Kingdom of God advances! That is reason to rejoice!

## V. 27–28 Paul’s exhortation to the church

Given his current circumstances, to whom did Paul find it necessary to pass on these instructions? Pagans? Unbelievers? No – to the church! We need these reminders! We are hearing so many messages that it is good and right for us to be reminded of our calling and purpose.

Let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ!

In these verses (19–30), we should note that Paul mentions Christ seven times by name and two more times using the personal pronoun “Him”!

Do you see the centrality of Paul’s belief and message? It is Christ!

Christ is the one who shall ensure Paul’s deliverance both in an immediate and future/eschatological sense.

Christ is the one who will be magnified by life or death.

Christ is why Paul desires to live and why he desires to depart this life.

Christ is the reason why the Philippians can rejoice.

And here in v. 27, Christ is the impetus for right conduct.

Let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ. Not because we win Christ's affection by our conduct – He loved us when we were sinners. (Rom 5:6) He loves us still when we fall short.

Our conduct becomes worthy of the gospel of Christ because, by the gospel, our very lives are re-shaped into the likeness of Jesus Christ!

As Paul desires to hear of their affairs, we must understand that information traveled a lot slower in the first century. With no internet, phone, electricity, etc., information traveled by people either in written form like these epistles or by verbal report.

One could go ages not knowing the affairs of those they cared about. Paul's desire was that the way the Philippians interacted with one another and the world would send a clear message about their faith.

Don't we love it when we hear that other believers are still committed to the Lord and are still living out lives of service in obedience to Jesus!? Yes, of course! Conversely, it breaks our hearts to hear of those dear loved ones who have abandoned the faith or fallen away.

John writes about this feeling, "For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth [that is] in you, just



as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” (3 Jhn 1:3–4, NKJV)

Furthermore, the Philippian church was urged to demonstrate unity: one spirit, one mind, all focused on contending for the gospel.

This is so applicable today in a world where the church has become known more for our infighting and doctrinal differences than a unity of spirit, mind, and togetherness as we contend for the faith of the gospel.

*“With one common purpose* may be expressed in some languages as ‘by all intending the same way,’ ‘by all of you having the same goal in mind,’ or ‘by all of you wanting to do the same.’”<sup>25</sup>

Now, we must also bring attention to this term “striving.” So often, we believers say that we don’t want to strive in ministry because we attach to that term the idea of striving or pursuing something according to our fleshly desires.

BUT we must acknowledge that as believers we are to contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3), to fight the good fight (1 Tim 6:12), to wage the good warfare (1 Tim 1:18) for the gospel – not for personal gain or ancillary agendas that

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<sup>25</sup> Louw and Nida, *Handbook on Philippians*, 40.

are loosely associated with the gospel – but we must contend for the clear, unadulterated, good news of Jesus Christ itself!

Don't get twisted up in confusing the gospel, or the faith, with something else. Never believe the lie that by convincing unbelieving, unreconciled humans to live morally acceptable lives, we have won! It is not so!

Man's greatest need is not good behavior but reconciliation through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is that gospel that shapes our behavior.

Paul goes on to tell the Philippians that as they live out their lives in a way that was certainly in stark contrast to their cultural context, they should do so unafraid. The reality for them was that their faith was not unopposed.<sup>26</sup>

Their steadfast faith – an unshakeable faith – and peace in Christ was to be the very visible proof of eternity. For the unbeliever, the steadfastness of the faithful was proof of future destruction. For the believer, this unshakeable faith was proof of eternal salvation.

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<sup>26</sup> Fee, 167.

Matthew Henry helps us understand this verse when he writes: “[I]t is a good sign ... when we are enabled in a right manner to suffer for the cause of Christ.”<sup>27</sup>

V. 29–30 Paul reminds them of the reality of the faith – suffering.

“[A]ll who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” (2 Tim 3:12)

Suffering is part of the Christian life. And as we see here in verse 29, it has been granted; God allowed the Philippians to be given over to suffering.

BDAG reads, “you have (graciously) been granted the privilege of suffering for Christ.”<sup>28</sup>

And we say, “I don’t want to suffer!” But to believe in Christ, to share in His likeness, to understand who He is involves suffering.

AND I find Paul’s word choice incredibly interesting given his earlier allusion to Job in v. 19 because we must remember that God granted Job to suffer as well.

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<sup>27</sup> Henry, 2323.

<sup>28</sup> Arndt, 1078.

Sometimes we feel like suffering is divine punishment. Sometimes it is. But not always. Sometimes suffering is the result of sharing fully in the life of Jesus – as Paul writes later in this epistle, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” (Phl 3:10, NKJV)

These things go together: the power of Christ’s resurrection and sharing in His sufferings. And those who are Christ’s are blessed to suffer for His name’s sake.

As Peter writes, “but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.” (1Pe 4:13, NKJV)

After all, as we consider suffering, we must ask ourselves, What does it mean to take up one’s cross at the invitation of Christ? (Matt 16:24, Mar 8:34, Luk 9:23)

Finally, in v. 30, Paul demonstrates an understanding of their mutual hardship. Remember Paul had been arrested, beaten with many stripes, and imprisoned by the Romans in Philippi! (Acts 16)

Now Paul finds himself again very literally imprisoned by the Roman government. So, it’s no wonder then that the Philippians had a hard time with their Roman countrymen.

Gordon Fee writes,

[I]t seems very likely that the (Roman) citizens of Philippi, who would have honored the emperor at every public gathering, were putting special pressure on the Philippian believers; their allegiance had now been given to another [Lord] ..., Jesus, who had himself been executed at the hands of the empire. The present context, in which Paul asserts that they are undergoing ‘the same struggle’ he is now engaged in—as a prisoner of the empire.<sup>29</sup>

If we ever feel like the government we live under isn’t supportive or friendly to our faith, we can take heart!

That same conflict was endured by Christ, by Paul, by the Philippians, by many other first-century churches even into our present age, and all by God’s design. And may I suggest He has graciously granted His church to be in those places and times on purpose – so that we might strive together for the faith of the gospel. May Jesus Christ be magnified forevermore. Amen.

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<sup>29</sup> Fee, 167.

## CHAPTER 6 | PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

At the beginning of Chapter 2, we continue to see Paul's thoughts on the shared experience of Christians with one another, with Christ, and with the gospel.

Paul has already exhorted the Philippians to let their conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ even while acknowledging that they both shared in similar suffering.

“He now appeals to their common experience of Christ's comfort, as a direct response to their common experience of suffering for Christ ... (1:29–30).”<sup>30</sup>

More than ONLY sharing in suffering, the gospel also allows for shared experience in the softer attributes of Christ. That is what we see here. This is what gives balance to our

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<sup>30</sup> Fee, 178.

understanding of who God is, how He relates to us, how we relate to Him, and how we relate to others – even in the midst of suffering.

V. 1–2 There IS consolation, the comfort of LOVE, affection, and mercy.

Paul’s language may seem to indicate to us some doubt or uncertainty of these attributes since many translations include the word “if.” But that is not the intention of the text.

The NLT does an admirable job of reframing these statements as questions to demonstrate to us the point that Paul is making:

“Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate?” (Phil 2:1, NLT)

To these questions, we affirm, “Yes, we do have those things as citizens in Christ’s Kingdom.”

One point in v. 1 bears further investigation. The term “consolation” is found in the KJV and NKJV, but this term is rendered “encouragement” in the ESV, NASB, NIV, and NLT.

The term used in the text is παράκλησις (*paraklesis*), which should spark an interest in those who are students of the Biblical languages.

Suffice it to say that either term, encouragement or consolation, is acceptable insofar as they both communicate the idea of “caus[ing] someone to be encouraged or consoled, either by verbal or non-verbal means—‘to encourage, to console, encouragement.’”<sup>31</sup>

AND

“[An] act of emboldening another in belief or course of action, encouragement, exhortation ... lifting of another’s spirits, comfort, consolation.”<sup>32</sup>

So, part of experiencing Christ is the encouragement found in Him.

We also have the shared experience of comfort that comes from love, His love for us, our love for Him, and our love for one another.

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<sup>31</sup> Louw and Nida, *Semantic Domains*, 305.

<sup>32</sup> Arndt, 766.



We also share in the fellowship of the Spirit, the joint communion which comes from, is supplied by, and is anchored in the Holy Spirit.

We also find “affection” – a nice English translation for the Greek word that literally means BOWELS or GUTS!

This word *σπλάγχχνον* (*splagknon*) was used in the same way we use the word “heart” to communicate love. But I think the term guts or bowels has a much more profound sentiment.

This is more than just theoretical professed affection but an affection that finds root in our gut, in the core of our being. In fact, this is the affection demonstrated toward us by Christ! This is more than a head love; it is a love that takes guts.

We also find mercy – withholding judgment from those who deserve it “with the implication of sensitivity and compassion.”<sup>33</sup>

Since these are things that are found in Christ, then we are to let that dictate our behavior and our unity.

Since all of those things are found in Christ, Paul explicitly commands the Philippians to “fulfill my joy.” That is quite an interesting turn of phrase. Often, we aren’t overly concerned

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<sup>33</sup> Louw and Nida, *Semantic Domains*, 750.

with making others happy, especially since we live in a society that tells us to take care of ourselves first.

Now Paul isn't telling the Philippians to be people-pleasers in the ugly sense of being a doormat.

BUT he is saying that there is a Christian duty to move toward and work for joy, based on the attributes of Christ that we just reviewed: encouragement, comfort of love, fellowship of the Spirit, affection, and mercy.

Since these are things we have access to and a claim to, then we are able to bring joy rightly to others. In this case, the Philippians brought this joy to Paul through their ONENESS, their UNITY.

UNITY OF MIND, not only as a church but a unity of mind WITH CHRIST, is a recurring theme in this portion of scripture.

The call for unity is quite clear, and the marks of a Christ-centered unity are: likeness of mind (thinking the same things in more than just an intellectual sense), having the same love (ἀγάπην – *agapen*), being of one accord (unity in spirit and will), and again – BEING OF ONE MIND.

How can we possibly arrive at such a place as this – unity of mind, spirit, and love, when we are all so convinced of the

rightness of our own individual convictions? How often are we focused on proving to everybody around us just how right we are?

The answer is found as we refocus our minds individually and collectively on the attributes set forth in v. 1 (encouragement, comfort of love, fellowship of the Spirit, affection, and mercy). All of those things are in CHRIST, not ourselves.

Our own convictions, proclivities, understandings, and presuppositions are often flawed and partially informed. AND more often than we would like to admit, they diverge from Scripture and from the person and work of Jesus Christ even though we may package them in a way that conveys a loose association with “Bible-isms.”

Instead, in v. 3–4 Paul instructs the Philippians on how they may come together in unity as a church body. The short answer is to shift their focus (our focus) to OTHERS!

#### V. 3–4 BE OTHERS FOCUSED

Avoid selfishness and selfish ambition, AND esteem others better than yourself! These are plain enough.

The problem is that as we try to live this out mechanically, we believe the “others” to be only the people that we actually like. We disagree with the people that we dislike, with whom

we don't have a unity of mind, or love, or even a shared foundation in Christ. Well, they get what they deserve in our eyes – judgment!

BUT remember, mercy is one of the attributes of Christ that we already discussed as the impetus for our behavior.

We find ourselves asking that same old question, “Who is the other that I should be concerned with?” Or, perhaps more cuttingly, “Who is my neighbor?”

[B]ehold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading [of it]?” So he answered and said, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’” And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.” But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain [man] went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded [him], and departed, leaving [him] half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to [him] and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set

him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave [them] to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luk 10:25–37, NKJV)

A few points on this:

Having a religious pedigree, even knowing God's Word, wasn't enough to move the seemingly pious to care for somebody else who needed it.

Don't overcomplicate it. "Others" means other people. Look out for their interests, even if it costs you something out of your own self-interests.

Caring for others will cost you.

Ultimately, this is a picture of how Christ relates to us. He is the one who carries us out of the ditch, pours on the oil and the wine, pays for our room and board, and says, "Whatever more you spend, put it on my tab."

It's far past time to be smashing through socio-political barriers and caring for others in Jesus' name. We are called to pick up the downtrodden, robbed, and deceived, even if it

means crossing the line. Why? Because that is what Jesus did and what He calls us to do as well.

Don't just look out for yourself but for others as well.

Henry Alford remarks how this is directly supported by what follows: "Th[is] exhortation [is] enforced, by the example of the self-denial of Christ Jesus."<sup>34</sup>

V. 5–11 The hymn of the humbled YET exalted Christ.  
GOD CAME CLOSE!

Some believe that these verses form an early Christian hymn that the church would have sung when joined in worship.

That is certainly interesting, and I believe, quite moving. We want our worship to be doctrinally rich and, more importantly, doctrinally right.

That interesting thought aside, Paul is trying to communicate something significant to us here about how the nature of Christ informs our own nature, how He was the most outstanding example of looking out not only for His own interests but for the interests of others – those who did not and do not deserve it.

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<sup>34</sup> Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1976), 3: 166.

In all of this discussion about unity of mind and wondering how to achieve consensus in that arena, Paul writes that we are to have Christ's mind and mindset and goes on to detail what this looks like explicitly. (1 Cor 2:16)

Rather than trying to convince everybody to adopt my ideas and opinions – which are not always great – we are to adopt the mind of Christ jointly, to let Christ's mind dictate who we are as a people and a church.

And to what exactly did Christ set His mind? How did He relate to humanity? He humbled Himself. This is the great STOOP! God stooped down.

Jesus Christ, who is exalted forevermore, left His place of exultation and made Himself of no reputation. He emptied himself (v. 7 ESV, NASB) and became one of us.

“Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.” (Phil 2:6, NLT)

This is contrary to many world religions, AND this is counter to how many people understand Christianity. This is even contrary to how we sometimes misrepresent Christianity today — you need to become like God.

