

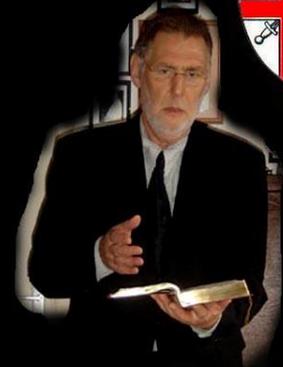


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**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet  
and a light unto my path.  
Psalm 119: 105**



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**Evangelical House Churches**

## **Letter of Paul to the Philippians**

**by Reverend Philippe L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.**

### **Caesarea Philippi**



Situated 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee and at the base of Mt. Hermon, Caesarea Philippi is the location of one of the largest springs feeding the Jordan River. This abundant water supply has made the area very fertile and attractive for religious worship. Numerous temples were built at this city in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

### **Biblical History**

Apparently known as Baal Hermon and Baal Gad in the Old Testament period, this site later was named Paniaas after the Greek god Pan who was worshiped here.

There is no record of Jesus entering the city, but the great confession and the transfiguration both occurred in the vicinity of the city (Matt 16:13), then known as Caesarea Philippi.

## **Biblical Background**

Philippians is the most personal of all the epistles of Paul that were not written to individuals. In the four pages that it occupies in an ordinary-size Bible there are no less than one hundred uses of the first person pronoun. Paul was not talking about himself in any boastful spirit, nor was he engaged in defence of his personal ministry, as in II Corinthians. The Philippian church had been intensely loyal to him, and he felt that he could speak to them freely of his tribulations and spiritual ambitions. The letter was written when Paul was a prisoner at Rome, and probably near the close of his imprisonment, about A.D. 62, when he was expecting to be released and again to visit the Philippian believers.

Practically a decade had passed since Paul, Silas, and Luke had first entered Philippi. From the beginning people had responded to his message. This church included many women, possibly friends of Lydia, who had laboured with him in the gospel (Phil. 4:3). Some of them, like Syntyche and Euodia, did not always agree among themselves (4:2). At the outset of his ministry in Macedonia the church had supported him, but as his travels had taken him farther afield, they had not done very much for him. The news of the disaster in Jerusalem and his consequent imprisonment in Rome had revived their sympathetic interest (4:10-14), and they had again made a contribution to his need. Epaphroditus, their messenger, had brought to Paul their gifts, and had been taken seriously ill. Paul counted his recovery an answer to prayer (2:25-27), and was sending him back to Philippi with the letter that he wrote (2:28-29). He stated that Epaphroditus had risked his life to bring the gifts, though the nature of the danger was not revealed. Perhaps he incurred disease through his travels and contacts; perhaps he laid himself open to suspicion by communicating with a man who was a political prisoner. The date of Philippians is uncertain, but it seems most reasonable to believe that it was written toward the close of Paul's two years in Rome. It is thought that it may have been earlier than the Asian epistles, because its language has greater affinity with that of the Travel Epistles than with that of the others.<sup>6</sup> Language affinity is a very tenuous argument, since an author may change his style and vocabulary not only with the advance of his years but also with the needs of the situation for which he was writing. While it is true, as some scholars point out, that Philippians does resemble Romans more in its vocabulary and general style than it does Ephesians or Colossians, it was intended for a church that was more European

than Asian and that was not affected by the mysticism and legalism that plagued Colossae. Several other factors enter into the background. Some time must be allowed for the news of Paul's arrival in Rome to reach Philippi, and for the church there to send Epaphroditus to him with the gift. Paul's reputation among the praetorian guard (1:13) and the penetration of the gospel among the members of Caesar's household (4:22) required an interval of time. The two factions among the preachers, those that envied and disliked Paul and those that stood with him (1:15-16), did not develop overnight. Furthermore, his view of his trial shows that he was uncertain of the outcome and that while he was resigned to whatever might happen, he appeared confident that he would be released for further service (1:23-26; 2:17, 24).<sup>7</sup> No particular schism or heresy within the Philippian church itself seems to have called for disciplinary action. The references to the Judaisers in 3:2 picture them as a potential rather than as a present danger; and while Paul's language is vehement, his main purpose is not so much to refute their error as to arouse the Philippians to walk worthily of their heavenly citizenship (3 :17-21 ) .

