

## Commentary on the Book of Philippians

### Philippians 1

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

**2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,**

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

**5 in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.**

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

Paul writes to the Philippian believers, including the overseers (elders) and deacons, on behalf of Timothy, greeting them in the name of God and Christ and wishing them His grace. The Philippians bring Paul great joy because they have remained faithful to the gospel since the first day that they responded to it in faith. Paul gladly prays for them, and his prayer is filled with joy because of their faithfulness. He expresses his confidence that they, like all believers, will have their faith made complete and perfect by the working of Christ within them when the day of Christ comes. Those who have been saved will be fully sanctified and then glorified (Romans 8:30). Christ is the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

**7 For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me.**

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

Paul has great brotherly affection for these believers because they have been praying for him and have been supportive of him through his imprisonment and in his preaching and defense of the gospel. Epaphroditus even came to visit Paul on behalf of the Philippians (c.f. 2:30).

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

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

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

Paul's prayer for the Philippians is that they would grow in their love according to true knowledge and discernment for the purpose of being able to identify and affirm what is right and good as compared to what is evil and dangerous. This discerning love will enable them to keep from falling for various deceptions and temptations, so that they might persevere and be blameless at the coming of Christ. Christ ultimately is the One Who must perfect His saints by grace through our faith, but there are responsibilities and

choices that we will have along the way. Paul prays that these believers will increasingly make the right ones. Then, they will be filled with the fruit of righteousness thanks to the working of Christ within them. They will become more like Christ, and they will be storing up rewards in heaven as the fruit of their righteous labor.

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

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

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

Paul's imprisonment was not a pleasant experience, but God used it to accomplish great good by advancing the gospel through the entire praetorian guard and to "all the rest." Those who guarded Paul and all those who heard him preach and who heard the gospel from the guards were blessed as a result of Paul being in close proximity to them. This is both a testimony to God being in control over all things and working them for good (Romans 8:28) and a testimony of Paul being responsible to take advantage of whatever opportunity was presented to him, even if it appeared meager. Many of the Christian brothers, having witnessed these events, were moved to boldly share the gospel themselves. Clearly, these difficult circumstances were used by God for the greater progress of the gospel such that it was actually spiritually advantageous for Paul to have been imprisoned. Such is the mystery, wonder, and grace of our God.

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

**16the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel;**

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

Some, Paul believed, were preaching the gospel from envy selfish ambition, trying to "compete" with Paul, taking advantage of his time in prison to advance their own status as ministers of the gospel. This, they hoped, would bring Paul misery while he was in prison, being unable to stop them. Yet there were others who were preaching the gospel from good motives and in love, accepting the fact that Paul was appointed by God to defend the gospel. They didn't envy his position, his authority, his apostleship, or his notoriety. They simply received it from God's hand as God's plan and did their part to help him advance the gospel.

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

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

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

Paul didn't allow himself to get disgruntled and discouraged by those who preached the truth out of false motives (though surely he didn't rejoice in their sin and impure motives), for the fact of the matter was that people could get saved by hearing the truth even if the preachers were not motivated by the salvation of souls. It is the truth that has the power to save (Romans 10:17). So Paul was able to rejoice in the fact that it was the truth about Christ which was being proclaimed. Paul also believed that he would be delivered, trusting in the prayers of the saints and the provision of Christ. This was his eager expectation and hope, for there was more work that he wanted to do. His prayer was that his life would always bring praise to Christ, whether by life or by death. While he had life in him, he wanted to labor for Christ, and if Christ were to call him home, he wanted to die well with a pure testimony. He wanted no shame to trace his steps, only the praise of Christ (c.f. Isaiah 49:23).

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

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

**23But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better;**

**24yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.**

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

**26so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.**

Paul realized rightly that it is better to be with Christ in glory in heaven. Living in this life was Christ in him, his hope of glory (Colossians 1:27, Galatians 2:20). Dying would be gain for he would inherit heaven and many rewards, the greatest being seeing His Savior face to face in glory. So there was great motive to die and be with Christ should God call him home, but there was also a great desire for him to labor on in the flesh because of the eternal, spiritual fruit that could be harvested. His decision of what he preferred, though he really didn't have any control over it, was to press on in the flesh for the sake of the believers. To be there with the Christians and to support them and encourage them in their growth was more important to Paul in the present than going to be with Christ in eternity. His perspective was others-centered rather than self-centered, though this others-centered perspective would really benefit him in the long run as well in terms of rewards in heaven. He wanted to witness their continuance in the faith, their joy, and their confidence that they had in learning from Paul who had literally seen Christ on the road to Damascus. They were proud to know this man and to have the chance to learn from him. His testimony was pure, and they loved him. After all, he was responsible for their salvation since he had preached the gospel to them. Only if he remained alive and visited them could they rejoice together in what God had done.