NO! We could never do it.

Consider the very first lie that gave sin a foothold in humanity: “Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and **you will be like God**, knowing good and evil.’” (Gen 3:4–5, emphasis mine, NKJV)<sup>35</sup>

Instead – HE BECAME LIKE US! HE CAME AND GOT DOWN INTO THE MUD AND THE MIRE WITH US RATHER THAN CLINGING TO HIS OWN DIVINE GLORY SO THAT HE COULD GIVE US HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS IN EXCHANGE FOR OUR SIN.  
(Ref. – 2 COR 5:21)

The language is quite strong here – he took the form of a δούλου (doulou), a bondservant or slave.

He humbled HIMSELF and embraced the humiliation of a public execution though He deserves all praise, honor, and glory.

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THE THOUGHT “WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR? WHO IS THE OTHER?” EVER CROSSED CHRIST’S MIND AS HE MARCHED TOWARD CALVARY?!

PERISH THE THOUGHT.

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<sup>35</sup> Fee, 209



This man shared his life with sinners, prostitutes, government employees, insurrectionists, Samaritans, religious people, ordinary good people, and Canaanites (Syro-Phoenicians) – the “other” that Jesus served is all of mankind – including religious people at their best and pagans at their worst.

As the flesh and the spirit wage war within our members, we shun the thought of being humiliated, especially for somebody else’s sake!

This is a hard saying. And only a tiny contingent of people would accept the invitation to be humiliated publicly or privately for the sake of somebody else.

After all, if we’re being honest, we want to be Christians in the most dignified sense!

In this, we willfully ignore the example and cause of Christ, preferring our own dignity. In doing so, we limit the gospel from being demonstrated in fullness because sometimes we’d rather cling to our dignity than follow the Lord into humility with our cross.

But it is exactly the cross that adds to Christ’s glory.

V. 9–11 Christ is exalted THROUGH His humiliation.

Here's the thing – Jesus didn't stay on the cross; He didn't stay in the grave!

He conquered death and proved who He is and the certainty of His word by His resurrection.

Who is this Jesus man? People have proposed many different ideas:

An itinerant Rabbi challenging the established religious system of the day...

A crazy person...

A criminal...

Just another Judean insurrectionist in a long line of Jewish rebels who stirred up trouble in Roman Palestine...

A miracle worker...

Here we find the answer to who Jesus is (v.11). **Jesus Christ is Lord** in the fullest, most real sense that word has ever carried – **through** His humiliation.

Many men and women have had many titles over the ages.

Kings, Queens, Caesars, Kaisers, Tsars, Emperors, Presidents, Prime Ministers, Assistant to the Regional Manager, etc. – none except Jesus has the right to be called Lord over all creation.

Louw and Nida note:

Here we have one of the earliest Christological confessions of the church preserved in the New Testament.... Lord is the most common title applied to Jesus by the early church. It is the word employed in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew 'Yahweh.' It can be used in the general sense of 'master' or 'sir,' but when it is applied to Jesus, it has a unique Christological significance. When Jesus Christ is acclaimed as Lord, he is installed in the place which properly belongs to God alone. This means that Jesus Christ has sovereignty over the entire universe.<sup>36</sup>

And what has God the Father done with Jesus' name? Placed it above every name to have ever existed.

How can that be? Jesus is one with the Father. He was Lord at the beginning, and He will be Lord at the end.

No one living or dead is exempt from His authority, no one outside His realm or His reach.

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<sup>36</sup> Louw and Nida, *Handbook on Philippians*, 64.

Peter testified to the Sanhedrin, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Act 4:12, NKJV)

And all of that is for the glory of our God.

It seems backwards, right? We would never consider a king who debases himself, who lives among the peasants, to be exalted above every other name.

What we have observed in our lives is that the fastest movers, richest people, most clever, most violent, loudest, most arrogant – those are the people who get the titles and the praise. People claw their way to the top to command the respect of those they consider to be their inferiors.

But IN CHRIST, we see the opposite. Having all power, glory, and authority in the heavenly realm, He laid it aside to come and live among His people – the broken, bruised, smoldering, worn-out shells of humanity – and to be humiliated for our sakes so that we could enter into His eternal Kingdom.

As He leads, we will follow, although it may be marked with humiliation. We will set our hearts – our GUTS – to serving others in this way for His glory so that His name may be lifted higher. And we do confess: “Jesus Christ is Lord.” Amen.

## CHAPTER 7 | PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18

V. 12–13 – Paul refers to the Philippians as his “beloved” – they have a special place in his heart. This is more than just flattery. This is intentional and demonstrates the genuine, substantial affection that Paul has for the churches.

This is as it should be. Our relationships with one another are to be framed in our mutual love and admiration for one another because of all that Jesus has done.

We begin v. 12 with “Therefore.” This is Paul’s way of calling to mind all that has already been set forth, namely the example of Christ’s humility and obedience as He humbled Himself, “to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (v. 8)

And we see that Paul is calling the church to that exact position!

Paul's remarks here, extending from the beginning of the chapter, call the Philippians to join with the example of Christ.

He has called the Philippians to a unity of mind and spirit, to a unity of love, to a unity of purpose.

He now calls them to a unity of obedience based on Christ's own example.

The question must be asked: who are the Philippians to obey? While some may read this as Paul asking them to obey him, I would contend that the imperative issued by Paul here is obedience to God.

While Paul's influence was certainly formative for the early church (and he didn't hold back any form of correction), he did not presume to take the Lord's rightful place as both foundation and head of the church. (Eph 1:22–23; 2:20)

As they were seeking to obey the Lord, what were they supposed to do? What action were they called to do?

They are called to, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Well, just exactly what does that mean!?

By the way, Paul's language here (second-person plural) indicates that this is directed to the congregation at Philippi

and could also be read, “[You all] work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

AGAIN, they are called to share in the example of Jesus!

On this topic Henry Alford offered his exegetical decision:

[A]s He obeyed and won His exaltation, so ... you obey and carry out your own salvation ... which is begun with justification by faith, but must be carried out ... by sanctification of the Spirit—a life of holy obedience and advance to Christian perfection.<sup>37</sup>

In other words, “Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear.” (Phil 2:12, NLT)

We must be careful not to undermine grace in our reading or to present the idea that we are the ones who earn our salvation by our works. Instead, our work proceeds from our shared salvation. We are naturally displaying the salvation that has been wrought in us, and we do so with “deep reverence and fear.”

FEAR AND TREMBLING doesn’t mean being cowardly or conditioned by pain to operate from a position of learned helplessness. The fear and trembling that we demonstrate

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<sup>37</sup> Alford, 170.

isn't an emotionally based fear born out of pain but a holy awe that we get to be in the company of the Living God.

God is not some cosmic child-abuser who demands our groveling so He can pump up His universe-sized ego!

God calls His saints to do all kinds of wild things that cowardice won't support, things that require a deep faith in who He is and a deeply ingrained boldness and courage that is implanted within the believer by the Holy Spirit.

It takes courage to go where God calls and carry out those expressions of salvation we are meant to as a faith community.

Rather than cowardice, the biblical concept of fear and trembling as a characteristic of the saints is one of seriousness – that this all matters in the most profound, impactful sense.

A missed or squandered opportunity to carry out that holy work that God has called us to may have eternal consequences!

Your work, my work, matters in the kingdom, not because God is dependent upon us but because it pleases Him to work IN us! (v. 13)



Ultimately, any courage we stir up in our deep respect for our Lord is placed within us by His Spirit.

We find then that the saints collectively are to be working out those holy things that God has worked in us with all seriousness for His glory and good pleasure.

One of the hallmarks of our movement is that we don't take ourselves too seriously, but we do take God's Word and God's work seriously.

While we are casual in almost everything else, we wouldn't want to be characterized as being overly casual in our assessment of who God is and our relationship with Him.

We agree with the Psalmist as our hearts cry:

Now therefore, be wise, O kings;  
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.  
Serve the LORD with fear,  
And rejoice with trembling. (Psa 2:10–11, NKJV)

When we take a moment to consider the mystery of Christ, the mystery of the triune God, and the mystery of grace, we are moved to consider that what we are doing as believers is more than merely a hobby. This is more than just a way of life. This IS LIFE!

The God we serve spoke creation into existence by His word. He called us to life by His Word.

Though we grasp only a little of His nature, we are blown away by His majesty. The fact that God concerns Himself mercifully in our affairs is nearly incomprehensible to me.

And the heavens will praise Your wonders, O  
LORD;  
Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the  
saints.  
For who in the heavens can be compared to the  
LORD  
[Who] among the sons of the mighty can be  
likened to the LORD?  
God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the  
saints,  
And to be held in reverence by all [those] around  
Him. (Psa 89:5–7, NKJV)

It is that sense that frames our obedience to Him regardless of who is watching or who approves or disapproves of our obedience. This carries us to the next imperative in the text, the next command.

v. 14 – Do all things without complaining and disputing – or arguing.

This addresses the attitude of the faithful. It isn't enough just to obey with a cold, dead heart and an obedience born out of guilt or compulsion.

It is quite impossible for anyone to fully know our motives if we don't want to reveal them, but the heart of the believer is

to be far from complaining and disputing with one another as we work together for the gospel's sake.

[O]ne must sometimes translate the relation between doing and complaining as 'whenever you do anything you must not complain,' ... Since the complaining or arguing probably refers to the relationship between believers in Philippi, it may be best to translate 'you should not complain to one another or argue with one another.'<sup>38</sup>

How many Christians need to hear that!?

Complaining is insidious – it's poison! The purpose of complaining is never to build up but to undermine and subvert.

Mark Twain once said, "Don't complain and talk about all your problems – 80 percent of people don't care; the other 20 percent will think you deserve them."

Charles Spurgeon taught on the subject of complaining as well. He captured this illustration to drive home the point —

A heavy wagon was being dragged along a country lane by a team of oxen. The axles groaned and creaked terribly, when the oxen turning around thus addressed the wheels, 'Hey there, why do you make so much noise? We bear all the labor, and we – not you – ought to cry out!' Those complain first in our churches who have

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<sup>38</sup> Louw and Nida, *Handbook on Philippians*, 70.

the least to do. The gift of grumbling is largely dispensed among those who have no other talents, or who keep what they have wrapped up in a napkin.<sup>39</sup>

Remember, complaining was that affliction so prevalent among the nation of Israel as they wandered in Sinai! God had delivered them from slavery, but it still wasn't good enough to banish that pervasive human tendency toward complaining – to their detriment!

Christian, God has delivered us from the grave, from being slaves to sin; let us not adopt that ancient sin of complaining as we travel through this Sinai toward eternity!

Nor let us pick up that worn-out tool of arguing with one another to advance our own interests, remembering that we are to esteem others better than ourselves and have the humble mind of Christ, deferring to one another, being gracious to one another, finding unity in the shared hope of Jesus.

Bear in mind, though, that this isn't something to be conjured up by our own willpower.

Remember what dear old Mom used to say? "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." That's

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<sup>39</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *The Quotable Spurgeon*.

good advice, but it doesn't address the issue of the heart that gives way to such complaining and arguing.

The reality is that by submitting to God's Word and adopting Christ's example of humility and servanthood, we are to cast those tools of vile speech we once used (complaining and arguing) away from us and adopt His nature instead.

Jesus didn't go to the cross (our example from v. 5–8), huffing and puffing, rolling His eyes, and saying, “Ugh, this is so dumb! This isn't how I would have done it.” He set His face like flint to what the Father had set before Him. (Isa 50:7)

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. (Isa 53:7, NKJV)

v. 15–16 – Paul answers why we are to throw complaining and arguing away because the world is watching AND we are BECOMING something else – children of God.

We have heard over and over again in our lives that we need to grow up! Into what? A cynical, insufferable smarty-pants that knows how to do everything better than everybody else? One who only sees the faults and errors of their brothers and sisters and must make them known?

No, we are becoming children of God, blameless and harmless regardless of the wretched generation around us.

Bear in mind that Paul wrote this to the Philippians nearly two thousand years ago! Their own generation, that of the first century church, was no beacon of moral superiority!

That generation was characterized as perverse, distorted, deformed. And YET, they were called to be different. When the world adopts a position of negativity, complaining, and disputing, we are called to be different, to be light in a dark place as we cling to the gospel, the Word of life.

By doing so, we offer something that is in short supply – light.

There's enough darkness. We don't need to add to it by complaining and arguing among ourselves. Rather, we are to BE LIGHT – that bright spot in the dark.

Paul's word usage here is quite unique. He uses the word “φωστήρα (*phostera*) [which refers to] ... any light-producing object in the sky, such as the sun, moon, and other planets and stars—‘light, luminary, star ... ‘you shine among them like stars in the sky’ (literally ‘... universe’) Php 2:15. Though φωστήρα may refer to any light-producing object, it is used especially of the heavenly bodies and more specifically of

stars, as in Php 2:15, the one NT context in which φωστήρα occurs. A focal component of this meaning is the light-giving characteristic.”<sup>40</sup>

Consider now that what makes the stars so brilliant in the night sky is the stark contrast of their brilliance against the backdrop of inky black space. The same holds true for us. The brilliance of Christ passed on to His saints, the church, is not snuffed out by the darkness. The darkness only serves to amplify our brightness.

As any person who has viewed a rural night sky can attest, the darker it gets, the more stars one can see!

Know also that you don’t have to conjure up your own light. By Christ, you ARE light. Your very substance has been changed from darkness to light; you have a new brightness.

“For you were once darkness, but now [you are] light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.” (Eph 5:8, NKJV)

Even as Jesus declared, “I am the Light of the World” (John 8:12). He also declared, “You are the light of the world” (Matt 5:14).

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<sup>40</sup> Louw and Nida, *Semantic Domains*, 7.

You must see how all of this fits together! This has very little to do with our own character (prerogative or restraint) and everything to do with joining in the likeness of Christ.