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This letter or epistle is of profound interest on account of certain marks in it, which connects the truth presented with a state of things much akin to that of the present day. The testimony is not viewed as opposed by the Jewish leaders, as in the beginning of the Acts, nor in conflict with Judaising influences, as at Antioch; but as in contract with the world power (Rome), which was holding Paul, the vessel of it, in bondage.

Two topics predominate in the text of Philippians. One is *the gospel*, which Paul mentions nine times. He speaks of "the fellowship in the gospel" (1:5, Greek text), the "confirmation of the gospel" (1:7), "the progress of the gospel" (1:12), "the defence of the gospel" (1:16), "worthy of the gospel" (1:27), "striving for the faith of the gospel" (1:27), "service in the gospel" (2:22, Greek text), "labor in the gospel" (4:3), "the beginning of the gospel" (4:15). Paul used the term as denoting a body of faith, a message, and the sphere of activity bounded by preaching. No definition of the gospel is given in Philippians, but the heart of the gospel is contained in two phrases that give respectively the historical and the personal aspects: he became "obedient *even* unto death, yea, the death of the cross" (2:8), and "having a righteousness . . . which is through faith in Christ" (3:9). The former is the good news that Christ died for men; the latter assures men that they can possess his righteousness before God. These are the two aspects of the gospel.

The second topic in Philippians that Paul stressed is joy. His outlook in Rome certainly was unpleasant, since his enemies were seeking to undermine his work, and sudden execution was a possible outcome of the trial. Philippians is anything but pessimistic. Paul rejoiced in every remembrance of the Philippians (1:3) because Christ was preached, whether sincerely or hypocritically (1:18), in the growth of humility in his followers (2:2), in his personal sacrifice for Christ (2:17), and in the gifts and goodwill of his friends (4:10). All through the epistle the brilliant joy of faith is contrasted with the sombre background of untoward circumstance and impending disaster.

## **Estimation**

Philippians is a note of thanks for favours received and an expression of Paul's personal Christian life. The two outstanding passages in this epistle, 2:5-11 and 3:2-15, express respectively the supreme obedience of Christ to the will of God and the supreme passion of his servant, Paul, to achieve the goal for which Christ had called him. The former passage was not written primarily as an essay in Christology, but was given incidentally to illustrate the nature of humility to which Paul was exhorting the Philippians. The very fact that Paul took its truth for granted in using it as an illustration confirms the theological truth that it contains. People take for granted what they believe in common; they argue when differences arise. ' Much ink has been spilled over the meaning of the phrase "emptied himself" (2:7). To what extent did Christ relinquish the prerogatives of deity when he came among men? The Lord Jesus Christ voluntarily divested himself of visible glory in order to take on himself the garment of humanity and in order to meet the penalty of human sin on human ground, but he did not cease to be God. Along with Colossians 1, Hebrews 1 and 2, and John 1, this is one of the outstanding passages relating to the doctrine of the incarnation.

The other passage, Philippians 3, provides an insight into the driving motive in the life of Paul. His amazing devotion and unflagging zeal place him among the great leaders of history who have devoted their lives to a cause in which they believed utterly. To him, however, all of life was summed up in Christ. To "gain" him, to "know" him, to "be found" in him, to attain the goal set in him engaged all of Paul's attention. Philippians depicts a totalitarian life in Christ.

## **After the Pauline Imprisonment, what happened?**

The outcome of the period of imprisonment is not difficult to assess, even though there may be some questions as to whether Paul was released or not. In spite of his confinement at Caesarea and at Rome, Paul's ministry was not

ended. Through his assistants and friends, who are mentioned in the salutations of his epistles, he maintained constant communication with the churches. The enforced retirement provided more time for prayer and contemplation, out of which came the priceless revelation of the Prison Epistles. His appeal to Caesar brought Christianity directly to the attention of the Roman government and compelled the civil authorities to pass judgment on its legality. If it was to be allowed as a *religio heao*, a permitted cult, the persecution of it would be illegal, and its security would be assured. If, on the other hand, it was adjudged to be a *religio illicita*, a forbidden cult, then the ensuing persecution would only advertise it and offer an opportunity for a demonstration of its power. In the decade of the Gentile mission from A.D. 46 to 56, and in the four years of Paul's imprisonment, the church came out from under the banner of Judaism and formed its own ranks as an independent movement. It was now ready for even greater advances in missionary expansion.