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

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

Paul's challenge to them is to continue to live in a way that is honoring to the gospel which they believe and preach. It is Paul's desire that they live in a way which is consistent with the character and nature of the Christ Whom they preach. If God grants it to Paul to be able to come and visit them again, he hopes to see them standing firm in one spirit, being faithful to Christ, upholding sound doctrine, and being steadfast in preaching the gospel. He wants them to not be frightened by those who seek to attack, insult, and persecute them, which serves to convict them of their error and of the truth which the believers have and hold. That a Christian is able to stand confidently and persevere faithfully despite persecution is a sign of their true salvation and to the persecutor of their own destruction.

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

**30 experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.**

In God's sovereign plan, He ordained that these Christians would believe in Him and also suffer for His sake (c.f. 2 Timothy 3:12). They had witnessed the frequent suffering which Paul had experienced (Acts 16:19-40 accounts Paul and Silas' imprisonment in Philippi) and had probably heard about it, and now again he was suffering in prison. Yet this same suffering of their teacher was going to be part of the normal life of the students.

## **Philippians 2**

**1 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,**

The summation of Christ's message was that love fulfills the law (Matthew 22:36-40) and that the mark of true disciples is love for one another (John 13:34-35). Thus, if there is anything to be gleaned from Christ, it is that we ought to love one another and be unified. His example and His teaching of love should persuade us and encourage us to love. The fact that we as believers are all sharers and beneficiaries of the same Spirit of God should also move us to live as those who love and are unified. The Hebrews viewed the intestines as the area where tender mercy and compassion resided, just as we would speak of tenderness of heart. Paul is exhorting them to draw from the place in them where mercy should be. If there is any there, which there should be if they are saved, they are to live as if such is the case. What Paul is doing by beginning this section this way is to point out that there is no excuse for believers to not live in unity and love. Christ's life and example as well as His indwelling Spirit should make it possible for believers to live in harmony with one another (2 Peter 1:3).

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

Therefore, given the infinite resources of Christ in them, the Philippians will make Paul's joy fully realized if they let Christ have His way in and among them, creating true love and true unity. Paul wants them to be of the same mind, meaning that they be agreed about the gospel and the Word of God. They will be harmonious in that they are to be drawing from the same well of wisdom, Christ (Colossians 2:3), and in that they are to be growing in a common understanding in the fear of the Lord as they obey His Word (Psalm 111:10). There can be no sameness of mind unless the Christian brothers and sisters be agreed that the Word of God stands above them all and that they must conform to it. Being of the same mind implies being in agreement in matters of God's will and desires. Interestingly, the word translated "mind" is the same word which is translated "intent" and "purpose." The idea that believers must be intent on one purpose is thus intricately related to being of the same mind. The purpose of believers must be what the Bible says our purpose is. Ultimately, it is the glory and honor of Christ, and this practically means fulfilling the Great Commission, going and making disciples and teaching them all that Christ commanded such that they can grow to maturity and make disciples themselves. It means being sanctified by the Word of God as we learn it and grow in conformity to it. It also involves Paul's other two commands of "maintaining the same love" and being "united in spirit." Maintaining the same love implies persevering in brotherly love toward one another, bearing one another's burdens and caring for the needs of others, even above and beyond our own. The phrase "maintaining the same love" speaks of being closely joined *to* brotherly love. In other words, a body of believers can only be united if each individual believer is personally so closely joined to the character and nature of love. Some try to manufacture unity by creating environments or agreements as a means of closely joining people. True unity comes as each individual believer becomes more loving. This unity does not have to be manufactured for it is simply a visible reality of a true inward transforming work by Christ, our chief example of unity (John 17:21). Unity must be shaped by the hand of God as spirits are tenderly taught and formed according to love. Paul's final admonition in this verse is that the Philippians be "united in spirit." The phrase translated "united in spirit" is a combination of two words, the first meaning "together" and the second meaning "soul or the seat of the desires and affections." What Paul is after is not a unity that merely says that we attend the same church or prefer the same style of music, for example. Paul is describing a unity that cuts to the deepest part of our being such that the pull of one soul toward the glory and service of Christ is replicated and shared by all other souls. Simply put, what one believer wants (God's glory) is what all want. This is the mark which the church should seek, and this should make our joy full as it did Paul's. This is an extremely difficult calling, and it will take great faith. But we would steal not only Paul's joy if he was still alive but the joy of our Savior by not trying to get to this point. We cannot lower the bar and tolerate doctrinal weakness and error or gloss over sin issues that need to be confronted Biblically. Love and unity are very serious things with profound evangelistic implications. If there is anything that Christ's life and message point us to as fundamental to Christianity and to the church, it is this.