We see that there was also a result in Paul's personal life as he witnessed the continued obedience and faithfulness of the saints and rejoiced that his labor was not in vain.

Let's be plain; ministry is marked with much disappointment and discouragement along the way. Sometimes we wonder if our service matters at all or if it's all been in vain.

Don't our hearts jump with joy when we see other believers shining so brightly? Mine does!

Each day I hear of the continued efforts of the saints, and my heart rejoices. Take joy in others. That is completely opposite to our tendency toward complaining and arguing, isn't it!? And it is important to point out that Jesus graciously takes joy in us too!

V.17–18 Paul shares a moment of self-reflection with the church.

It's as if he is taking the time to consider what they've gone through together and where he now finds himself – in the hands of a not so friendly Roman government.



It's quite a somber, serious moment. He realizes that he may, in fact, die for the faith. As Christ "emptied Himself" (2:7 ESV, NASB), Paul understands that this is a very real possibility in his own life.

Of course, we must come to some understanding of what exactly Paul is talking about here since he references something that many modern readers would be unfamiliar with – "being poured out."

Many translations include the added phrase, "*as a drink offering*" or something similar to give the reader clues to what exactly Paul is writing about.

This is related to the Old Testament requirement to pour out a drink offering along with certain types of sacrifices, more specifically, a drink offering called a libation.

Libation: A drink offering of water or wine poured out as a ritualistic act of worship (e.g., Exod 29:40–41; 30:9; 37:16; Hos 9:4). Libations often accompanied other types of offerings.<sup>41</sup>

Christ was described in part by the prophet Isaiah as giving Himself in this manner, "He poured out His soul unto death." (Isa 53:12, NKJV)

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<sup>41</sup> John D. Barry et al., eds., "Libation," *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016). Logos.

Similarly, Paul is committed to sharing in this sacrificial service exemplified by Jesus for the Philippians. He willingly gives all of himself to the ministry of the saints. BUT far from being a moment of self-pity, he revives the call to rejoice in this act of service.

There is a joy in giving up ourselves to the work of the kingdom, even when it comes at great cost.

The picture that Paul is presenting here is clear – be like Jesus. That seems overly simple, but to begin down that simple path involves the difficult task of emptying ourselves so that we may be filled with and moved by His Spirit.

By emptying ourselves and joining with Christ, we allow that holy work to continue whereby we are changed from miserable dark, black holes of selfishness into brilliant bright stars in God's firmament, providing light and warmth in the vacuum of the fallen human existence. THAT is a joyful prospect! Empty us of ourselves, oh Lord, and refill us with that substance we cannot contain – You.

## CHAPTER 8 | PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30

Paul comes to some administrative matters in his letter to the Philippians. More specifically, he lays out his plan for sending a couple of men on their way to Philippi.

Ministry is more than just sermonizing. In fact, the bulk share of the ministerial work is more than just sermonizing. There are many things involved in keeping our service on the right track and doing the work that the Lord has called us to do.

The Lord gifts His church, as He wills, with people who are best suited to carry out His work, and He sends those people out for His own purposes. Sometimes we even get to be a part of that.

In this portion of Scripture, we see just such men who embody the attitude of Christ-like service and who are

committed to laboring in God's Kingdom. Their names are Timothy and Epaphroditus.

## V.19 – Timothy

The first of these men is Timothy, for whom two of our NT books are named. Both of these are letters written to him by Paul while Timothy was serving the church in Ephesus.

We know much of Timothy from the NT writings. In fact, Timothy is mentioned 24 times in the NT corpus.

Timothy was the son of a Jewish woman (Eunice) who was married to a Greek man who remains unnamed in the text. His grandmother Lois, a believer like his mother, is also mentioned in 2 Tim 1:5.

He accompanied Paul on many of his journeys; this is recorded for us in Acts. When Paul was unable to travel to certain places, he would often send Timothy in his place to deal with even the most incendiary of matters. (1 Cor 4:17)

Paul first took Timothy under his wing in Acts 16.

Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, [the] son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father [was] Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he

took [him] and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. (Acts 16:1–3, NKJV)

During their time traveling and serving together, they grew quite close. Ten to twelve years passed between the first meeting of Paul and Timothy and the writing of this letter. Over time Timothy had proved himself able, faithful, and trustworthy.

Here in v.19, Paul plans to send this dedicated worker to the Philippians so that he might discover how everything is going.

Paul wants to put eyes on the situation, have a body in the room.

There's no better way to get to know somebody than spending time with them, and Paul is sending Timothy to do just that since he himself is currently imprisoned.

V. 20 – Paul trusts Timothy not only to observe faithfully the state of the church at Philippi but to care for them in the same way that Paul would care for them – sincerely, genuinely, affectionately.

He describes Timothy as being like-minded in a unique way – a way that nobody else in Paul's ministry circle really fit into except Timothy.

They had a unity of mind with one another – something that Paul has been encouraging the Philippians to adopt as he wrote, “[F]ulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, [being] of one accord, of one mind.” (Phl 2:2, NKJV)

It was important for Paul to choose the RIGHT person for this task.

This required a special touch – a unity of mind and heart demonstrated by the care that Paul knew Timothy would give to the Body at Philippi. After all, Paul wouldn’t be able to coach Timothy over his shoulder. Timothy would be flying solo!

Similarly, our work in the kingdom should be marked by a unity of mind and sincere care, not simply the administrative task of caring for people like a production manager making widgets on an assembly line but a deep, earnest, concerned care for the lives of God’s people.

That is important for any church, anywhere! Unfortunately, there are those in the church who see ministry only as a job, and their lackluster commitment and care for the church reflects that view.

There are some who approach ministry from an adversarial or competitive position that really betrays their own selfish motives or desire to “be somebody.”

Rather than sharing a unity of mind and genuine affection for God's people, they would rather obscure, confuse, or block everybody else's efforts in a grab for power that isn't theirs in the first place!

Perhaps that seems too extreme. Paul confirms this in quite strong language in v. 21.

V. 21 – Paul has addressed the idea previously that men enter the ministry with mixed motives:

Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains. (Phil 1:15–16)

Sadly, Paul's language here in v. 21 seems to indicate that those who are known to him IN MINISTRY aren't cut from the same cloth as he and Timothy. While this can be taken in a general sense, we have reason to suspect that he probably had certain, particular men in mind as he declared "all seek their own, not the things of Christ."<sup>42</sup>

This is a sentiment we know all too well. Having surveyed the landscape of modern Christendom, it is easy to conjure up a list of crooks who are purposefully taking advantage of God's people –as it was in Paul's own day!

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<sup>42</sup> Fee, 268.

In direct contradiction to Paul's exhortation to adopt the humility, mind, and ministry of Christ, rather than "esteeming others better than themselves," these men sought their own gratification.

We know that at the end of Paul's ministry, many of his one-time companions left him, having a stronger affection for the world than for Paul, the church, the saints, and, more importantly, the Lord Jesus himself.

Specifically, once listed alongside other fellow laborers like Luke and Mark, a man named Demas bailed completely on ministry. (Col 4:14, Phm 1:24)

Paul wrote on the abandonment he faced in his own ministry:

[F]or Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica. (2Ti 4:10, NKJV)

At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. (2Ti 4:16, NKJV)

We know, too, that "false brethren" were named among the multitude of perils that Paul experienced in ministry. (2 Cor 11:26, Gal 2:4)



It's no wonder then that Paul saw the value in faithful, like-minded, sincere co-laborers; these men and women are far and few between.

“Few come to the help of the Lord's cause, where ease, fame, and gain have to be sacrificed. Most help only when Christ's gain is compatible with their own.”<sup>43</sup>

This is a call to serious self-reflection.

V. 22 Contrary to this, Timothy enjoys great commendation from Paul.

Notice that Paul didn't withhold this praise just so Timothy wouldn't get a big head! Also, note that this isn't flattery but an honest assessment of Timothy's faithfulness tried and tested over time and found pure.

The relationship these men shared was that of a son to a father.

Paul had spent much time training, instructing, and encouraging Timothy. Pouring his life into Timothy, along with the grace of Christ, produced the fruit of faithfulness and care that is so necessary among pastors.

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 2: 365.

Paul understood the responsibility to raise up a spiritual generation to follow, sons of faith to advance the kingdom after his departure.

As a matter of fact, Paul explicitly instructs his spiritual son to raise up the next generation of disciples in his very last letter before his death.

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2Ti 2:1–2, NKJV)

Our faith is a disciple-making faith and a faith that finds its realization in the expansion of the family of God. All of us, adopted into Christ's family, are commissioned by the Lord Jesus himself to make other disciples and care for people the way an ideal family does. (Matt 28:19)

It's important to highlight the term "ideal" family because many people bear the deepest scars from their own earthly families.

Those families turned out to be less than ideal. That is true for the church as well. Many people bear deep wounds from a less-than-perfect church family as well.

BUT when we adopt the mind of Christ, lay aside our selfish ambitions, esteem others as better than ourselves, and care

for one another as Christ cares for us, then we can be about the business of raising up sons and daughters of the faith.

Yes, there will be bumps, arguments, some selfishness, and growing pains along the way. There will be hurts. But, in Christ's family, His grace is the foundation of our eternal family, and that is what allows us to bear with one another, bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal 6:1–2, Col 3:13)

Paul raised up a spiritual son who proved his mettle and in whom Paul had every confidence.

The imagery employed by Paul is “gold or silver which has been tested and found genuine.”<sup>44</sup> Timothy was the real deal!

V. 23–24 Paul reiterates his desire to send Timothy to minister to the saints at Philippi after discovering more of how his situation would play out in Rome. AND Paul expresses confidence that the Lord would make allowance for him to visit as well.

Paul was eventually released from this first imprisonment for a few years before being arrested a second time and finally executed at the hands of Caesar Nero in about 66 A.D.

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<sup>44</sup> Louw and Nida, *Handbook on Philippians*, 80.

## V. 25–27 Epaphroditus

We are introduced to a man by the name of Epaphroditus.

This man was part of the Philippian church. The Philippians sent Epaphroditus earlier to deliver their care package to Paul. The Philippians were great material supporters of his ministry. (Phil 4:14)

Paul commends Epaphroditus as a brother, a worker, a soldier, a messenger, and a servant.

That is quite comprehensive! This is a man you want on your team, one who shares in that familial understanding of ministry that we are more than just coworkers but we are family in Christ; a man that understands that ministry is work and requires effort; a man that understands that part of our calling is to stand as soldiers in the armor which God provides in the midst of a perverse and crooked generation; and one who willingly accepts the task as messenger and servant to those in need, namely Paul.

Remember that the Philippian church loved Paul, and it appears that they sent their very best to care for him in his time of need.

Now, even though Epaphroditus appears to be a rockstar of the faith, he became sick, so sick that he nearly died.

We are now confronted with the reality that good people get sick.

Christians get sick. The people we lean on and look to become ill.

God has not promised to keep us all from every illness. We are part of a fallen creation subject to its maladies until the Father makes all things new once and for all.

Paul felt the weight of this illness too; he felt deep sorrow watching somebody he cared about come close to death. He wasn't a robot with no emotions or who reduced all of human suffering to "God's will," in the dismissive sense that we find in calloused believers.

Yes, we take hope in the resurrection and God's perfect will, but that doesn't mute our feeling of sorrow in the moment – even as demonstrated by Paul's own deep sorrow.

"Here only occurs anything of a sorrowful tone in this Epistle, which generally is most joyous."<sup>45</sup>

Mercifully, God was good to Epaphroditus. We can be sure that much prayer was had for him as he lay sick, at the

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<sup>45</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, 2: 365.

precipice of death. Remarkably none of that is recorded for us here – only the fact that God intervened on his behalf.

V. 28 As God brought Epaphroditus back to full health, Paul sent him on his way back to his home church so that they might rejoice in the miracle of God's goodness and also the dedication of their brother Epaphroditus. This was good medicine for Paul's heart too!

We get the sense that Paul truly cared about the men and women that he shepherded and that he experienced deep emotions for them.

V. 29–30 As Epaphroditus returned to his sending church, Paul instructed the Philippians to specifically hold Epaphroditus in high esteem as an example of sacrificial service in the name of Christ.

It's important to point out here that men worthy of this type of esteem are not going to demand it for themselves! Paul takes it upon himself to make sure that they do what is right and fitting.

This is not to be done in a weird, idolatrous way as some have adopted, putting the pastor and other servants on a pedestal where they don't belong. As we lovingly esteem those faithful servants who give so much of themselves for Christ, we know that all fame, celebrity, and glory belong to God alone!

Paul writes to the Thessalonians:

And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly **in love** for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. (1Th 5:12–13, emphasis mine, NKJV)

Later he similarly writes to Timothy, “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.” (1Ti 5:17, NKJV)

As the Body recognizes the marks of Christ born by these humble servants, they are to honor them in turn by love, affection, respect, and care.

We know a tree by the fruit that it bears (Matt 7:17). Even so, Christ's servants are known by how they resemble Him, how they humble themselves, how they don't count their own lives too high a cost for the cause of Christ.

The church was full of these types of people, willing to risk their own lives for what they saw as more important. And truly that is the mark of Christ: giving all for the sake of others. (Rom 16:3–4)

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.” (Jhn 15:12–13, NKJV)

This sentiment, this commandment, this example first carried out by Christ, lies at the heart of the work that Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Paul embraced.

It is good and right for us to consider these examples of faithfulness who have walked before us.

It is good and right for us to consider the call to servanthood and the cost of service that we may be called to bear. It is good and right for us to consider and esteem those of our own number who faithfully labor for the Lord's sake, placing the interests of others above their own for the glory and honor of God, for His kingdom, and for His people. Amen.



## CHAPTER 9 | PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11

We find ourselves at about the halfway point in Philippians, coming to an interesting turn of phrase – “FINALLY, my brethren.”