## **Detailed Outline**

### **INTRODUCTION (1:1-11)**

1. Salutation (1-2)
2. Thanksgiving and prayer (3-11)

### **I. THE SITUATION IN ROME (1:12-26)**

#### **A. PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT AND OPPOSITION (1:12-18)**

1. Imprisonment has actually created opportunities to spread the gospel (1:12-14)
2. Even opposition has provided opportunity for Christ to be preached (1:15-18)

#### **B. PAUL'S EXPECTATION OF DELIVERANCE (1:19-26)**

1. By their prayers and the provision of the Holy Spirit, he knows all will turn out well for his salvation (1:19-20)
2. Whether he lives or dies, it will be a blessing (1:21-23)
3. Knowing their need of him at the present, he is confident of coming to them once again (1:24-26)

### **II. EXHORTATION TO BEHAVIOR WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL (1:27-2:18)**

#### **A. STAND FAST IN ONE SPIRIT (1:27-30)**

1. Strive together for the faith of the gospel (1:27)
2. Do not be terrified by your adversaries (1:28-30)

**B. BE OF ONE MIND BY FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST (2:1-11)**

1. Make Paul's joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love (2:1-2)
2. In humility, look out for the interests of others (2:3-4)
3. Follow the example of Christ's humility (2:5-11)

**C. SHINE AS LIGHTS IN THE WORLD (2:12-18)**

1. By working out their own salvation, for it is God who is at work in them (2:12-13)
2. As children of God, blameless and harmless (2:14-16)
3. Consider Paul's imprisonment as a reason to rejoice (2:17-18)

**III. PLANS INVOLVING TIMOTHY AND EPAPHRODITUS (2:19-30)**

**A. TO SEND TIMOTHY SOON (2:19-24)**

1. Paul plans to send him shortly (2:19)
2. Commendation of Timothy (2:20-22)
3. Timothy to come soon, hopefully followed by Paul himself (2:23-24)

**B. TO SEND EPAPHRODITUS AT ONCE (2:25-30)**

1. Why Paul felt it necessary to send Epaphroditus (2:25-28)
2. Receive him in the Lord with all gladness (2:29-30)

**IV. WARNINGS AGAINST JUDAISM AND ANTINOMIANISM (3:1-21)**

**A. AGAINST JUDAISM (3:1-11)**

1. Rejoice in the Lord, beware of those who place confidence in the flesh (3:1-3)
2. If anyone had reason to boast in the flesh, it would have been Paul (3:4-6)
3. But he gave it all up, that he might know Christ and the power of His resurrection (3:7-11)

**B. AGAINST ANTINOMIANISM (3:12-21)**

1. Paul's attitude of pressing on to perfection (3:12-14)
2. An exhortation for them to have the same mind (3:15-17)
3. A warning against those who serve their own desires (3:18-19)
4. A reminder of our true citizenship, and the hope it entails (3:20-21)

## **V. EXHORTATIONS TO UNITY, JOY, AND PEACE (4:1-9)**

### **A. AN APPEAL TO EUODIA AND SYNTYCHE (4:1-3)**

1. Prefaced with an exhortation to stand fast in the Lord (4:1)
2. A plea for them to be of one mind, assisted by others (4:2-3)

### **B. EXHORTATION CONCERNING JOY AND PEACE (4:4-9)**

1. Rejoice in the Lord always, and be gentle to all (4:4-5)
2. Through prayer, let the peace of God guard your hearts from anxiety (4:6-7)
3. Meditate upon things worthy of virtue and praise, and follow Paul's example (4:8-9)

## **VI. THANKSGIVING FOR THEIR GENEROSITY (4:10-19)**

### **A. THEIR GIFT A SOURCE OF JOY TO PAUL (10-14)**

1. Paul rejoiced when they were able to care for him again (4:10)
2. Not that he really had need, for he had learned contentment (4:11-13)
3. But they have done well to share in his distress (4:14)