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

**4do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.**

Practically, love and unity are manifested by those who take on an attitude of humility such as Christ had. Humility is a posture of the heart that does nothing with selfish motives or out of vain arrogance. The historical use of the word under examination here is to put oneself forward by using unfair means to gain a political office. It is a factious spirit that seeks to put others down so that self can be lifted up, so that its cause can be advanced, and so that it can rise to greater heights while others fall to greater depths. The direct opposite of humility is this spirit of self-advancement at the expense others. This is the essence of selfishness. Also incorporated in a lack of humility is a pursuit of vain glory, being consumed with self and how others view us. The word translated “empty conceit” could also be translated “self-esteem.” Paul’s point is not that we should look down on ourselves, though certainly we should not think of ourselves more highly than we ought (Romans 12:3). Paul’s point is simply that we need to stop being so preoccupied and consumed with ourselves so that we begin to think about the welfare and interests of others. Humility is akin to lowliness, the recognition of our smallness and neediness. Humility doesn’t have a big ego, but it boasts in Christ. It is not that it lacks confidence; it is just that it finds its strength and boldness in Jesus Who is in us rather than in our flesh. The word translated “humility” could also be translated “modesty,” thus carrying the idea of a person who is not trying to draw all of the focus and attention to himself for his own glory. Humility seeks God’s glory, and it hates when self steals the show. Humility also views others as of a surpassing value to self. The phrase translated “more important” could also be translated “surpassing value,” which it is translated in Philippians 3:8, speaking of how knowing Christ is better than all of Paul’s human accolades. In the same way, we are to view our brothers and sisters (and those outside of Christ) as of a greater importance and value to us than our own selfish gain. Among the family of God, this mindset doesn’t make us doormats, for others are to view our interests above their own. Thus, no one is self-consumed but rather seeking to serve the other. All benefit, and all have their needs met. The best part is that we get the joy of serving one another, and we get to experience the joy of Christian fellowship, rather than isolating ourselves. We are not to be consumed with our interests only, but we are to put the interests of others ahead of our own, particularly when it comes to the household of God (Galatians 6:10). This will lead to such things as giving sacrificially for the kingdom or the free giving of our time, service, and energy to help a person in need, for example. It is not that we neglect ourselves, for we do have things we need to care to, lest we disqualify ourselves from serving others (e.g. keeping a home to be able to be hospitable to others, keeping a job in order to be able to give to back to God, and giving proper time and attention to family to maintain a proper testimony). But even these things of taking care of our own interests ultimately serve the interests of others (family, spouse, employer, employees, clients, customers, those in need, etc.). In all we do, God is to get the glory as we are others-focused rather than self-absorbed. Ultimately, we must trust

God Who promises to take care of our needs as we concern ourselves first and foremost with the needs of others (Philippians 4:19).

**5Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,  
6who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,  
7but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.**

Christ was the ultimate example of humility, and it is His attitude we are to imitate. Christ has always existed, being God, and prior to His coming to earth and being incarnated in the form of a human being, He existed in the form of God, Who is spirit (John 4:24). Yet, He was willing to be obedient to the Father and come to earth as a man. Infinite power and deity was confined to human flesh by His choice. Previously, He had had all of the power and glory that belongs to God in being with Him in paradise, but upon coming to earth, He was prone to pain, suffering, and physical death, though even the grave couldn't hold Him. He had been honored by the angels in heaven in glory, but now He was going to die at the hands of His feeble, rebellious creation. He was willing to do all of this because it was not His interests which came first but the interests of the Father and of His rebellious creatures. He came to them in love even though they weren't deserving of love (Romans 5:8), demonstrating the epitome of humility. He emptied Himself not of His deity but of the rights, benefits, and glory that were His before coming as a man. Rather than hold tightly to the privileges of His deity and dwelling place in heaven, He gave up His "rights" and took on the form of a bond-servant, disregarding His own interests for the sake of seeking the lost and honoring the Father's interest. What humility our Savior demonstrated in being willing to take on human likeness, putting our interests and the Father's will ahead of His own (Luke 22:42).

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

Not only did He take on human likeness, being fully human and yet fully God, He willfully and submissively yielded Himself to the plan of God to go to the cross as the Lamb of God Who died for the sins of the world. When put to the greatest test of humility, our Lord passed with perfection, giving up His very life on a cross at the hands of brutal men and experiencing the wrath of God that should have been ours to bear. This is the ultimate example of putting the interests of others (us) ahead of His own, though He knew that obedience to the Father would lead to the greatest blessing.

**9For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,  
10so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
11and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

It was because of His ultimate humility and obedience to the Father that God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above all others. All authority has been given to Christ (Matthew 28:18), and He will subject all things under the feet of the Father (1 Corinthians 15:25-28). If men don't honor Christ as God now, they will have to later, for every knee will bow and every mouth will confess that He is Lord. Those who are in heaven (angels and those already dead in Christ) gladly bow before Him. Those on the earth will bow, some willingly, leading to eternal life, and some against their will, having been condemned because they didn't bow while they had the chance at redemption. Those dead who are in Sheol will also have to bow and confess before they are sentenced to the lake of fire. By God's decree, Jesus is the name of utmost power and authority, for this brings Him the utmost glory (c.f. Hebrews 2:9-18).