So, Paul is beginning to wrap things up, but he still has much to say, kind of like a southern good-bye, a deliberate plodding toward departure. This is not merely an administrative wrap-up. In the remaining verses, Paul continues to present to us some profound theological truth.

We see in the verses under consideration that Paul exhorts the Philippians to an action (v.1–2); describes the collective state of the saints as the people of God who “worship God in the Spirit (v. 3);” gives a personal autobiography with the express purpose of correcting the self-righteous believer who thinks

they have it all together (v. 4–6); and then gives his future hope – “the resurrection from the dead” (v. 7–11).

V. 1 – As Paul begins to conclude this letter at length, he first encourages the Philippians to REJOICE IN THE LORD!

REJOICE, loved one! Sometimes we get so caught up in what we think the Bible requires of us that we don’t make time to rejoice. We turn the joy of bearing fruit by the work God has wrought in us into a heavy, depressing weight!

This might have been the tendency for the Philippians as well. Paul has just given them quite a few lines on how they are to be like-minded (2:2), esteem others better than themselves (2:3), and adopt the mind of Christ (2:5). As they adopt the mind of Christ, they are to be a servant to others (2:7), humble themselves (2:8), and work out their own salvation in fear and trembling (2:12).

That’s quite a lot, to say nothing of the common imperatives we are to be mindful of as well – love your neighbor, care for others, choose the good, shun the evil, etc. It’s easy to see how we sometimes inadvertently turn this into a works-based religion, is it not? And sometimes, the one thing that gets lost in the shuffle is the command to REJOICE.

Though we espouse the idea of grace, we are often sucked into a pitifully dull obedience that ONLY focuses on those

godly behaviors as tasks to complete rather than a joyful expression of worship based on the work that Jesus has already done and continues to do in our lives.

We are supposed to be rejoicing as believers! We have every reason to rejoice. All of the imperative behavioral commands that we are supposed to be doing in our lives result from the fact that Jesus Christ has redeemed us, sealed us by the Spirit, and carries us along in His grace!

He is the one who has defeated sin and death, not us – that is cause to rejoice! And yet, sometimes, we are caught with a holy frown and a critical eye because we forget the joy of the good news. Remember, it's good news, not bad news!

As deep as the Pauline letters are, as challenging, as much as they call us to deep contemplation, one of the common themes that run through them is the concept of joy and the reality that the saints are to be people of joy.

Jesus taught the disciples in the upper room:

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and [that] your joy may be full. (Jhn 15:10–11, NKJV)

Maybe more profound in its simplicity are Paul's words to the

Thessalonians: “Rejoice always.” (1 Thes 5:16)

Paul goes on to assure them that repeatedly writing the same things to them is not bothersome, but it is safe, secure, stable.

Incidentally, this may cause us to ask, Where is Second Philippians or First Philippians? While it is not outside the realm of possibility that some previous letter to the Philippians has been lost to time, Paul could be reiterating in his writing things that he has already spoken to them beforehand face to face.

Here’s the deal concerning repetition in instruction – especially in the gospel: Loved one, as long as you continue following Jesus, you will continue to hear and read the same life-giving truths over and over again.

Blessedly these truths never get old, and we are certain of the certain truths – those foundational matters pertaining to salvation.

While the method of how we communicate those truths will change, as God directs His Word toward unreached people groups, the message never changes.

This is the reality of discipleship and following Jesus over the long term. God has designed our faith this way purposefully because something as simple as the command to REJOICE

IN THE LORD continues to be a growth point for us that we need to hear over and over again.

As we mature, we come to understand more of what that means, practically and theologically. As we hear the same truths retold time and time again, we are further instructed in God's heart and wisdom. Our faulty opinions can then be shaped into truth as we abandon our confused positions for holiness.

Also, consider that Paul explaining this need for repetition to them in very plain terms indicates that the Philippians needed to be reminded of this, and so do we.

## V. 2 – Watch out!

This warning is not against three different groups of people, but against the same group described in three ways.... Most probably Paul's opponents were gnostic Jewish Christians who insisted on combining the gospel with the Law.<sup>46</sup>

This warning, albeit said in different words, is a common warning in Paul's letters as well! The entire book of Galatians was a warning against the poison of legalism and adopting religious works as the basis of salvation.

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<sup>46</sup> Louw and Nida, *Handbook on Philippians*, 91.

Paul's language is quite strong! While these men probably appeared religious and sincere, Paul characterizes them as dogs, evil workers, and the mutilated (referring to the false requirement that believing men must be circumcised).

V. 3–6 – Paul pushes back.

Some in the first-century church claimed that true worshippers WOULD BE circumcised. If we think this is too extreme, let us remember that they even have a Scriptural basis for their argument.

The covenant requirement for circumcision was given by God to Abraham in Genesis chapter 17, long before the Ten Commandments were given in Exodus 19 and 20 (perhaps 500 years or so!).

That covenant was to be an everlasting covenant among the Israelites.

God even made an allowance for non-Hebrews to participate as He extended this covenant to foreigners who desired to celebrate the Passover in Exodus chapter 12.

Circumcision, this cutting in the flesh, was an ancient custom that was so deeply rooted in their faith that it was naturally carried over into Christianity. But Christ came to fulfill the whole Law; it has been abolished, nailed to the tree of Christ.

There is no longer a requirement for those under Christ's covenant.

Paul wrote to the Colossians:

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Col 2:13–14, NKJV)

While the church has come to acknowledge that circumcision is no longer required because of the doctrine of grace based largely on Paul's valiant corrective efforts, the church has found other things to take its place!

Now, as an exercise in conscience, consider for a moment some behavior that you believe good Christians WILL DO that aren't specifically commanded by Scripture; that's the new legalism.

Instead, Paul says that the true mark of believing doesn't reside in the body or some action done by human hands but is found in those who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have NO CONFIDENCE in the flesh!

And we all say amen and praise God for His grace because we aren't bound to rely on our own flesh to win salvation, rather, the flesh of Jesus Christ purchased salvation for us.

BUT THEN in a dramatic show of force and a reality check to those within the Philippian body who were perhaps relying on their own flesh and adhering to the Law, Paul lays his own credentials on the table.

For those who thought they were something, who thought they were a big deal because of their fleshly/religious accomplishments, Paul brings them back down to earth.

It's one thing to hear that you don't have to follow a whole bunch of rules from a rule breaker and quite another to hear that you don't have to follow a whole bunch of rules from somebody who followed ALL OF THEM!

That is Paul! He had followed all of the rules and found that they brought death rather than life!

And the commandment, which [was] to [bring] life, I found to [bring] death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed [me]. (Rom 7:10–11, NKJV)

Paul was born for self-righteousness. He was a Hebrew circumcised on the 8th day as the law requires (not a newcomer to Judaism) who could trace his lineage all the way



back to Benjamin. Incidentally, the first time Benjamin is mentioned in the Bible is at his birth in Genesis 35:18.

Paul could likely trace his covenant lineage back over 1500 years. His claim is even more remarkable because of the glaring disruption in Hebrew history that we call the Babylonian Captivity, wherein the entire nation of Israel effectively ceased to exist. Paul was so committed to the “righteous requirement of the Law” that he became a Pharisee, a strict religious-political sect of Judaism concerned with what they viewed as holiness or piety. No doubt they were sincere. The Pharisees get a bad reputation perhaps deservedly – but they ostensibly held the Scriptures in high regard and were committed to fulfilling them down to the letter.

The problem was that in doing so, they became dangerously self-centered and, as Jesus observed, “neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith.” (Matt 23:23, Luk 11:42)

This was Paul! In fact, he was so committed that he set his heart on stamping out this increasingly popular sect of what he and the Pharisees viewed as a heretical, deluded offshoot of Judaism, the sect of the Nazarenes or what we call Christianity.

Long before he came to know the risen Lord, Paul was a zealous crusader for what he considered to be the true faith – the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! Oh, Paul, how everything changed by that one key event, the resurrection.

V. 7 Paul plainly declared that he considered all of those religious accomplishments and accolades, the things that made him a force to be reckoned with in Judaism, to be loss for Christ.

The Greek adds substantial weight to this commonly read verse and may include “the implication that the loss involves considerable hardship or suffering.”<sup>47</sup>

Bear in mind this is explicitly about Paul’s religiosity; the former self-righteousness that he once knew was stripped away for Christ.

V. 8–11 Paul expounds on his assertion of losing all for Christ.

In the original language, verses 8–11 are one long sentence and packed with the idea that knowing Christ fully is unmatched – nothing is worth more.

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<sup>47</sup> Louw and Nida, *Semantic Domains*, 565.

No cost was too high for Paul. As zealous as Paul was for the Pharisees, he exceeded that zeal to know Christ. Paul had known the Law, and all that he had studied and learned didn't hold a candle to the risen Lord that Paul met in Acts 9.

Paul's language is so strong here that we have at times diminished it so as to not offend our delicate sensibilities.

The term we translate as “rubbish” means “useless or undesirable material that is subject to disposal, refuse, garbage (in var. senses, ‘excrement, manure ... kitchen scraps’ ... consider everything ... crud Phil 3:8 (cp. AcPl Ha 2, 23; Spicq. s.v. ‘to convey the crudity of the Greek: “It’s all crap.”)’.”<sup>48</sup>

The KJV adopts the stronger translation, “I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.”

Why? Why the strong emotions? Why the ruthless assessment of all past religious accomplishments? To gain Christ and to find our place in Him.

Paul acknowledges and repeats over and over throughout his writings the futility of the Law – we cannot build our own righteousness! It must come from outside of us.

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<sup>48</sup> Arndt, 932.

This is the alien righteousness, foreign righteousness, that was so important to the reformers, the true, undeniable righteousness of Christ that is awarded to those who believe in Christ and are found in Him.

But Paul doesn't stop there. The more common danger today, as the pendulum of religiosity continues to swing from self-righteousness rooted in legalism, is what it swings toward – a stalled righteousness rooted in lazy-ism.

Those things that Paul leans into, that he desires to know more of, revolve around the saving work of Jesus and Jesus' righteousness.

It is interesting to note that Paul frames these final clauses, his view to the future, in knowing Jesus Christ in specific ways.

Paul desired to specifically know, in very real, personal terms, “the power of His resurrection.” This is nearly incomprehensible for us because we aren't accustomed to seeing dead people come back to life!

“To know Christ now means first of all to know ‘the power of his resurrection,’ that is, the power that comes to believers on the basis of Christ's resurrection.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Fee, 329.

It is by the resurrection that God demonstrates His unmatched power. Do we believe that God forgives sins? Yes. Do we believe that God has reconciled humanity to Himself by the blood of Christ? Yes. What is the proof? The resurrection and the power that made Christ's resurrection a reality!

In conjunction with the resurrection, Paul set his heart to know “the fellowship of His sufferings.” Paul traded in his religious accolades, he traded in his “place at the table” of Jewish society, he traded in worldly respect and admiration, for knowing the suffering of Jesus – to be poured out for the sake of others. And in the doing, he was shaped, “came to be similar in form,” to what Jesus experienced on the cross.<sup>50</sup>

Why? Because Paul looked forward to another resurrection, his own. Sharing and knowing Jesus and His suffering, even to the extent that we may come to know His death as fully as possible, is not a death sentence but is rooted in resurrection power.

As Thomas Scott wrote:

Every note with wonder swell,  
Sin o'erthrown, and captivated hell;

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<sup>50</sup> Louw and Nida, *Semantic Domains*, 584.

Where is hell's once dreaded king?  
Where, O death, thy mortal sting?<sup>51</sup>

That is what we celebrate! That is why we REJOICE! The man, Jesus of Nazareth, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, Christ, is alive today! He didn't just come back to life for a brief time but is alive now! And we shall see Him face to face.

On this earth, we participate in His resurrection partially as we are born again and shaped to His image, though it may be with much suffering AND, as believers, it WILL BE with **much rejoicing**! In eternity we shall participate finally and completely in His resurrection as He gathers His church to Himself.

Christ has risen! All creation lives in the wake of that glorious event. There is a resurrection coming. REJOICE in the resurrection. Know the resurrection power of Christ, know Christ.

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<sup>51</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *The Pastor's Book*, ed. Douglas Sean O'Donnell (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 119.

## CHAPTER 10 | PHILIPPIANS 3:12-16

In the preceding verses, Paul came to the conclusion that everything he had accomplished religiously was nothing compared to knowing Christ, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.

Paul desired to know Jesus deeply, even to the extent of suffering in his own life, so that he might understand the fullness of Christ's work. This indicates far more than a superficial following of Jesus.

It shows us a completely committed life buried in the work of Christ.

Even with such strong language and apparent commitment to Christ, we find an admission of imperfection as we arrive at verse 12. However, this self-acknowledgment of imperfection does not stop Paul from a continued pursuit of Jesus.

V. 12–14 – Paul, having labored so long for the risen Lord Jesus Christ, wasn’t done yet.

At this time, Paul was likely in his 50s and had already written Galatians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, and Romans, and was in the process of authoring Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, and this very letter – Philippians. He had already lived all of what is recorded in the Book of Acts and been on three Missionary Journeys.<sup>52</sup>

By this time in his life, Paul referred to his own self as “aged.” (Philemon 1:9)

This giant of the faith dedicated himself to pressing onward toward perfection, toward a final resurrection, and grasping that final prize – eternity with Jesus because Jesus Christ had grasped him!

The NIV does an admirable job translating this verse: “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” (Phil 3:12, NIV)

This is the desire that springs forth in the saints when we are grasped by Jesus.

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<sup>52</sup> “Apostle Paul’s Timeline,” <https://www.blueletterbible.org/study/paul/timeline.cfm>.



First and foremost, Jesus is the victor. He wins us to Himself, and being won to Him, we then move toward that upward call throughout our lives. We are won all at once; we are perfected our entire lives.