### **B. THEIR GIFT A SOURCE OF BLESSING FOR THEMSELVES (15-19)**

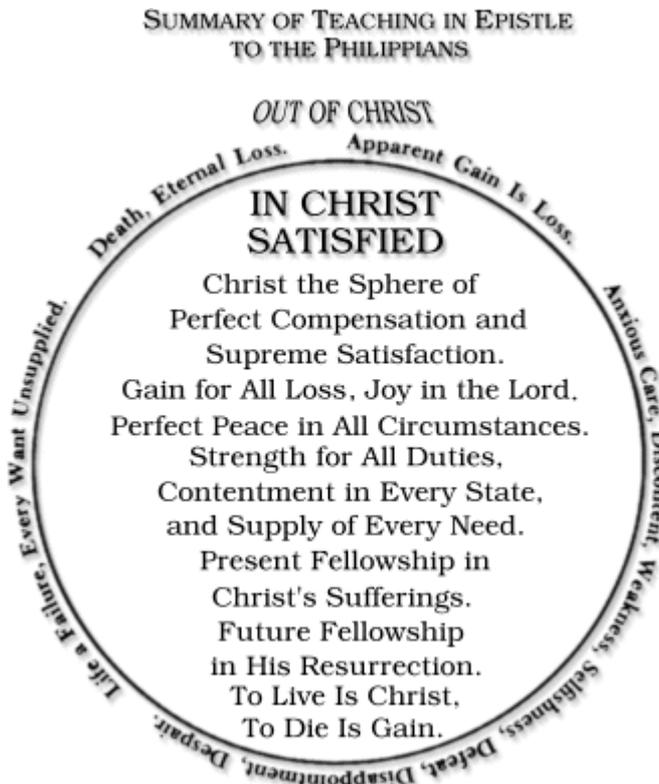
1. A brief history of their giving to Paul (4:15-16)
2. Their giving abounds to their own account, viewed as an acceptable sacrifice to God, who will supply all their need (4:17-19)

## **CONCLUSION (4:20-23)**

1. Praise to God (4:20)
2. Greetings from those with Paul, even those of Caesar's household (4:21-22)
3. Final benediction (4:23)

# Comments

## Contents Generalities



About 50 CE, Paul and his companions, including Silas, Timothy, and Luke, arrived in Philippi. While in Troas, the apostle saw a night vision in which a man of Macedonia pleaded, “Come to Macedonia to help us.” Based on the vision, Paul concluded that it was God’s will for the evangel about Christ to be proclaimed in Macedonia, and he and his associates set sail from Troas. After making a straight run for the island of Samothrace in the Aegean Sea, the ship arrived at the seaport of Neapolis the next day. Paul and his companions traveled overland for about ten miles over a rocky ridge and then into a plain to

Philippi, a Roman colony. There does not appear to have been a large Jewish population in the city, as Paul and his companions headed for the river on the Sabbath day, thinking that they might find a place where Jews convened for prayer. They did locate a group of women who had assembled for worship, including Lydia, a seller of purple (either purple dye or purple cloth or garments). Lydia responded in faith to the glad tidings about Jesus Christ, was baptized along with her household, and extended an invitation to the group to stay at her home, making her offer of hospitality in such a way that it could not be refused. (Acts 16:7-15)

Later a problem arose with a slave girl whom the populace regarded as having a “spirit of python.” According to Greek mythology, the god Apollo killed python, the serpent guarding the Delphic oracle. The association of python with the oracle apparently is the basis for the expression “spirit of python” as designating a spirit of divination. When seeing Paul and his companions as they made their way to the place of prayer, the slave girl would shout, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who are proclaiming the way of salvation to you.” As this

continued for many days, Paul became annoyed and, in the name of Jesus, caused her to lose her powers of prediction. Her owners became furious, as they had profited handsomely from her divination. They seized Paul and Silas, dragged them before the magistrates or the chief officials of Philippi, and made serious false charges against them. Paul and Silas were beaten on their bare skin with rods and then imprisoned. Ordered to guard them securely, the jailer put them in the inner prison and confined their feet in stocks. (Acts 16:16-24)

During the night, a strong earthquake opened the prison doors and released the prisoners from their bonds. Fearing that they had escaped and that he would be executed for having failed in his duty to guard them, the jailer was at the point of committing suicide with his sword. Seeing this, Paul shouted, “Do not harm yourself, for all of us are here.” The jailer’s question about what he needed to do to be saved opened the opportunity for him and his household to hear the good news about the Son of God. That very night he and his household responded in faith and were baptized. He also attended to the wounds that had been inflicted on Paul and Silas from the beating and served them a meal. (Acts 16:25-34)

The next morning the magistrates sent lecturers, lesser officials, with the directive that Paul and Silas be released from prison. As their rights as Roman citizens had been violated and this secret release could have given the wrong impression to the people of Philippi, Paul insisted that the magistrates personally come to the prison and publicly release them. Alarmed that they had trampled on the rights of Roman citizens, the magistrates complied but did request that Paul and Silas leave the city. Before departing, Paul and Silas stopped at the home of Lydia and encouraged the believers who had assembled there. (Acts 16:35-40)