**12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;**

**13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.**

In light of Christ's example, His suffering, and His authority, Paul encourages the Philippians to live as those who are indeed saved of Christ, walking in humility and giving honor to one another. He commands them to "work out" their salvation, not to "work for it," given that they are already saved. We are to do our part of exercising our will by faith to render ourselves like Christ, knowing and remembering all the while that it is God Who gets the glory as He is the One working in us according to His good pleasure. The Philippians have been obedient and faithful, but Paul wants them to keep growing such that they excel still more (1 Thessalonians 4:1, 10). Our positional perfection in Christ needs to become more and more of a practical, conditional reality in our day to day lives which will happen as God continues to transform us as we put our faith in Him (c.f. Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 12:2). What God ultimately wants from us is for us to obey Him, for this brings Him great pleasure. Our chief concern on earth isn't to find our greatest pleasure, for when we live to bring God pleasure, we will find fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). The purpose of man is not our pleasure but His. Though we ought to enjoy Him (Psalm 37:4), the greatest objective of our existence is that He enjoys what He sees in us. God both desires and works to bring to fruition to our sanctification, and this is His delight. He doesn't override our wills as we have responsibility to choose to obey and to exercise faith, but He is the ultimate initiator, energizer, and finisher of our faith. Paul wants the Philippians to obey so as to let God get His glory and pleasure in seeing us made more like Christ, His only begotten Son in Whom He was and is well-pleased (Mark 1:11).

Paul makes special mention that we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We do this knowing that God is at work in us according to His good pleasure. The point is that it is God's good pleasure that is to motivate us. That God gets the glory and the pleasure that He desires from lives lived for Him is what should drive us to be devoted to growing in holiness. If life was simply about our enjoyment, we wouldn't need to fear or



tremble. But because life is ultimately about God's enjoyment, we, upon recognizing this by faith, will fear and tremble that we are not giving Him the glory to His name. It is not that we fear for our salvation, for we won't face His wrath, but we might fear His disappointment or His discipline. We have an authority figure, and He demands glory. He is a jealous God, and He shares His glory with none. He hates it when we as His people don't give Him proper respect and reverence. Let us be mindful of Who we serve, trembling before Him and at His Word, desiring always to keep it and knowing that we so desperately need Him at work in us to be able to keep it (c.f. Isaiah 66:2). Thus, we tremble, rather than walk about arrogantly. This also should move us to stop arguing with God and complaining, for such detracts from His pleasure. We must never outgrow the fear of the Lord (c.f. Proverbs 28:14), or we will become arrogant and fail to obey, stealing His pleasure.

**14Do all things without grumbling or disputing;  
15so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,  
16holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.**

We as Christians should work out their salvation by obeying Christ in faith with whole hearts, not murmuring, grumbling, or holding a secret grudge or opposition in our hearts. It is those who have wholly given their hearts to Him that He wants to support (2 Chronicles 16:9). Grumbling speaks of a displeasure within us when God wants us to take pleasure in obeying Him because such brings Him pleasure. God doesn't want us to deliberate with Him, to challenge Him, or to doubt Him. We are not to be those who create a dispute against God or who dispute within ourselves. There is to be no arguing against the wishes, will, and intents of God. As we see God take control of our hearts to the point where we delight in Him and His will and ways, we will see who we really are, and likely others will too. Children of God stand out from the perverse and crooked ways of the world, for children of God love not the world or the ways of the world (1 John 2:15). They are rather blameless, innocent, and above reproach. They are not perfect practically and conditionally, but they are working hard by faith to be such that they stand out as lights in a dark world in need of the Light (c.f. Matthew 5:16). These faithful children, cleansed in the blood of the Lamb, are to hold fast to the word of life, the commands of Christ, His gospel, and their hope of heaven. When it is clear that these Christians are being sanctified and standing for truth amidst the darkness and persecution of the world in which they are in, this will bring Paul great joy, for it demonstrates that his labor in preaching the gospel and teaching the ways of Christ to them was truly fruitful. This will bring him great reward at the coming of Christ, but more importantly glory to Christ. Christ will be honored by the fact that Paul's life bore true and lasting spiritual fruit.

**17But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.  
18You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.**

Paul, being in prison and coming toward the end of his life, used an analogy of a drink offering (c.f. Exodus 29:39-41) to describe his life. Just as the wine/flour/oil mixture was poured out over the altar as a soothing aroma to the Lord, so, too, Paul's sacrificial, humble life was a pouring out of service for others which amounted to pleasure to God. Paul was a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2). Paul rejoices in seeing the Philippians' growth and faithfulness and in having the opportunity by God's grace to serve them. He wants them to rejoice in their own faithfulness and growth so that they can share their joy with one another and Paul to the glory of God.

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

**20For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.**

**21For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.**

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

**23Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me;**

**24and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly.**

Many had left Paul, seeking after their own interests rather than after the interests of others and those of Christ. Yet Paul had great confidence in Timothy, and he hoped in the Lord to be able to send him to them so that he could be encouraged to hear of their faith and faithfulness. Paul knew that Timothy was a kindred spirit, indicative of brotherly love and a desire for true unity, and that he genuinely cared about the Philippians' welfare, a mark of true humility. The Philippians were aware of Timothy's faithfulness to Paul just as a child to a father. Timothy had built up a track record of faithfulness and reliability. Paul trusted that he himself would be coming shortly also, though he knew he was subject to God's will. He was released and may have had an opportunity to visit them, though the Scripture doesn't tell us for sure if he did in fact make it their way (c.f. Acts 28:30).