This is one of those wonderful portions of Scripture that communicates to us, at least in some measure, the intersection of God's sovereignty and election (especially in Paul's life) and human response (our will).

Notice the humility and reflection in Paul's language, "I do not count myself to have apprehended" (v. 13). Paul doesn't present to us either Pollyanna Christianity where everything is roses all the time nor defeated Christianity where we can never gain any ground. Rather, Paul presents an honest reckoning of himself that demonstrates the doctrine of sanctification.

"Sanctification" is one of those ten-dollar church words that sometimes make people tune out but can be summed up simply as "a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 746–747.

This is the growing maturity and holiness that Paul is so enthusiastic about and is to be evident in the lives of the saints. Rather than espousing a flat, motionless position, Paul takes personal responsibility for forging ahead toward holiness or Christlikeness, culminating in what he calls “the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

The image we get is that Paul views himself as a competitor in this grand redemptive narrative, not just a fan, disinterested passerby, or spectator.

This is a theme in Paul’s writings. He never views himself as a passive entity relative to the gospel. While his faith is decidedly won by Christ, Paul acknowledges the personal responsibility that comes with being grasped by Christ – to move to the sound of His call, to compete with a vested interest in the final results.

Paul uses similar language with the Corinthian church:

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain [it]. And everyone who competes [for the prize] is temperate in all things. Now they [do it] to obtain a perishable crown, but we [for] an imperishable [crown]. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as [one who] beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring [it] into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (1Co 9:24–27, NKJV)

Or, as the author of Hebrews writes:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares [us], and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of [our] faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb 12:1–2, NKJV)

So, we run with purpose, with a clear mind, ignoring those past things that weigh us down and with our hearts set firmly on reaching the end. We do this not to win Christ – He won us! – but BECAUSE of the example we have in Christ of endurance, faithfulness, and grit.

It has been preached many times before that our faith is a marathon, not a sprint. Many believers have fallen away far from the finish line, believing that short bursts of holiness would get them to the end. What we find is that only Christ's grace and our protracted endurance result in a race well run.

In the Army, there is this sort of lore surrounding special operators and their selection process.

Those soldiers who seek to serve at the highest levels of special operations must endure years of grueling, rigorous training. They must demonstrate that they are far and above the top representatives of the profession of arms.

Part of their selection culminates in what is sometimes referred to as “the long walk.”

About the ‘long walk,’ one source reports:

It’s 40 miles long, it’s conducted on the last day of training when candidates are already physically and mentally completely exhausted, and the rucksacks weigh 70 pounds ... There is an unpublished time limit of 20 hours. And candidates can’t march together, each gets their own points and has to walk them alone. And ... they don’t actually ever know the full course, only their next point.<sup>54</sup>

Now, it’s fun to sing about being in the Lord’s Army – Yes sir! But the long walk awaits us all, and that is what truly reveals our motivation, commitment, drive, and ultimately our love.

I have spoken with many pastors who are discouraged at the impact that our instant society has had on commitment, discipleship, and caring. We have together lamented the scourge of consumerism that marks even our Christian culture and causes vast swaths of believers to flit in and out of churches week in and week out with seemingly no home and no concern for what it means to be part of Christ’s bride over the long-term.

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<sup>54</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/delta-force-long-march-the-grueling-final-test-to-select-its-operators-2019-4>.

None of this is new. We've all witnessed the pervasive phenomenon of nominal consumeristic Christianity. In 1980, Eugene Peterson wrote with the hope of reviving an understanding among Christians of the long haul of our faith.

He wrote:

Religion in our time has been captured by the tourist mindset. Religion is understood as a visit to an attractive site to be made when we have adequate leisure. For some it is a weekly jaunt to church, for others, occasional visits to special services. Some, with a bent for religious entertainment and sacred diversion, plan their lives around special events like retreats, rallies and conferences. We go to see a new personality, to hear a new truth, to get a new experience and so somehow expand our otherwise humdrum lives. The religious life is defined as the latest and the newest: Zen, faith healing, human potential, parapsychology, successful living, choreography in the chancel, Armageddon. We'll try anything – until something else comes along ... for pastors in Western culture at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the aspect of [the] world that makes the work of leading Christians in the way of faith most difficult is ... 'today's passion for the immediate and casual.' Everyone is in a hurry. The persons whom I lead in worship, among whom I counsel, visit, pray, preach and teach, want shortcuts. They want me to help them fill out the form that will get them instant credit (in eternity).... It is 'long obedience in the same

direction' which the mood of the world does so much to discourage.<sup>55</sup>

While the world discourages this long race of ours, God's Word affirms it as a reality and something to be fully engaged in.

I want to point out that Paul's wording in these verses, a declaration of commitment in the long-term, is equally a rejection of the "I've arrived" syndrome.

The "I've arrived" syndrome is one of those intersections that Christians encounter during our long walk. Having gained a little knowledge and understanding, we believe we've learned everything! This is a significant and dangerous obstacle. If we are not careful, we can be enticed into taking a seat on the roadside and failing to advance any further.

Let Paul's example be our own – we have not yet attained that which is set before us.

Let's be very clear about the application here, lest we in error believe that Paul's specificity in writing about himself relinquishes us of any requirement of the same commitment.

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<sup>55</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2000), 10–11.

Certainly, we ourselves have said many times, “Yeah, but I’m not Paul!” Or, more commonly, “I’m not Jesus.”

Both of those are true, but most often, those statements are not born out of a humble assessment of faith but more trying to absolve ourselves of any real requirement to which the text calls us.

The implication when we make statements like, “I’m not Paul,” or “I’m not Jesus,” is that we don’t have the required strength or desire to do whatever holy thing is laid before us.

I would argue against those assertions and point to Paul’s words, “Imitate me, just as I also [imitate] Christ. (1Co 11:1, NKJV)

The reality is that we are SUPPOSED to be and ARE BEING conformed into the image of Christ as we journey along through this life.

So, while we are not yet fully like Christ, we are to resemble Him more and more every day and shun the half-hearted excuse, “I’m not Jesus.”

Paul writes, again to the Corinthians, “[A]s we have borne the image of the [man] of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly [Man].” (1Co 15:49, NKJV)

So, PRESS ON, loved one! Move out for Jesus. Compete for the prize!

V. 15 – Paul addresses those who would reject this call to press-on, to reach forward, or to head on.

He calls for a unity among those who desire to press into Christ's kingdom, calling for the support of those who are “mature.”

This terminology is meant to communicate the idea “of persons who are fully up to standard in a certain respect and not satisfied with half-way measures.”<sup>56</sup> Additionally, it can signify a “grown person.”<sup>57</sup>

The point then is that those who are “spiritually grown” will find themselves in agreement with Paul on the call to endurance over the long-term; they will have a shared mind with Paul.

Blessedly, Paul makes allowance for those who disagree, though! He even indicates that God will teach them along the way. This pairs nicely with what we've said about sanctification.

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<sup>56</sup> Arndt, 995.

<sup>57</sup> Louw and Nida, *Semantic Domains*, 104.



All the negative things that have been said so far are not meant to be dismissive or to rid ourselves of half-hearted believers. When it comes to the very real and common conditions of consumerism in the faith, instant gratification, shallow understanding, and believers with rebellious hearts who don't see the need to conform to the image of Christ, these conditions can be temporary because God is the one who is responsible for our sanctification. He is the one who changes us if we are obedient to His call to follow.

Many of us have lived in these conditions. Many of us have been self-righteous know-it-alls, judgmental porcupines, theological hacks, and impostors. BUT Christ redeemed us and changed our minds and our lives by His Spirit and by His Word.

There is hope, loved one, as we journey together that Christ will continue to reveal things to us that will shape us more and more into His image.

V. 16 – Paul circles back to the idea of attainment or grasping the final prize.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> “λαμβάνω [*lambano*] ... to take hold of something or someone, with or without force—‘to take hold of, to grasp, to grab.’” Louw and Nida, *Semantic Domains*, 219.

Remember, in v. 12 Paul wrote, “Not that I have already attained” but now says, “Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained.”

What this means practically and as a unified text in plain language is, “We don’t know, we haven’t grasped EVERYTHING; but we do know, we have grasped SOME things.”

To the extent that we have grasped or taken hold of SOME things, let us then walk together in unity holding fast to what we do have and pressing on toward the ultimate goal – eternity with Christ.

The NLT renders this verse, “But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.”

We’re in this together! So let us continue to march on together. Mercifully, our long walk isn’t intended to be done alone. We are gifted with fellowship with one another and with Christ. It involves pressing forward as the Lord shapes our understanding. While we don’t know the distance or the duration of our walk, we rejoice in the hope of finishing strong.

Let this be an encouragement to press on, to keep reaching forward:

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and [before] Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep [this] commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, [He who is] the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom [be] honor and everlasting power. (1Ti 6:12–16, NKJV)

## CHAPTER 11 | PHILIPPIANS 3:17 — 4:1

Previously Paul strongly urged the Philippian church to join him in the unity of mind and conduct. This is one of the recurring themes of the book – unity in the church.

He has also declared his own personal intention of pressing onward in his commitment to follow Jesus, no matter the cost, because in Paul's assessment, nothing compared to knowing and following Jesus.

These two thoughts intersect in chapter three – unity with one another and pressing on toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. That practically means following Jesus not only individually but together.

Our text continues to advance this theme by way of Paul's own appeal to his personal example and the example of other stout-hearted believers. He contrasts that commendable

pattern of conduct against those who are supposedly walking in faith but are actually “enemies of the cross.”

That thought, a contrast in the kingdom, paints for us a sad state of affairs among the universal congregation of saints. One might be tempted to ask, how could that possibly be? But this condition of unconverted “Christians” is not new to us.

V.17 – Mark the familial language with which Paul continues – brethren.

It is perhaps easy to forget the weight that terms like brethren, brother, sister, etc., are supposed to carry.

As a matter of fact, sometimes we feel like those terms come off as kitsch or cheesy because we’ve heard them tossed around without very much conviction regarding the actual familial bond that those words are meant to communicate.

Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, doesn’t use such language lightly. He viewed the church as family.

He then exhorts this dearly loved family of his to be “imitators together” of the example that he has so faithfully presented to them.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, 2: 367.

Now Paul doesn't say he's the only one following the Lord! This is important! Paul was a giant of the faith, but he acknowledges that there are others on this blessed walk and in this blessed family who are presenting an admirable example that others should note and imitate.

Now, while we may desire to draw this out and discuss all of the various examples of faithfulness and the ways to follow this example that we have encountered and while we might desire for Paul to give us more detail on what exactly made these examples so good for the believers at Philippi, he actually takes us in a completely different direction.

He calls to mind the opposite of a good example in order to highlight what right looks like. Paul shows us what wrong looks like. This is incredibly important!

There are so many important aspects of pressing onward in our walk with Jesus. We ought to KNOW by now that we are SUPPOSED to be following Jesus on the long walk of sanctification toward holiness (Heb 6:1–3). But there are also some examples that we are to shun or turn away from, examples that are dangerous.

V. 18–19 The proliferation of bad examples – MANY walk who are enemies of Jesus. Let that sink in!

Apparently, this warning to be careful who we follow is so important to Paul that he has repeated it over and over again.

Just as the faithful are surrounded by “so great a cloud of witnesses” who encourage us to run with endurance (Heb 12:1), we are also surrounded by an army of bad actors who have adopted the language, style, and customs of the church as simply a means to an end – to get paid, to gratify the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. (1 John 2:16) This reality broke Paul’s heart!

One source notes that Paul’s writing here was:

[C]ommonly used of loud expression[s] of sorrow and pain. It signifies intense grief. It is essential to render this phrase in such a way as to indicate clearly that Paul is extremely sorry to have to say what he does. It may, therefore, be necessary to render ‘with tears’ as ‘I am so sorry about this that I could cry,’ or ‘this makes me so sorry that I am crying.’<sup>60</sup>

This is a big deal. It isn’t something to be swept under the rug. The fact that this plague of sorry believers has infected the church grieves Paul deeply!

Our dear teacher doesn’t pull any punches, soften his language, or make cheap appeals to reconciliation and grace.

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<sup>60</sup> Louw and Nida, *Handbook on Philippians*, 115.

He describes this multitude of bad actors as “enemies of the cross.”

We were all ONCE enemies of the cross – BUT, once we have been won to Christ, we are His! Let us not dare remain in our wretched state, not even for a moment, to present ourselves as enemies of the cross!

Ultimately those who follow Jesus by half measure – who play both sides – the church and the world, their end is destruction.

About these types of people, Gordon Fee writes, “Paul is referring to some who have appeared as believers, but whose ‘end’ demonstrates that something was wrong with their ‘faith.’ They probably consider themselves to be within the household of faith, and most likely are, or were, but whom Paul now assigns to a place outside Christ, precisely because they have abandoned Christ by adopting a lifestyle that is totally opposed to the redemptive work of the cross.”<sup>61</sup>

We are to identify and turn away from this type of living. That may seem harsh, but the Bible instructs us clearly on this matter.

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<sup>61</sup> Fee, 371.



I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet [I] certainly [did] not [mean] with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner-not even to eat with such a person. For what [have] I [to do] with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person. (1Co 5:9–13, NKJV)

Did you notice that Paul indicates that we can’t do anything about unbelievers living in continual sin? That’s their nature! Of course, they’re going to live like that. What do you expect?!

Paul gives us some specific indicators of what to look for.

The first is that their god is their belly. That means that the ruling force in their lives is their own gratification in both a literal and figurative sense.

Just as Paul instructed the Philippians to note those good examples, he instructed the Romans to note those bad examples by using some of the same terminology!

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine

which you learned, and avoid them. 18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. (Rom 16:17–18, NKJV)

The second mark is that these unconverted Christians glory in their shame, or they claim their shame as glorious – reveling in sin, wearing it as a badge of honor. This is not to be named among Christians! Our past sin, and any current sin we war against is to be abhorrent and resisted, not embraced and celebrated.