In intervening years, believers in Philippi continued to assist Paul materially. While the apostle was imprisoned, they sent Epaphroditus with funds and to minister to his needs. Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians during the period of his confinement. The letter itself does not say where the apostle was then imprisoned. In his letter, Paul mentions the “praetorium” (1:13), which can designate the imperial guard in the city of Rome. The designation “praetorium” can, however, also mean the official government house or the governor’s residence. Based on Paul’s mentioning his fighting beasts in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 15:32) and the extreme danger he faced in the province of Asia (2 Corinthians 1:8), some commentators have suggested Ephesus as the place of imprisonment and understand persons of Caesar’s household (Philippians 4:22) to be minor Roman officials, including slaves or freedmen in their service. It does, however, seem less interpretative to regard Rome as the place of Paul’s imprisonment, taking “praetorium” to mean the imperial guard and the “household of Caesar” to refer to members of Caesar’s household in Rome, including slaves. Moreover, the book of Acts makes no reference to an extended

period of imprisonment in Ephesus but concludes with Paul's confinement in Rome. According to the book of Acts, Caesarea was the only other place where the apostle was imprisoned for an extended period, and some have concluded that his letter to the Philippians was written from there. (Acts 24:27) This view requires interpreting "praetorium" and "Caesar's household" in the same way as when Ephesus is thought to have been the place of imprisonment.

## **Commentary on Philippians**

### **Philippians 1: 1-30**

#### **1: 1-11 Paul the pastor's joy in Christ**

##### **Verses 1-2 Paul's pastoral salutation**

Paul identified himself as the writer of this letter to the Philippians. He mentioned Timothy as his fellow servant of Jesus Christ, for Timothy had earlier laboured with him in Philippi. As slaves of Jesus Christ, Paul and Timothy had the inestimable honour of being in his service, advancing his interests. (1:1)

Paul addressed his letter to all the "holy ones in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi." As members of Christ's body, believers were at one with him. Having been forgiven of their sins, they were holy or pure from God's standpoint as they sought to be guided by his spirit to live upright lives. Among the "holy ones" were "overseers" or superintendents, men who were entrusted with the responsibility to look after the spiritual interests of fellow believers, and "servants" who cared for the needy. (1:1; compare Acts 6:1-4; 20:28.)

As in other letters, Paul included the prayerful expression, "Favour to you and peace from God our Father and [the] Lord Jesus Christ." "Favour," unmerited kindness, or grace would include all the aid and guidance the Father and his Son would provide. For believers to enjoy the peace of which God and Christ are the source would mean their being in possession of inner tranquillity, knowing that as beloved children of God and brothers of Christ they would be sustained and strengthened in times of trial and distress. (1:2)

##### **3-11 His pastoral joy**

Whenever Paul remembered the Philippian believers, he was moved to thank God, always doing so for them individually in every supplication of his. His gratitude was prompted by what the Most High had done for them and how they

had responded to the evangel. The apostle's intense prayers included every one of the believers in Philippi, reflecting his personal care and concern for each of them. Joy accompanied his supplication or fervent prayer, as his diligent labors among the Philippians had produced good results. From the first day until the very time Paul wrote this letter, the Philippians had been sharers in the advancement of the evangel. (1:3-5) Immediately, after her baptism, Lydia insisted on having Paul and his companions stay in her home and framed the invitation in a manner they could not refuse. "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord," she said, "come into my house and stay." (Acts 16:15) This genuine offer of hospitality would have enabled Paul and his companions to devote themselves fully to sharing the glad tidings about Christ and focusing on the spiritual needs of fellow believers. On other occasions, the Philippians sent aid to him while he was proclaiming the evangel elsewhere and, upon receiving news about his imprisonment, sent Epaphroditus to minister to his needs. (2:25; 4:14-16) At the time Paul wrote his letter, Epaphroditus was still with him.