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

**26because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.**

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

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

**29Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard;**

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

Paul decided to send Epaphroditus to the Philippians in addition to Timothy. Paul describes him as a brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, in addition to being a messenger to them and a helper to Paul in his need. This was an extremely loyal and faithful man to Paul and to Christ. Epaphroditus loved the Philippians and longed to see them because they had heard that he had been sick. Certainly, they wondered how he was doing and if they would see him again. He had been sick to the point where he just about died, but God spared him in mercy. This kept Paul from having to lose one of his few faithful workers and from experiencing deep sorrow. Paul wanted to send him back to the Philippians so that they could rejoice in having the opportunity to see him yet again, and his visit to them would alleviate some of Paul's concerns about them. He could encourage them and bring back word as to their condition. The Philippians were to receive him in great joy, which he certainly expected them to do, and they were to make a practice of respecting him and those like him. He was particularly deserving of respect because he risked his life to do the work of Christ and serve the Philippians. Just as Christ gave up His life so that others might live, Epaphroditus apparently went the extra mile almost to his own peril so he could help Paul and meet the needs that apparently the Philippians lacked the opportunity to meet (see 4:10).

### **Philippians 3**

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

A theme that begins to emerge in this letter is that of joy. Paul wants his joy to be made complete, he wants the Philippians to rejoice, and he wants to bring joy to the heart of God. Apparently, he had written to the Philippians before about some things, and they are important enough for him to repeat now as a safeguard to them. When something is of a particular danger to a church, it is worth a shepherd reminding his sheep as to what the danger is.

**2Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; 3for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,**

It is not those who are circumcised only outwardly who are the children of the kingdom, but it is those who have been circumcised of their hearts, trusting in Christ to save them (Romans 2:29). There are those who put their confidence in the flesh (the Judaizers) and what rituals and laws they have kept in their own ability, being self-absorbed and self-interested. Yet the true circumcision is those who worship in Spirit and glory in Christ, rather than worshipping in ritual and glorying in the flesh. The Philippians are to be wary of those who put confidence in their own worth and merit apart from Christ, and Paul calls these men evil workers, the false circumcision, and dogs. They were those who feasted on the leftovers and gloried in the garbage of their flesh (c.f. Matthew 7:6).

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

**5**circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;  
**6**as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

If anyone could have put confidence in the flesh, it would have been Paul, for he was born a Hebrew, circumcised on the eighth day according to tradition, of the tribe of Benjamin (a son of Jacob's preferred wife Rachel), and a Pharisee. He knew the Law and probably had it all memorized. He studied under the best teacher of the Law, Gamaliel (c.f. Acts 22:3, Acts 5:34). He kept all of the fine extra-biblical regulations of the Law, and he more fervently than any other Jew persecuted the church of Jesus Christ. Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Jew's Jew, defending the "purity" of the Law against the gospel of Christ. He had far more to boast in in terms of fleshly achievements than many of the Judaizers.

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

But for Paul, what was far more valuable was knowing Christ. All these things that he had viewed as success, gain, and self-worth he now viewed as loss.

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

In fact, for Paul, all things were loss when compared to knowing Christ which was of a far surpassing value to anything else. It was for Christ's name and glory that he quit his life of fame, notoriety, and power. All the things he once took pride in and devoted his life to he now viewed as refuse, mere excrement. It was all waste in light of Christ Who brings true joy, true purpose, true worth, and true righteousness.

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

Paul wanted to be known as a child of God, being associated and known as Christ's rather than as a Jew's Jew. He didn't want the "righteousness" that was of his own attempted making based on keeping the fine letters of the Law, but he wanted the righteousness of God which comes through faith. He realized that he had sinned and fallen short of God's glory and that he needed to give praise to the true Savior of the world. He had been wrong, and now he wanted all the world to know the truth.

**10**that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

**11**in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul's hope was to know Christ intimately and to be acquainted and in tune with the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. If he could be conformed to his death, then he believed that he could attain to the resurrection of the dead. In other words, he was willing to die to himself and to lose all that he had held dear so that he could be born again and be infused with the resurrected Christ and the power to advance His kingdom. He was willing to take up his cross and die to sin and self daily if only he could have eternal life, which he would by faith in Christ. Such a decision would certainly lead to persecution which would demonstrate his love and fellowship with Christ (1 John 1:6).

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

**13Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,**

**14I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**

Though in a legal, positional sense, Paul was clothed in the righteousness of Christ, he knew that practically he was not perfect yet. Christ laid hold of Paul, revealing Himself to him while he was on the road to Damascus, and this changed him from the inside out. He was forgiven and washed clean, seen by God through the perfection of Christ. The rest of his life had been for the purpose of laying hold of a practical holiness as he walking in obedient faith. Paul's goal was not mediocrity or half-heartedness. The same fervor, if not moreso, that he had taken against Christ, he now invested in the glory of Christ. Paul knew he wasn't perfect yet, though he believed Christ would ultimately finish the good work which he started (see 1:6). Yet, what he knew he needed to do was to forget his past failures and sins which had been forgiven him and to press on and reach forward to what lay ahead. What was ahead was the final goal of perfection, and he sought this as an athlete seeks to win a prize (1 Corinthians 9:24). Yet this was no earthly, fleshly prize but everlasting rewards in the name of Christ for the glory of Christ. God's call was upward toward increased holiness and the pleasure of God. Before his pleasure had been in his own glory, and now it was in the glory of God.