This much is certain – we are each called to holiness!

Lastly, they set their minds on earthly things. That means they are constantly considering that which is worldly as opposed to the heavenly.

This last marker probably rings a bell for most of us as it is contradictory to an oft-quoted verse, “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” (Col 3:2, NKJV)

Do you see what Paul is driving at?

Christians are to be markedly different! What Paul presents to us here is a series of comparisons and contrasts meant to illustrate the world of difference between believers and enemies of the cross.

The proof of sincere faith is in the pudding!

Or, if you prefer, “Every good tree bears good fruit.”

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor [can] a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. (Matt 7:15–20, NKJV)

Did you notice that the ravenous wolves that Jesus teaches about actually APPEAR to be sheep? It is impossible to discern the heart of the wolf aside from looking at the fruit they bear because all outward indications suggest to us that they are sheep!

We need to balance this idea of bearing fruit lest we believe wrongly that we can just strive hard enough to pop out good fruits on our own terms or own effort. That would be a works-based faith wherein we save ourselves because of the fruit we bear. That is quite a popular lie!

The inverse of that works-based faith is the truth we cling to: we bear fruit BECAUSE we've been saved. We are not the true vine; Jesus is!

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every [branch] that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you [are] the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw [them] into the fire, and they are burned. (Jhn 15:1–6, NKJV)

In both Matt 7 and John 15, we see the importance of bearing fruit. We also see that the fruitless or unprofitable will end up in the burn pile and that only by abiding in Christ can one bear good fruit.

V. 20 – Contrasted against those who are enemies of the cross and “who set their mind on earthly things,” Paul affirms that the community of saints holds a heavenly citizenship.

This is WHY and HOW we are different!

This is WHY those who are connected to the true vine, Jesus, can't help but press into the kingdom! It's who we are! The substance of our being is conformed into, grafted into who He is.

As citizens of heaven, we speak Christ's heavenly language!  
We live His life! We carry His customs and traditions with us!  
We have His shared history! We have a national identity that is  
rooted in eternity and in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

BUT for the time being, as we wait, we are ambassadors and pilgrims in a foreign land. That means that we have to speak two languages – just like any good ambassador. AND, like any good ambassador, thinking to advance the interests of our homeland, we hold to a unified message!

Paul writes about this to the Corinthians, “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore [you] on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.” (2Co 5:20, NKJV)

It's important that we recognize we are ambassadors and not refugees. It would be easy to look at this passage and hear Paul's language regarding those who “eagerly wait for the Savior” in a forlorn sense, like we're refugees waiting for rescue. But NO – we've already been rescued!

Now, as we hopefully serve in the diplomatic corps of Christ, we also eagerly wait for His soon return.

Pay attention to Paul's expectation. Note that his language indicates to us that the state of the first-century church was

one of expectation, waiting for the soon return of Christ!  
They believed that Jesus was returning soon!

As the millennia tick by, some of us naturally become disheartened. There are even those who have dismissed the notion of a second coming altogether, preferring to explain this Biblical teaching as allegory or wishful thinking. BUT we are to be people of expectation and hope.

Peter writes about this in his second epistle:

[K]nowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as [they were] from the beginning of creation." ... The Lord is not slack concerning [His] promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2Pe 3:3–4, 9, NKJV)

Our expectation isn't wishful thinking. Our understanding that Jesus could come back at any moment should actually impact our work on planet earth! And we believe this because Jesus declared it, "When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am." (Jhn 14:3, NLT)

A question for reflection: If Jesus could return at any moment and transform this place, this earth, our very bodies

– how would that move us to interact with the world around us?

The day is getting long, loved one! If we grasped this truth or were grasped by it, we would be about our Father’s business. We would ensure that our lives bore the marks of faithful examples, separate from the earthly-minded false believer, press forward to the prize and this ambassadorship, reaching out to the hopeless and unsaved, crying out, “Be reconciled to God!” Paul instructs the Roman church on just this thing!

[N]ow [it is] high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation [is] nearer than when we [first] believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to [fulfill its] lusts. (Rom 13:11–14, NKJV)

4:1 – It makes better sense to include this verse with the reading of chapter three, given that it is the culmination of what Paul has set forth in the past several verses.

Paul again expresses his deep connection with the church by referring to them in unabashedly affectionate terms. I propose that this is an example that we should also embrace with one another and with other Jesus followers.

So sweet is Paul's fellowship with this church that he refers to them as a treasure and the object which brings him joy.

Is this how we feel about the church and one another? That question might be challenging. Some of us would rather hide our affiliation with the body of Christ rather than treasure and wear it on our heads as a laurel crown to be looked upon with awe.

The end of the comparisons for the Philippians and us is to stand fast. Having been presented with good examples to follow and a sea of bad examples to discern and shun, the last remaining duty is to remain firm in our position. Where is that position? In the Lord.

One commentator suggests:

With this word one can visualize a soldier standing firmly amidst the horrors of a battle. The idea is to remain faithful without giving way ..., or to demonstrate unswerving loyalty ... amidst attacks from without and false teachings within ... one can sometimes express it better [as] 'you should never run away,' 'you should never give in,' or 'you must never collapse.'<sup>62</sup>

And so, we pray, Lord, equip us with the endurance to stand until the end by your Spirit, your grace, your Word, and your strong hand.

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<sup>62</sup> Louw and Nida, *Handbook on Philippians*, 124.



## CHAPTER 12 | PHILIPPIANS 4:2-7

It was suggested that perhaps the traditional division between chapters 3 and 4 could have been more logically placed where we begin this section, at v. 2 rather than v. 1.

Remember, chapter and verse markings were later additions to the text and are therefore not considered authoritative, although they are undoubtedly helpful.

Since chapter and verse markings are not considered authoritative, it is incredibly important to read around the text under consideration so we can gain an understanding of the context rather than interpreting single verses or small portions of Scripture without any regard for the surrounding material. That can lead to questionable interpretations and questionable applications.

When the New Testament was first written there were no punctuation marks ... the words were run together one after another without any separation. Punctuation and versification entered the text of manuscripts at a much later period.<sup>63</sup>

The first division of the Bible into chapters and verses is attributed to Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury in the late 12th century. Cardinal Hugo, in the middle of the 13th century, divided the Old Testament into chapters as they stand in our translation. In 1661, Athias, a Jew of Amsterdam, divided the section of Hugo into verses. And in 1561, a French painter divided the New Testament into verses as they are now.<sup>64</sup>

The rationale for associating Phil 4:1 with chapter 3 is that v. 1 is a “Therefore” statement (sometimes called an Inferential Conjunction), which “gives a deduction, conclusion, or summary to the preceding discussion.”<sup>65</sup>

The command found in v. 1 to “stand fast in the Lord” appears to be the logical conclusion of Paul’s instruction in the preceding verses to take note of and to collectively, as a church, follow the example of the faithful saints that were in their company.

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<sup>63</sup> William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek: Grammar*, ed. Verlyn D. Verbrugge, 3rd ed (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 12.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, 1996), 186.

<sup>65</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 673.

The remainder of chapter 4 presents to us final instructions from Paul, including specific instructions regarding a couple of particular members in the Philippian church.

V. 2 – Could you imagine the chagrin of these two women – Euodia and Syntyche?

Bear in mind that not long after these NT letters were written, they began to circulate throughout the first-century church, partly because the readers recognized the inspiration, authority, and worth of the content and partly at the command of the Apostle himself.

Paul wrote to both the Colossians and Thessalonians:

“Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the [epistle] from Laodicea.” (Col 4:16, NKJV)

“I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.” (1Th 5:27, NKJV)

What we know about Paul from his writings is that he didn't pull any punches. In fact, this is one of the things that challenges readers today – Paul's direct style. He wasn't afraid to address issues that arose in the churches he ministered to, not because he was a hammer and every problem he encountered was a nail, but because, for Paul, the danger of

letting those subversive, slow-burn, divisive issues continue to simmer in the church deserved direct correction.

So, in our text, Paul seeks to set right a wrong within the Body, particularly between two people that appear to be at odds with one another.

His language, addressed directly to each woman, is quite urgent. It carries the meaning, “to urge strongly, appeal to, ... exhort, encourage”<sup>66</sup> and to “ask for something earnestly ... to plead for.”<sup>67</sup>

The NLT renders this verse: “Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement.” (Phil 4:2, NLT)

More than just asking them to bury the hatchet, Paul urged this disparate pair to a unity of thinking and understanding in Jesus, a recurring theme that is found repeatedly in Philippians.

So far in the letter, Paul has urged the church toward unity with one another, he has urged them to unity with Jesus, and he has urged them to unity with himself. And now he focuses

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<sup>66</sup> Arndt, 765.

<sup>67</sup> Louw and Nida, *Semantic Domains*, 407.

on a micro level – the individuals, people who are quarreling. He urges them to have unity with one another.

The fact that Paul was so plain in this call tells us a lot about his understanding of the church both locally and universally, especially since Paul himself had somewhat of a schism earlier in his ministry!

Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, [and see] how they are doing.” Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so, Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. (Acts 15:36–40, NKJV)

We often chalk this up to “divine division.” We assert that God made an allowance for these men to differ and go their separate ways and that potentially the Lord was actually growing his Kingdom and the people who were affected by this division.

There is certainly a time and place for that. The problem is that we are the ones who have a hard time with “divine division.” It is difficult for us to go through while still

acknowledging that the person we disagree with is the Lord's treasure, and we are supposed to love them through the contention.

What we see in Phil 4:2 doesn't seem to be that at all. This doesn't appear to be a cut-and-dried example of "divine division." Instead, Paul urges reconciliation and oneness. This indicates to us that this probably wasn't "divine division," but two people being stubborn – about what, we don't know.

Many have attempted to discern what this division was about. Apparently, the cause for contention was well known to these women and probably the people at Philippi since Paul didn't feel the need to record the details for us.

V. 3 Paul calls in reinforcements to help in the reconciliation and reveals more about the character of the leaders in the church and these women.

We find that whoever Paul is addressing in v. 3 is viewed as his "true companion," lit. "true yoke-fellow."<sup>68</sup>

Perhaps this was the pastor of the church. Some have suggested that perhaps this was Luke.<sup>69</sup> It is unknowable based on the information we have – but fun to speculate.

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<sup>68</sup> Louw and Nida, *Handbook on Philippians*, 125.

<sup>69</sup> Fee, 394.

Regardless, this person had his work cut out for him!  
Whoever he is, Paul asks to help these women.

This is really special. Apparently, this wasn't the time for some brutal church discipline but for assistance. Incidentally, the purpose of church discipline is supposed to be restoration and reconciliation, not hurt feelings and shame.

We also find out that these two women, who were having a difficult time getting along, worked with Paul to advance the good message, the gospel! These weren't a couple of back-pew wallflowers who were being corrected for gossip or anything like that; I believe Paul would have said as much. These were laborers, and we know that laborers are few! These women were valuable to the ministry, and they were important to Paul's heart. He dearly wanted to see them restored and in unity.

Paul goes on to name a few others who were probably involved in the same work.

This reminds us that even as the Apostle looms large in our imaginations, he wasn't alone. He labored with some deeply committed believers – even describing them as having their names written in the Book of Life.

“The idea of a Book of Life is found throughout the Bible. Like the genealogies of the OT, the Book of Life recorded

the names of the living (Psa 69:28) who were part of God's people."<sup>70</sup>

This type of symbolic and dramatic language has to have some sort of bearing on the situation.

It appears that Paul is calling the church, this contentious party, and all of those who have labored alongside him to remember the big picture.

On the importance of Paul's appeal to the Book of Life, Gordon Fee writes, "The ultimate reason for their getting it together in Philippi as they await from heaven the coming of their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (3:20), is that their names [all of their names] are in the book of life."<sup>71</sup>

When we remember the big picture, that Christ is advancing His kingdom and we are to be about His business rather than advancing our own kingdom, then our personal controversies and endeavors to manipulate people to adopt our attitudes on non-essentials appear rather small.

We can deduct that whatever Euodia and Syntyche were worked up over was not an essential belief because Paul never

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<sup>70</sup> Derek R. Brown, *Philippians*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Research Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), Php 4:1–23.

<sup>71</sup> Fee, 396.



let the essentials of the faith slide; he always tackles those issues head-on in his writings. Instead, he calls for them to remember the big picture and to view their fellow workers in light of their heavenly citizenship.

#### V. 4 – Paul calls for rejoicing!

For the Philippians to remember that their names are written in the Book of Life is certainly cause for rejoicing, even if they had their disagreements. So strong is Paul's summons to rejoice that he says it twice!

I can't help but wonder if Paul didn't write this verse with a big smile on his face as he reflected on these dear believers that he loved so much: Euodia, Syntyche, and all of the others at Philippi. I wonder if this isn't a moment of Paul's own rejoicing captured for us, even as he finds himself imprisoned by the Roman government.

Even in less-than-ideal situations – when people rub us the wrong way – when CHURCH PEOPLE rub us the wrong way, we still have cause to rejoice because our names are written in the Book of Life!

V. 5 – Paul now instructs the Philippians to be known for their gentleness.

This would have been especially pertinent given his call for reconciliation and unity. Sometimes people find it more productive to muscle their way through conflict. That is certainly true for our present age. We live in a society that places a premium on asserting oneself and not getting walked on.

When we find ourselves at odds with others – even those in the church – sometimes we feel like we need to set things straight by force!

Rather, Paul instructs the church to be so gentle that everybody views that as one of their defining characteristics. And of course, this reminds us of Jesus' instructions to the disciples, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." (Matt 10:16)

I've heard this question pop up a lot from Christians when they are instructed in gentleness, humility, that sort of thing. "Well, how long do we do that before we push back? How long do we just take it before we stand up for ourselves?"