The apostle had confidence that the Father, who had begun the "good work" in the Philippians, would complete it. In the "day of Jesus Christ," they would stand as approved, fully tested servants of the Most High and possessors of genuine faith. Although Paul did not specifically identify God as the one who began the good work, other passages do indicate this. Jesus said that only those whom the Father would draw could come to him. (John 6:44) God is the one who, by means of his spirit, imparts a newness of life to believers and makes continual growth possible. (John 1:12, 13; 1 Corinthians 3:6, 7) Paul had no doubt that, in the "day of Jesus Christ," or at the time of his return in glory, God's work in the Philippians would be revealed as having been completed. (1:6)

He felt that it was only right for him to think so positively about all of the Philippian believers because he had them in his "heart" or was affectionately attached to them because of the commendable spirit they had manifested. As a spirit-filled apostle, Paul recognized God's working within the Philippian believers and knew them to be beloved fellow children of God. That is why he deeply loved them. In his bonds and in the defence and confirmation of the evangel, they were sharers with him in the favour, unmerited kindness, or grace of God. (1:7) Paul's reference to divine favour may here specifically relate to his having been called to be an apostle and entrusted with the evangel or the glad tidings about Jesus Christ. In coming to his aid during the time of his confinement, the Philippian believers proved themselves to be sharers in his bonds, sympathizing with him as if bound with him. (Compare Hebrews 10:34; 13:3.) They were also participants in his defence and confirmation of the evangel, as their aid demonstrated their support of and cooperation with Paul in

his defending the message about Jesus Christ against false accusations and confirming its validity. (Compare Paul's defense before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa [Acts 24:10-21; 25:8; 26:1-29]. Note that a major part of his defense consisted in presenting proof respecting the truth of the evangel.)

Paul called upon God as his witness respecting the longing he had to see all of the Philippian believers "in the affection [literally, bowels, apparently from the standpoint of the effect deep emotions have and thus denoting tender feelings or affection] of Christ Jesus." The apostle's love for the Philippians was like that of God's Son, and this deep love for them prompted his yearning to see them. (1:8) Paul prayed that the love of the Philippians might abound more and more "in knowledge and all perception." This appears to mean that their ever-increasing love would be guided by knowledge and perception, making it possible for them to direct their love in the best or noblest way. With a fullness of knowledge as a stabilizing factor, their love would then not blindly attach itself to anyone and anything. Discernment would enable them to avoid wasting or misdirecting their love. (1:9)

In possession of knowledge and discernment, they would be able to perceive differences, recognizing who should rightly be the objects of their love and to what degree. Love for God and Christ would take priority over any other love. An ever-expanding, rightly motivated, properly directed love would result in their being pure and blameless at Christ's return in glory or in his "day." They would be filled with the "fruit of righteousness that [is] through Jesus Christ for God's glory and praise." The "fruit of righteousness" could include laudable conduct, aid rendered to those in need, and participation in advancing the evangel. Through oneness with Christ, they would be able to bear this desirable fruit (John 15:5, 8), and God would be glorified or exalted and praised on the basis of their commendable words and deeds. (1:10, 11)

## **1:12-30 Paul the prisoner's joy in Christ**

### **Verses 12-20 His confident joy in tribulations**

The Philippian believers, his brothers in Christ, may have thought that Paul's imprisonment interfered with the spread of the message about God's Son. The apostle wanted them to know that this was not the case. Instead of his confinement presenting an obstacle, it had contributed to the advancement of the evangel. "In the whole "praetorium" and to all the rest," it had been manifest or come to be well known that his bonds were "in Christ" or that he was suffering because of being Christ's disciple. It seems likely that the "praetorium" designates the praetorian or imperial guard in Rome. According to Acts 28:16, a

soldier guarded Paul. As different soldiers would have guard duty, they would have learned about the reason for the apostle's confinement, and word would have spread throughout the praetorian guard about him. Talk was not limited to the guard. "All the rest," or others besides the Roman soldiers, learned about Paul and the reason for his confinement. (1:12, 13)

As far as most of the brothers or fellow believers were concerned, Paul's bonds or his faithful endurance of confinement for Christ's name had greatly emboldened them to speak God's word or the message about Christ fearlessly. (See the Notes section regarding the words "in [the] Lord.") Not all, however, were rightly motivated. Certain ones were envious of Paul and manifested a spirit of rivalry. They may have wanted to exalt themselves and advance their own cause. (Compare 2 Corinthians 11:4, 5; Galatians 6:12, 13.) Others, however, proclaimed Christ out of "good will," or they were kindly disposed toward the apostle. They wanted to see the cause of Christ advanced despite Paul's being in confinement. Their preaching of Christ was rightly motivated, "out of love." Their objective was pure, wanting others to accept Christ as Lord and to be reconciled to the Father through him. They recognized that Paul was in prison for a noble reason—"for the defense of the evangel." This could mean that the confinement provided him with an opportunity to defend the evangel against false charges (1:7; compare Acts 9:15; 23:11; 27:24) or that he found himself in bonds because he had defended (and continued to defend) the glad tidings about Jesus Christ. (1:14-16)