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

**16however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.**

Those who are perfected positionally and legally in Jesus Christ, which is any true believer, are to have a similar attitude to Paul's regarding approaching life after salvation as we as believers are sanctified. Paul forgot his past failures and the sins which had been forgiven him, and he pressed on toward perfection in Jesus, keeping his eyes on the prize of eternal life and eternal rewards, bringing glory and joy to His Savior. If any believer did not have this perspective, Paul believed that God would reveal that to them such that they could repent and begin seeking God wholeheartedly. Paul did not want any backsliding but only growth toward perfection. The level to which the believers had attained, they needed to maintain and then grow from there.

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

Paul desires that the Philippians would follow his example (see also 4:9, Hebrews 13:7, 3 John 1:11, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9). There is a major theme in the New Testament of the apostles desiring those who would come after them to do as they did as they followed Christ. There was much in their lives worthy of being imitated, or else they wouldn't have made such an assertion. Many were already walking after them in the pattern which they had set according to obedience to Christ, and these were worthy of imitation as well.

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

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

The sad reality is that there are counterfeits in the professing church of Jesus Christ. Many have walked after Christ's example for a time before falling away, revealing who they truly were all along (c.f. 1 John 2:19). They were enemies of Christ and the cross, denying Him and His gospel. This greatly grieved Paul and caused him to weep, for he knew what their destination would be and how they might lead others astray. Apostasy (not mere backsliding but never having been reborn) destines one's soul for hell. These who had professed Christ eventually reveal themselves as not serving God but themselves. It is the fulfillment of their own fleshly, sinful, and selfish appetites that drives them and motivates them in life. They worship their shameful acts and desires, even gloating and glorying in them. Their sin is their boast, not Christ. Their minds are not being transformed unto the mind of Christ, for they do not have the mind of Christ. They have a mind set on the ways of the world, and their mental preoccupation is with evil (c.f. Romans 1:28-31, Proverbs 6:12-15).

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

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

Believers, on the other hand, have a citizenship in heaven. Their home is not here, and their focus is to be on the glory to come, not on base, worldly, passing appetites. We are to hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6) and for Christ (Psalm 37:4). Holiness and righteousness is our blessing and glory. We look forward to the return of Christ the Lord, Who, when He comes, will transform our weak and feeble bodies into conformity with the body of His glory (see also 1 Thessalonians 4:14-19, 1 Corinthians 15:51-55, Romans 8:14). Christ's resurrection body was far better and different than His earthly body had been. We know from the Scripture that He could appear and disappear (John 20:19), move from place to place instantaneously, eat (John 21:15), and yet still be tangible (John 20:27). This is very likely similar if not identical to what our resurrected bodies will be like. It will be the power and work of Christ on our behalf that will change

our bodies from corruptible and mortal to incorruptible and immortal so that they will be fit for heaven, free of the effects of sin, and able to endure forever.

## **Philippians 4**

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

Paul longs to see the Philippians, and he views these who have come to faith as a result of his spiritual investment as his joy and crown. These believers are Paul's spiritual fruit which will bring him eternal rewards and, more importantly, glory to Christ. Paul does not find joy in base, worldly things but in that which is eternal and important to Christ. His eternal perspective of his life as he looks forward to the prize and reflects upon the future coming of Christ transforms how he lives in the present. He desires the Philippians to stand firm in Christ, living in humility, unity, and holiness.

**2I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord.**

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

Euodia and Syntyche, two godly women who had supported Paul in his ministry, had evidently been having conflict between them. Paul's admonition was for them to live in harmony so that his joy could be full (Philippians 2:2). Some person at Philippi whom Paul trusted and who probably knew these women well was to work with them to help them resolve their issues and to encourage them to live peaceably with one another. Clement and many other Christians had also assisted Paul in his ministry, and Paul was confident that their names were written in the book of life because of their faith in Christ. There are books which record all that sinners have done wrong (Revelation 20:12), and then there is the book of life which is for those who are in Christ Who has done all things right (Revelation 20:15, 21:27). Believers are not held liable for their sin such that they would face God's wrath, for they have life in Jesus and are thus in His book of life. Those who are truly saved will never be blotted out of the book of life (Revelation 3:5), for we are all more than conquerors in Christ (Romans 8:37).

**4Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!**

Joy is to be a constant reality for believers. Though life can be very difficult at times and there are times of great sorrow and grief, we can always be comforted and have hope in our hearts, not despairing, because of Christ in us and our promised inheritance with Him in heaven. Thus, we must choose to believe Christ's word by faith and decide to rejoice.