Well, as far as I can tell, the New Testament doesn't issue any imperatives for an enraged resistance or holy war against whatever societal or personal struggle we find ourselves caught up in. On the other hand, we repeatedly see that we

are to adopt the nature of Christ as we “stand fast in the Lord.”

Remember that it was Christ who described Himself as gentle as he said, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matt 11:29, NKJV)

James adds more detail, specifically concerning the source of such gentleness and peace:

[T]he wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (Jas 3:17–18, NKJV)

AND—

You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (Jas 5:8, NKJV)

While people love to come up with hypothetical trigger lines for when we can finally have our moment of righteous indignation, resistance, and perhaps bloodshed, what is abundantly clear is that we are instructed to let our gentleness be a defining characteristic of our faith.

Why? Because Jesus is coming soon! He is the one who repays in full, loved one! He is the one who brings justice and truth.

We don't just simply say Jesus is coming soon because that's what's expected, as if it's some kind of cheesy Christian trope, but because we believe the Scriptures and Jesus himself declared, "Surely I am coming quickly." (Rev 22:20)

Nevertheless, sometimes we feel like we've reached the last straw, like we have to defend Jesus or His kingdom will fall. It is not so! He is the one who defends us, and the gates of hell shall never prevail against His church. (Matt 16:18) And since we believe that Jesus is coming soon, we can allow ourselves to be gentle and patient with others because He has already won!

#### V. 6–7 Anxiety and the need for prayer

I find Paul's instructions here to be especially interesting given the context of disagreement within the church. This is quite pertinent because disagreement with one another can bring about a lack of gentleness and quite a bit of anxiety.

People replay their interactions with others over and over in their heads, trying to figure out who said what and why everything feels so upside down. That's not how we are to live as believers with one another!

Paul writes, “Be anxious for nothing!” This is actually an imperative, a command, something to be carried out. Easier said than done, Paul.

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America:

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults in the United States age 18 and older, or 18.1% of the population every year. Anxiety disorders affect 25.1% of children between 13 and 18 years old.<sup>72</sup>

What that means practically is that there is a lack of abiding peace raging through humanity.

So, what is the alternative? How do we bring peace back into our churches, our relationships, and our lives?

Paul gives some practical instructions here that are wrapped up in God’s peace, which defies understanding on a human level.

Essentially what Paul is encouraging Christians to do here, acknowledging that anxiety is real and vicious (especially for the first-century church!), is to reframe their thinking by drawing near to God in prayer in all of its various modes.

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<sup>72</sup> “Facts and Statistics. Anxiety and Depression Association of America,” <https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/facts-statistics>.

What Paul lists for us are all forms of prayer. The first is quite literally prayer, talking with the Lord in open dialogue between a Father and a child, which is perhaps so elusive to us.

The second is supplication, that is, an “urgent request to meet a need, exclusively addressed to God.”<sup>73</sup> AND, in the midst of that urgent request, there is an acknowledgment of what He has already provided, which results in giving thanks.

Giving thanks is SO VALUABLE in reframing our perspective.

So often, we are weighed down by the anxiety of the unknown or unknowable or uncertain that we fail to remember all of the ways the Lord has been so faithful to us over time. Taking a moment to reflect on those things and to give thanks for Christ’s faithfulness to us is supremely important in staving off anxiety. It reminds us that He is true to His word, He has everything under control, and He will never abandon us to fend for ourselves. (Matt 28:20, Heb 13:5)

The result of this prayer life, of pressing into God’s presence, is God’s peace. (1 Pe 5:7)

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<sup>73</sup> Arndt, 213.

God's peace is an active peace, not a passive, stagnant peace. Our God is a living God.

The peace that God gives is far more than just repeating a mantra or breathing deeply until we find ourselves in some zombified state of humdrum “stupefaction.”

God's peace involves knowing that the living God concerns Himself mercifully and lovingly in our affairs, and He is the one who will guard our hearts, the seat of our emotions and our minds, the seat of our thoughts.

He is the one who keeps us in His perfect peace as we draw near to Him. This is a timely reminder in an era of so much chaos.

Peace is not unattainable. It is found in Christ, who is our peace.

## CHAPTER 13 | PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9

We find ourselves in the final stretch of Paul's letter to the Philippians. This is a portion of Scripture that, if we are not careful, can be skimmed over quickly because we simply assume that we get the point. We assume that we know what Paul is driving at. However, this brief two-verse pericope deserves our full attention.

The challenging thing about this text and Paul's admonition to the church to "set their minds on things above" (to borrow a phrase from Colossians 3:2) is that seasoned believers know the principles presented, at least theoretically. BUT we all find this admonition to higher thinking quite challenging to adopt in our own lives.



The draw towards everything else is so strong that our flesh rebels, and we find ourselves meditating upon, dabbling in quite unwholesome material. (Gal 5:17)

There are so many things competing for our attention and our affection. Not all competing interests are bad. There are many noble pursuits competing for our interest, and those things can dominate or undermine our personal devotional time just as much as any sin.

The reality is that we live in an age where knowledge has increased and continues to increase (at least ostensibly), but wisdom and discernment doesn't seem to be increasing at an equitable rate. (Dan 12:4)

Because of the rise of instant worldwide communication and social media, everybody has been given a platform for a relatively low cost and low risk of adverse consequence for propagating ignorance.

Supposedly there is an old Yiddish proverb that says, "Every village has its village idiot."

Now, in the days of old, everybody in the village knew who their idiot was! But now every village idiot gets a platform to share their idiocy with the world, and we, not being from their village, find it more and more difficult to discern who is legitimate and who is, well ... an idiot.

We have created a perfect storm of questionable content to cloud our minds, with nearly unlimited access to communication tools, lack of context, expansive reach and distribution, and, I would argue, the most important ingredient to this storm – relativism regarding truth, facts, morality, and justice.

According to Statista.com, “As of May 2019, more than 500 hours of video were uploaded to YouTube every minute. This equates to approximately 30,000 hours [4.7 years!] of newly uploaded content per hour.”<sup>74</sup>

“Americans aged 18 and older spend more than four hours a day watching TV, still beating the three hours and 45 minutes they interact with their smartphone on an average”<sup>75</sup>

If you care to look, there are other disturbing statistics on the proliferation of adult content that are sadly not shocking at all.

One of the problems with addressing the issue of “setting our minds on things above” is that we all gather around and act like it’s not a problem, like we’ve all got it under control.

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<sup>74</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/259477/hours-of-video-uploaded-to-youtube-every-minute/>.

<sup>75</sup> <https://www.statista.com/chart/15224/daily-tv-consumption-by-us-adults/>.

Instead of transparently bringing truth and freedom to an ugly situation, our hesitancy causes people who want to open up about their struggles and temptations to clam up because they feel ashamed, and they don't want to be ostracized by people they view as having it "all under control."

This common behavior, especially within the church, pushes the sinner into a depressive cycle. They wonder what's wrong with them and why they can't get it together when seemingly everybody else is doing just fine.

We started with the easy, fun stuff: TV, internet, cell phones. Let's talk about that thing nobody wants to talk about.

Here's some data from an organization called Covenant Eyes.

**64% of Christian men and 15% of Christian women** say they watch porn at least once a month.

**1 in 5 youth pastors and 1 in 7 senior pastors** use porn on a regular basis and are currently struggling. That's more than 50,000 U.S. church leaders.<sup>76</sup>

This is real. It's happening. It's awkward, but only because we let it be. Christ has set us free, so then let us be free and honest and open. It's time to let go of our momentary icky

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<sup>76</sup> <https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/>.

feelings in obedience to God's Word to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal 6:1–2)

Let us consider the depth and practicality of this call to meditate on those things that are praiseworthy, that which is bound up in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Let us enter into this study acknowledging Paul's words to the Corinthians, "we have the mind of Christ." (1 Cor 2:16)

Since we have the mind of Christ, this task is not too difficult for us, nor is it outside our grasp as we rely on the Holy Spirit and the grace of God to carry us. BUT we must set our hand to the plow in this regard. We must take part in Christ's holiness with our whole self – including our minds – if we hope to find any progress in this area to which we are so lovingly called.

V. 8 – Paul instructs this first-century church, surrounded by pagan worship, ritual prostitution, idolatry, and wantonness, to elevate their thinking, and he gives them practical instruction on how they might know that they are on the right path.

We must say up front that all of these characteristics under consideration are once and for all commended to the Philippians by way of MEDITATION. The Philippians are commanded to consider these attributes as they interact with

the world around them, with God's Word, with one another, etc., and do something with this information, namely to MEDITATE.

Don't be scared of that word. It is used in Scripture, and we have a claim to meditation in its fullest, most correct, most holy sense.

The term means “to think about something in a detailed and logical manner—to think about, to reason about, to ponder, reasoning.”<sup>77</sup> It carries the weight of “reflect[ing] carefully upon [these things] in order that they may shape your conduct. These good qualities are not merely things that are good for the head, but things that need to be transformed into action [and this term] has the force of continual action (... ‘your thoughts must continually dwell on’).”<sup>78</sup>

The first characteristic worthy of continual meditation is that whatever we are thinking about is to be TRUE. We live in an age of “truthiness, half-truths, and alternative facts.” Let us look toward that which is true. This isn't too difficult for us to grasp.

Remember it was Pontius Pilate who, upon hearing Jesus proclaim, “everyone who is of the truth hears my voice,”

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<sup>77</sup> λογίζομαι; λογισμός, οὗ – Louw and Nida, *Semantic Domains*, 350.

<sup>78</sup> Louw and Nida, *Handbook on Philippians*, 133.

asked that ancient question that people think makes them sound so original, “What is truth?” (John 18:37–38)

Truth is knowable. It is real, substantial, and edifying to the soul.

Let us set our minds on things that are true.

Are you unsure of what is true? Look to the things that you KNOW are true and meditate on those: Christ, God’s Word, the Spirit of Truth, to name a few.

The next characteristic is NOBLE – “pertaining to appropriate, befitting behavior and implying dignity and respect—‘honorable, worthy of respect, of good character.’”<sup>79</sup> This same term is used to describe the character required of deacons within the church in 1 Tim 3:8, “deacons are to be dignified.”

This removes those things from our thought life that are debased, debasing, or dehumanizing.

I must reiterate that all of these attributes may be applied directly to Christ in their fullest sense. He is the dignified one who is worthy of honor. He is the true one, and He is all of these other attributes that we are examining.

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<sup>79</sup> σεμνός – Louw and Nida, *Semantic Domains*, 747.

Moreover, the church is admonished to consider and reflect upon those things that are JUST. That means what is RIGHT and FAIR.<sup>80</sup>

Do not wallow in the depravity of injustice. God is just, He is righteous, and He is making us like Him. True justice has a place in God's Kingdom, and He is the one who will make it so. God's people appreciate and think about that which is JUST, RIGHT, and FAIR.

Whatever things are PURE should also occupy our headspace. This word ἁγνά (*hagna*) is closely associated with the Greek term for holiness (ἅγιος, *hagios*). It conveys the thought of that which is “without blemish or moral defect.”<sup>81</sup>

Holiness, or purity, is important to God. It is who He is! And we cannot be in His presence if we are not holy!

That doesn't mean when we mess up we are immediately removed from His presence. God forbid! He imparted Christ's righteousness to us so that we can stand in His presence. The question we must wrestle with is, how far are we willing to go in our own lives so that we might press into the holiness He has provided for us?

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<sup>80</sup> Arndt, 246.

<sup>81</sup> Louw and Nida, *Semantic Domains*, 745.

As Peter writes, “[A]s He who called you [is] holy, you also be holy in all [your] conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” (1Pe 1:15–16, NKJV)

Holiness seems unattainable, but it is gifted to us, and we must walk in holiness with our Lord, shunning those unclean things around us even though they call out to us so deceptively, like the immoral woman from Prov. 7. Take the path to her house and be struck down.

With her enticing speech she caused him to yield,  
With her flattering lips she seduced him.  
Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to  
the slaughter,  
Or as a fool to the correction of the stocks,  
Till an arrow struck his liver.  
As a bird hastens to the snare,  
He did not know it [would cost] his life.  
Now therefore, listen to me, [my] children;  
Pay attention to the words of my mouth:  
Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways,  
Do not stray into her paths;  
For she has cast down many wounded,  
And all who were slain by her were strong [men].  
Her house [is] the way to hell,  
Descending to the chambers of death. (Pro 7:21–  
27, NKJV)

Purity matters to God. The warnings He gives throughout Scripture are plain. AND if you care to consider the remarkable structure of Proverbs, keep in mind that the chapter immediately following the tempting immoral woman



is the voice of another woman calling out in the street – Lady Wisdom.

She takes her stand on the top of the high hill,  
Beside the way, where the paths meet.  
She cries out by the gates, at the entry of the city,  
At the entrance of the doors:  
“To you, O men, I call,  
And my voice [is] to the sons of men.  
O you simple ones, understand prudence,  
And you fools, be of an understanding heart.  
Listen, for I will speak of excellent things,  
And from the opening of my lips [will come]  
right things;...” (Pro 8:2–6, NKJV)

Who are we going to listen to — the woman who calls to seduce us, or Lady Wisdom who invites us to truth?

The next thing Paul implores the Philippians to consider is all those things that are LOVELY. That is things that are pleasing, along with all of the other attributes he has set forth. We wouldn’t consider things that please us in a sinful way to be lovely but rather those things created by God that are exceptional, delightful, agreeable, and moving.<sup>82</sup>

Additionally, we are to consider those things that are of GOOD REPORT, admirable, or commendable.

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<sup>82</sup> Arndt, 886.

We move to Paul's final couplet – virtue and praise. The six previous characteristics are virtuous in themselves. But as one source points out, up until this point, Paul has used adjectives, describing words, as he details for the Philippian church the ethical practicalities of following Jesus with our minds.<sup>83</sup>

These final two terms are nouns in the original language: virtue and praise.