The others were preaching Christ with a contentious or quarrelsome spirit. According to another significance of the Greek word *eritheia*, selfishness or selfish ambition motivated them. They lacked purity or sincerity. Mean-spirited, they thought to cause distress for Paul while he found himself in bonds. In seeking to undermine and demean Paul's labours, they would have revealed themselves to be persons intent on adding to the burden he was under while in confinement. (1:17)

The apostle, however, did not let wrongly motivated ones discourage him. Whether individuals preached for a pretext or mere appearances or they did so in truth or sincerity, Christ was still being made known. The fact that the message about Christ was being proclaimed brought joy to Paul, and he determined to continue rejoicing. The apostle recognized that the wrongly motivated messenger did not change the right message, and those responding to the message in faith would not, at the same time, have to adopt the spirit of the wrongly motivated messenger. (1:18)

If the introductory phrase (“for I know that this”) is to be linked with the previous verse, the meaning would be as follows: Because he maintained his joy that Christ was being made known, coupled with the fervent prayers of the Philippians and the “support of the spirit of Jesus Christ,” Paul knew or had the assurance of his “salvation” or “deliverance.” The apostle thus acknowledged the importance of his fellow believers’ supplications for him. He also recognized the need for the support or assistance of the “spirit of Jesus Christ.” From the standpoint of Christ’s role in making the spirit available to believers, the reference may be to the Holy Spirit. (Compare Acts 2:33.) There is also the possibility that “the spirit of Jesus Christ” denotes the spirit or disposition God’s Son manifested when undergoing suffering. (Compare 1 Peter 2:21, 22.) In this case, “salvation” or “deliverance” could mean that Paul expected to be set free or that his experience would contribute to his final salvation. In the Septuagint, the identical words are found in Job 13:16 (*toutó moi apobésetai eis soterían* [this to turn out for salvation to me], with “salvation” (*soteria*) having the sense of “deliverance.” In view of Paul’s mentioning the possibility of death as an outcome in the next verse, however, he may have been referring to his final salvation. On the other hand, he was convinced that it was needful for him to continue living to aid the Philippian believers and so may have meant that he would be set free. (1:19; see the Notes section for additional comments.)

The apostle eagerly expected and hoped that he would not experience shame in any way but that he would then, as always, boldly or courageously, whether by his life or by his death, magnify Christ in his body. Paul desired to bring honor to God’s Son, courageously making known the message about him and exalting him by the way he used his body. Whether Paul continued to live or had his life cut short, he was chiefly concerned about how his conduct reflected on God’s Son. Paul earnestly desired that his life would continue to manifest a Christlike spirit and that his facing death would be with a Christlike spirit, revealing to others the inestimable value of being a disciple of God’s beloved Son. (1:20)

### **Verses 21-30 The secret of Paul**

Apart from Christ, Paul did not regard himself as truly living. He directed all his efforts to please the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who had died for him. Christ proved to be Paul’s very life. For the apostle, death would have been gain, as a death in faithfulness would assure him of being united with his Lord whom he deeply loved. (1:21)

If he were to continue living, there would be fruit from his labour. His life would serve a good purpose, and he would use it in advancing Christ’s cause.

Still, he did not know whether to choose life or the gain that dying as a faithful servant of Christ would bring. He felt torn between whether it would be more desirable to continue living or to complete his earthly sojourn. What he really wanted is to depart and to be with Christ, enjoying fellowship with him in the sinless state. Being with Christ would be far better than continuing to live in the flesh. (1:22, 23)

For the sake of his beloved fellow believers in Philippi, however, Paul realized that his continuing to live would be better and, in fact, more essential, as he would still be in a position to assist them spiritually in a personal way. Convinced that he still needed to serve the Philippians, he firmly believed that he would not be executed but would continue to enjoy personal association with all of them and aid them in their spiritual progress. His remaining alive would also contribute to their “joy of faith.” This would be a joy stemming from faith. The Philippians had faith in the help of the Lord Jesus Christ and that of his Father, and they persevered in prayer for Paul, earnestly desiring that he be set free. As the Son of God, the head of the body of believers, would be involved in effecting the apostle’s release, their faith in him would result in joy. Therefore, “in Christ Jesus,” by reason of what he had done for Paul, making it possible for him to be with them again, the Philippians would be jubilant with unbounded joy. (1:24-26)