**5Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.**

Gentleness speaks of being tender rather than harsh. Believers are not pushovers or doormats, but they are to have a certain tenderness about them. This can be seen

practically in a willingness to forgive, to be long-suffering, to be merciful, and to be caring, among other things. Tender-heartedness rather than a calloused, careless mindset toward others is indicative of true kindness and love (c.f. Ephesians 4:31-32).

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

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

There is no reason for believers to be anxious about things because our God cares for us. Our worrying won't change things a bit, but our trusting in Christ and praying to Him about our needs can (c.f. Luke 12:25-26). God can do anything, and we need to trust ourselves to Him, committing our way to Him. Psalm 37:5 says, "Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He will do it." We commit our way to Him as we obey Him, thank Him, let Him carry our burdens (1 Peter 4:7), and give our requests to Him in prayer. God already knows our needs, but we can by faith remove the burden upon ourselves of stress and worry by giving it to Him as we petition Him in prayer. We let our all-powerful God take on what we feel inadequate to take on (c.f. Zechariah 4:6). When we trust God, He promises to let His peace, a fruit of His Spirit within us (Galatians 5:22), guard our hearts and minds. He will keep us from being anxious, and He will enable us to stay calm and to stand firm. God's peace is so wonderful that it goes beyond worth and qualities that we can even wrap our minds around; it is so valuable and precious. His peace is also superior to understanding in that we would stress ourselves to an early death if we tried to be God and understand His mind and ways. God gives us peace which for us is better than total understanding. We are to trust Him completely and not lean on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6). When we keep our minds fixed upon Christ and His Word in faith, we can have peace (Isaiah 26:3).

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

It is seared on man's conscience as to what is right and what is wrong (Romans 1:32). Thus, even the world has an understanding of what is honorable, right, and pure, though many justify and rationalize behaviors that they know are wrong. Paul's admonition here is that whatever is of good repute, or well thought of and well spoken of, is probably what we should be thinking on. If we have any doubt about it, we have the other guidelines about what is true, right, lovely (acceptable), and pure. God's Word is our final, ultimate, and authoritative guide as to what we should be setting our minds upon. It is upon the Word of God that we should meditate (Joshua 1:8).

Our minds think, plot, reflect, and meditate. Even while we aren't consciously thinking about things, our minds work. What we put into them is what they are going to be prone to think on, work through, and have to filter. The danger is that as we take in filth and garbage of the world that we will eventually act it out and defile ourselves (Mark 7:20). We need to do what we can to not let our minds dwell on evil. We are in the world, and



we will be tempted by the devil. We must flee him and resist him (James 4:7), giving no provision for the flesh (Romans 13:14). When wrong thoughts come, we must take them captive unto obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). We must rather think on Christ, fixing our minds on Him, thus sustaining our joy and peace. If something would be praised by Christ or be declared right by God's Word, then we can think on it. Anything else must be purged from our minds, lest we be led away and enticed by awakening the desires of our flesh (James 1:14).

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

Paul again encourages the Philippians to model their behavior after him. They are to practice the things which they have learned from him by listening and observing. As they walk in holiness and after the Spirit rather than after the flesh, they will remain at peace.

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

The Philippians had done whatever they could to support Paul, including financial means. For a time, they were unable to give, but Epaphroditus risked his life to be able to support Paul in this time (2:30). Now, the Philippians are able to support Paul again, and they are doing so.

**11Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.**

Paul is not greedy in his desire to be supported and have his needs met. He has submitted himself to God's plan and provision, and he has found contentment in whatever his circumstances are. This was something Paul learned as he endured these times, coming to the place where he had joy and peace in abundance or in lack. His heart and mind were guarded and at rest in God's peace no matter what would happen to him, no matter where he was, and no matter how bright or dim his earthly future appeared.

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

**13I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.**

Paul has endured times of having more than he needed and times of not just being in need but enduring the suffering which accompanies need. He has learned to be content and to righteously steward and handle times of prosperity and times of lack. Some people are corrupted by wealth, falling to self-glory and self-sufficiency. Others curse God when things go bad, and they find themselves in need. Paul was able to give God the glory in both times of prosperity and need. His secret, whether he was hungry or well-fed, was that He could endure and persevere spiritually in godliness because of the strength of Christ. It was not that Christ would magically relieve His suffering and make food

appear out of thin air so that Paul never had need, but it was that Paul wasn't corrupted in spirit by circumstances, whether good or bad. Christ was His boast, and suffering with Him or serving Him both brought him joy. To live was Christ and to die was gain (Philippians 1:21). He knew that God's grace would be sufficient no matter what for him to persevere in honoring Christ even if his body continued to decay or if he was being attacked in some way by a minion of the devil (2 Corinthians 10:7-10). God always give us the grace and resources to be able to do His will as we walk in godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

**14Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction.**

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

**16for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.**

The Philippians do well to give to Paul such that they share in his affliction by ministering to him. They did not forget him while he was in prison, and they were able to support him even if only from a distance by sending material things. He reminds them of how they were the only church to support him after he left Macedonia. While he was in Thessalonica, he remembers that they sent a gift to him more than once.