We are to be a people who consider and reflect upon VIRTUE.

What does that mean? Perhaps this is a good place to start meditating. What is the meaning of Christ-centered virtue? One lexicon suggests that the term denotes specifically “uncommon character worthy of praise.”<sup>84</sup>

The Greek philosophers of the 4th century BC, led by Plato, believed in four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice.

While that's interesting, we are still left with the question, What is Christian virtue? Perhaps we have marched around that question too much. Some have suggested that we just

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<sup>83</sup> Louw and Nida, *Handbook to Philippians*, 132.

<sup>84</sup> Arndt, 130.

add faith, hope, and love to those four and call it good! (1 Cor 13:13)

Considering the depth and breadth of Christian virtue is far more involved than our time allows. Perhaps that's Paul's point, after all, to stimulate the thought life of those Jesus followers who wanted to know the answer!

Look to your teacher, dear one! The Spirit and the Word!

Lastly, we are to consider PRAISE in our thought lives.

Yes, we are a people of praise. We have incorporated praise into our worship services and our daily lives. We've incorporated praise into our prayer lives even. BUT – what is PRAISE? What is it meant for? Chew on that! That is the beginning of meditating upon praise.

V. 9 – After such a brief discussion on meditation, Paul urged the church once again to join in following his example (Phil 3:17).

You see, Paul himself was committed to this pattern of setting his mind on things above, on holy things. He didn't live a wealthy life because of it. He certainly didn't escape suffering because of it. But Paul was convinced that the God of peace remained near to him as he reflected deeply upon holy things.

Why? Well, Paul was an example of pressing into the life that he described, one that was true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, founded upon the virtue and praise of Christ. Paul was drawing near to God intentionally.

Everything else that competed for Paul's affection he counted as rubbish – but you already knew that, didn't you (Phil 3:7)?

We are promised that if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. (Jas 4:8)

Now, this instruction to meditate upon these things continually is a significant admonition – choose holiness, shun filth – set your mind on things above! We try to do this in our own lives. We even try to follow after Paul as he asked the Philippians to do! And then we get tired of it or fail, and then we feel miserable, wretched, ashamed, or like we're hypocrites fulfilling the stereotype that the world has assigned to Christians.

At that moment, it sure doesn't feel like the God of peace is with us. If He is only with us when we are getting straight A's in the morality and meditation department, then we are doomed!

Well, Paul felt this way too. He wrote to the Romans:

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. (Rom 7:21–25, NKJV)

AND—

[There is] therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God [did] by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh. (Rom 8:1–3, NKJV)

## CHAPTER 14 | PHILIPPIANS 4:10-23

Having thoroughly instructed the Philippian church on meditation, unity, prayer, a heavenly citizenship, pressing onward toward completion, holiness, Christ the servant, humility, suffering, living, preaching, and thankfulness, Paul now arrives at his parting words.

We see Paul transitioning from instruction to considering how the Philippians have practically cared for him and what that means for himself and their congregation.

The Philippians were givers. In fact, they were one of the few churches that supported Paul during his ministry.

We know a few things about Paul that shaped his position and instructions to the churches regarding giving and supporting those in ministry.

We know that Paul supported himself as best as he could by working a job, specifically as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3).

We know that Paul instructed the other churches to care for and support their own pastors (1 Tim 5:17–18). Paul quotes the OT to support this imperative, writing to Timothy, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” (Deut 25:4)

We also know that the issue was complicated not by Scripture but by tradition. “Jewish custom prohibited rabbis from receiving payment for their services.... On one level, from the ox citation Paul defends apostolic financial support. On another more important level, however ... promoting human compassion, the citation also serves Paul’s wider, long-term purpose—to cultivate the mature, Christ-like character that God desires of the entire Christian community.”<sup>85</sup>

We know that Paul had a contentious relationship with the Corinthian church over this issue (1 Cor 9:6–18). It appears that the Corinthians needed much instruction when it came to right giving and right hearts.

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<sup>85</sup> William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 79–80.

In fact, Paul used the Philippian church and other churches in their area to instruct the Corinthians on this very subject. He sets them forth as a gleaming example of what right giving looked like:

Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. (2Co 8:1-4, NLT)

Though the Philippians were deeply impoverished, they were moved by God's grace to be givers. They desired to be part of the team in the fullest sense of the meaning. In plainer terms, they had skin in the game.

The text we now consider attests to that work as Paul addresses them firsthand about their gracious support for him – a man who could use all the support he could get!

This is a beautiful portion of Scripture when it comes to giving. So many sermons on the topic use guilt to provoke unwilling congregants to part ways with their money or false promises of future riches if you only drop a few coins in the plate.



What we see here is just real, authentic thanks from a poor man to a poor but gracious church.

V. 10 – Paul turns his full attention to the saints at Philippi as he explicitly acknowledges their support of the ministry.

Today, it is widely believed that talking about giving is sort of a faux pas in the modern church. The reason is well-deserved. Too many hacks and spiritual posers have spent their energy talking about nothing else!

Church has become corporatized, in many ways adopting the same business strategies that run multimillion-dollar companies all for the sole purpose of generating revenue, hiring more staff, buying more property, creating member value – all with the ostensible purpose of “spreading the gospel,” while actually pursuing filthy lucre.

What we’ve seen in our lifetime is that the pendulum of thought and feeling has oscillated back and forth quite dramatically in regard to giving and supporting ministry.

There was a time when every church passed the plate, and the tithe was expected, preached on, and encouraged. Well, that was so disgustingly abused by prosperity gospel preachers (and still is) that the label applied to all churches was “they only want your money.”

So, in a wild shift away from ever talking about money, churches discreetly put a neat little unobtrusive box in the back of the church, stopped passing a plate, skipped over portions of Scripture about giving, and kind of shrugged the whole thing off.

Besides a lack of regard for God's Holy Word when it comes to giving, what that demonstrates is that humans are fickle. We are slaves to emotion, and our opinions on things change with the times.

BUT teaching on giving shouldn't be feared. And, inasmuch as the Bible teaches on the subject, we will too!

Paul writes directly on the subject here to the Philippians. Part of their labor with him, as they pressed into fellowship with the Apostle for the Kingdom, was providing for his needs.

The fact that Paul could have a full belly because of the Philippians' generosity, even though he was in prison at this time, gave him great cause to rejoice. It demonstrated to Paul that the church cared about him in a very real way. Again, they had some skin in the game.

There's a world of difference between affirming our care for others through words or through deeds.

As James sets forth:

If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what [does it] profit? (Jas 2:15-16, NKJV)

AND—

Do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it's in your power to help them. If you can help your neighbor now, don't say, “Come back tomorrow, and then I'll help you.” (Pro 3:27-28, NLT)

AND—

But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. (1 Jhn 3:17-18, NKJV)

All of this is born out of Christ's example – He is the ultimate giver.

Now, it appears that in Paul's case, they desired to send their gift to him earlier, but something had interfered; they lacked the opportunity. In the meantime, Paul had to go without.

Oh, how that flies in the face of bazillionaire celebrity pastors and dubious preachers who claim that God will always shower us with material wealth if we are in His favor. They

take advantage of the poorest, most desperate people, selling a lie while living substantially above their congregants. It's a shame!

V. 11–13 Paul had to go without at times.

Paul didn't shake down the churches for support or for a paycheck. If the Philippians or any other church were unable to help out, he just continued faithfully plodding along preaching the gospel, making tents, and learning about that elusive characteristic we humans long for – contentment.

He knew how to be low, how to live humbly, how to go without, how to do with little.<sup>86</sup> In Paul's theology, having just a little didn't mean that God was displeased with him, as some believe.

Perhaps Paul kept this Proverb in mind:

O God, I beg two favors from you;  
let me have them before I die.  
First, help me never to tell a lie.  
Second, give me neither poverty nor riches!  
Give me just enough to satisfy my needs.  
For if I grow rich, I may deny you and say, "Who  
is the LORD?"  
And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus insult  
God's holy name. (Pro 30:7-9, NLT)

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<sup>86</sup> Arndt, 990.

Now, Paul also knew how to abound, that is to live in prosperity, or “to have such an abundance as to be more than sufficient—‘to have (much) more than enough, to have an overabundance.’”<sup>87</sup> He knew how to have a lot without losing his way, without falling into the trap of serving wealth instead of Jesus.

This view of Paul’s situation, a life of contentment, being okay with whatever situation he found himself in, whether that meant being hungry or being full, leads to one of the most abused portions of scripture ever, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (v. 13)

We have taken the meandering contextual path to this verse, so that we understand that Paul is giving Jesus all of the credit for the contentment that he experienced during ministry. If that meant scraping the bottom of the barrel, wondering where the next meal was going to come from, or having more than enough, Paul understood that Jesus was over all of that.

This example is sufficient for us, too! No matter what situation in life we find ourselves in, Jesus will equip us with the strength to remain content.

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<sup>87</sup> Louw and Nida, *Semantic Domains*, 560.

BUT let's be plain; this is not an endorsement that Jesus WANTS us to do everything! Much of our lofty goal setting is rotten with the sin of self-interest, greed, and pride.

The blanket statement, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," as commonly applied to any human endeavor irrespective of context, is brutally unkind to the intention of the Scripture. Be careful! Context matters!

Many people have wounded themselves by adopting the idea that God wants to give them everything they dream up, only to be left disappointed and shaking their fist at the heavens when they don't get what they want, revealing their heart and showing that they were pursuing something other than God all along.

Eugene Peterson does an admirable job capturing the spirit behind Paul's belief in the sufficiency of Christ. His translation reads:

Actually, I don't have a sense of needing anything personally. I've learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I'm just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it

through anything in the One who makes me who I am.<sup>88</sup>

Or put more simply, “Christ causes me to be strong in every kind of circumstance.”<sup>89</sup>

V. 14–17 Paul affirms the rightness of their giving and commends their example.

While the Philippians are wonderful examples of giving, we see that wasn’t the case for all of the churches. It appears that, at first, it was only the Philippians (a poor church!) who consistently cared for Paul even while he was away serving other potentially wealthier churches!

This tracks with what we know of Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians. He took wages from other churches to minister to them! (2 Cor 11:8-9)

In one especially poignant snapshot of Paul’s ministry, he writes this:

To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure. (1Co 4:11-12, NKJV)

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<sup>88</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), Php 4:11–13.

<sup>89</sup> Louw and Nida, *Handbook on Philippians*, 143.

Is it any wonder then that Paul wrote to the churches that they should care for their ministers? Why did he feel compelled to do that? Why did the Holy Spirit deem it necessary to capture this thought in SCRIPTURE for all time?!

BECAUSE PEOPLE LOVE THEIR SHEKELS MORE THAN THEIR SHEPHERDS. One may say, That's not true! Isn't it? We can find the answer by asking the question – which one are we more willing to live without?

The Philippian church was exceptional in this regard! They cared, and it showed, and it made Paul's heart soar. They had some skin in the game.

V. 17–20 – At the end of it all, having learned how to live a life of contentment THROUGH suffering, Paul understood that the greatest gift wasn't a meal or clothes; it was the growth produced WITHIN the Philippian saints themselves.

They were growing into good trees, and the fruit on their branches was good fruit. They were learning the very real practicalities of sharing in Paul's suffering by practical application, even in their own poverty. This was more than just theory or head knowledge! They put their hand to the task faithfully. One thing they learned along the way was that



God always gave them enough collectively to share with others.

Paul writes to another pastor, Titus, who was raising up church servants, about meeting the needs of others, “[L]et our [people] also learn to maintain good works, to [meet] urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.” (Tit 3:14, NKJV)

Or again as Paul writes, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” (2Co 8:9, NKJV)

There’s something about our actual giving that teaches us deep, holy lessons about Jesus’ heart that listening to a sermon could never accomplish.

Giving, or not giving, reveals our value system. It shows us privately what we value most. It shows us how big or small our trust is in the God that provides. It shows us how committed we are to our own church family and community.

These are quiet lessons that the Holy Spirit teaches us as we consider how much or how little we are willing to let go of as we seek to care for others.

The Philippians' work, born out of sincerity of heart, and their worship was done in the right spirit. The cost was not too great for them, and Paul assures them that their giving, their sharing with him in very real-life hardships, was pleasing to God.

Their giving was not lost in the ether, nor was it lost on God, nor was it broadcast on some thermometer graph for all to see.

Paul says to them as well that God will supply all their needs. Keep that in mind; He shall supply all your NEED.

Our good Father cares for us enough to make sure we have all that we need.

Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, [will He] not much more [clothe] you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, "What shall we

eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matt 6:25-33, NKJV)

Now, some may push back against that seemingly Pollyanna teaching of God’s provision, arguing that there are many innocents in the world who lack bread, water, and adequate clothing. It doesn’t appear that God is meeting their needs!

That’s where we come in. We get to be like the Philippians and care for others. They loved Paul enough to care for him. We get to be givers as led by the Lord Jesus and follow His example as well.

And that is glorious. That glorifies God. His glory lasts forever and is presented to all people as we faithfully live out these same principles as a church family seeking to care for others as much as we can.

V. 21–23 Paul concludes his epistle by reminding the church that they are part of a bigger family. They are included in a bigger church that extends past Philippi – right into Caesar’s own house!

They are to demonstrate those familial bonds and affection with one another, and we are too.

Finally, Paul ends with a reminder of grace.

It's easy for us to lose sight of grace when we get into the individual topics that we think we've got nailed down: discipleship, giving, serving, caring for others, being doers and not hearers, etc.

BUT perhaps the fullest way we can understand giving and caring for others is by considering how that fits in with grace.

Our Father did not count the life of His only Son too much to give for our sakes, poor, destitute, and undeserving as we are. He gave to us far more than 10% of what He has. He gave everything. That is grace. That is God's gift to us.

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you now and forever. Amen. -AR

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