**17Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.**

The Philippians had the joy of sharing in the God-designed process of giving and receiving. The church as a whole is to see to it that those in need are given to by those who have an abundance so that none lack and none have too much (2 Corinthians 8:14). Thus, giving and receiving takes place in the church, and a major way that it is to take place, though not under compulsion, is in the case of those who are serving the Lord full-time who need support. They bring their wisdom, teaching, shepherding, and service, but they need their material needs taken care of (c.f. 1 Corinthians 9:9-11). (Paul did not require support from those he ministered to, for he labored as a tentmaker in addition to doing the work of the ministry lest any would be stumbled by his receiving support.) Yet there is also a giving and receiving of an eternal significance. As we give to the Lord by giving to the work of His church, we receive eternal rewards and blessing in addition to the joy that we get from the giving itself (2 Corinthians 9:11-13). Giving is part of God's plan, for He loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). Paul desired that the Philippians would give faithfully out of obedience to God because of what blessing and reward it would bring to their eternal, spiritual account. To give a decaying material possession in exchange for eternal rewards always yields a great profit.

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

Paul acknowledges that the Philippians have given him more than he needs and that he is now amply supplied. Epaphroditus brought the gift to Paul on their behalf, which Paul

received as an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing, and a fragrant aroma to God (c.f. Romans 12:1-2, Exodus 29:18). In our giving, we ultimately give to God as a sacrifice to Him, for He owns all things (c.f. Psalm 50:10). We have nothing that we didn't receive first from Him. Giving joyously is a great blessing to God, and it brings Him great delight.

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

2 Corinthians 9:6 says, "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." The principle in Scripture is that as we give generously and from a cheerful heart to God, God will reward us so that we receive bountifully in return. If we give sparingly, we can expect few rewards. This is not to be understood as a promise that we will never be in need, for Paul was in need as he just explained (4:12). A need cannot be supplied if it is not first a need. Thus, it is not as though those who are in need, financial, physical, emotional, or any other kind of need, are lacking faith or not giving enough to God. There is no guarantee in the Bible that we will never have need. Needs remind us of our utter dependence upon God Who is the Giver of all good things.

The truth of Scripture is that those who have an abundance by the grace of God are to be giving to those in need (Acts 2:44-45). Paul is saying here that, one way or another, though preferably through other believers, God will repay the Philippians for their generosity. Certainly, they will be rewarded in eternity, yet there is also an expectation of like for like. The Philippians gave materially, and Paul seems to indicate that they will have their material needs supplied by God's riches in glory. Yet we must be careful lest we try to manipulate God and make free, cheerful giving with no thought of recompense other than eternal rewards and joy into a "give so that I can get back" mentality. It is not that we give one hundred dollars and somebody guarantees us either two hundred in return or even simply the repayment of what we have given. It is not that we give God ten percent and then somehow expect God to miraculously give us that money back. We are not to give thinking that the money will come right back to us. We are to give to God knowing that God will reward us in His perfect time, one way or another. He has riches that go beyond mere dollars and cents, and there are more needs than mere financial, though certainly He cares about our material needs as Paul emphasizes here.

The Scripture indicates that the churches which give to the Lord bountifully will have their needs supplied bountifully so that they can again give bountifully and have an abundance for every good deed and work of righteousness (2 Corinthians 9:8-11). As we sow, so also will we reap in eternity and in terms of our spiritual fruitfulness now (Galatians 6:7). We don't give to get rich on earth but in heaven. Yet we can give freely and trust that God will supply our needs as He sees them and defines them, which is not always as we see and define them. It is sometimes in a place of need that we grow the most spiritually. Thus, we must trust this promise to be true, though we will not always understand how it is fulfilled. Yet we shouldn't be surprised when God does work miraculously or through the giving of our brothers and sisters to supply our needs as we

supply the needs of others. The bottom line is that we can give bountifully and cheerfully as a church knowing that God will take care of our needs.

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

Paul exalts our God and Father by praising Him, desiring glory to always be His. We are to give God glory, and we can thank God as He supplies our need. In all things, in all places, and in all conditions, God is to receive the glory.

**21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you.**

Paul wants the Philippians to greet every saint in Christ (believers are saints who sometimes sin, being no longer sinners by identity). This is to be a true family where each person is cared for. Certainly, as this letter was read to the church, Paul's greeting would be passed on to all of them. Paul's desire is that each person would know that he cares for them, that all who are with him care for them, and that they be reminded that Christ cares for them.

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

All the saints that Paul knew in Rome, including many who were saved in Caesar's household including those who heard of the gospel through his present imprisonment, passed on their greetings to the Philippians. The true church is ultimately one church that loves one another even though geographically it is separated into different locales.

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

Paul wishes the believers the grace of God to be with their spirits as He continues to work out their salvation (Philippians 2:12-13) so that they can be preserved complete and perfect at the coming of Christ, body, soul, and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

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