At this point in his letter, the apostle focused specifically on the Philippians, admonishing them to maintain conduct worthy of the evangel of Christ and thus of Christ himself. The Greek verb *politeúomai* for “conduct” has the literal sense of acting as a citizen. As possessors of heavenly citizenship, their conduct should harmonize with their dignified standing and reflect favourably on the glad tidings about Christ. Their conduct should be a credit to his name. By maintaining laudable conduct, the Philippians would retain a good reputation. So, whether with them personally or away from them, Paul would hear that they were “standing firm in one spirit, striving with one soul for the faith of the evangel.” The expression “standing firm in one spirit” may denote being solidly fixed as a body of believers in intent, purpose, or the motivating or energizing force at work within them. As with one soul (“with one mind,” according to numerous translations), a complete unity or oneness, they should be “striving side by side” for the faith to which the evangel gave rise or for which it was responsible. Unitedly, the Philippians would be advancing and upholding the cause of Christ. (1:27)

Their doing so would not be without intense opposition from persons persisting in unbelief. Therefore, Paul encouraged them not to allow their opponents to frighten or intimidate them in any way. Opposers might heap abuse upon them,

violently attack them, or in other ways cause them to suffer. By continuing to persecute the Philippian believers, the enemies of Christ gave evidence that they were headed for destruction. If they continued in this course, these opponents could not hope to be spared from divine wrath. (1:28)

At the same time, the persecution opposers launched against them provided proof of salvation for the Philippian believers, and Paul added, “and this [is] from God.” (1:28) The Philippians had endured faithfully under suffering, and they had Christ’s assurance, “the one who endures to the end will be saved.” (Matthew 24:13) Their being abused and persecuted for the name of Christ proved that they were friends of God and of his Son. They were no part of the world alienated from God and, therefore, no friends of the world. If they had been friends of the world, they would not have suffered at the hands of those alienated from God and they themselves would have been God’s enemies. Accordingly, the suffering that befell them and their faithful endurance constituted a token from God of their standing as his beloved children, assuring them of salvation. (John 15:18-21; Hebrews 12:3-11; James 4:4)

As believers, the Philippians had not only been favoured to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him. (1:29) To believe in Christ, to come to enjoy the relationship with him and his Father that faith in him makes possible, is an incomparable favour. Throughout the centuries, people have considered it an honour to be in the service of a ruler, a king, or a queen. The Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of Lords, has far greater authority and dignity than any human ruler or all rulers combined possessed or ever will possess. No greater honour could anyone have than to be in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ and to suffer for him, and he considers any suffering his faithful disciples experience as his suffering. (Compare Matthew 25:34-45.)

The “struggle” the Philippian believers were experiencing in the form of opposition and persecution was the same “struggle” Paul had faced in Philippi and which they had witnessed. He (along with Silas) was falsely accused and unjustly beaten and jailed. As the Philippians heard more recently, Paul continued to experience this struggle for advancing the cause of Christ, for he was then in confinement. (1:30)

## **Notes:**

The phrase “in [the] Lord” (1:14) could apply to “brothers” (“brothers in the Lord”). Elsewhere in this letter, however, Paul used the expression “brothers” by itself, and this suggests that “in the Lord” may be linked to the participle that

follows (*pepoithótas*, meaning “having confidence”). Translations reflect both ways of understanding the expression “in the Lord.” “Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.” (NIV) “Now most of the Lord’s followers have become brave and are fearlessly telling the message.” (CEV) “Most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.” (NRSV) “The majority of the brothers, having taken encouragement in the Lord from my imprisonment, dare more than ever to proclaim the word fearlessly.” (NAB) In verse 14, manuscript readings include “speak the word,” “speak the word of the Lord,” and “speak the word of God.”

Translations differ considerably in the way verse 19 is rendered, with some preserving the basic word order of the Greek text and others changing the word order and adding interpretive elements. Numerous translators have chosen to make the reference to “salvation” to mean being set free. The following are examples of various renderings of the concluding part of verse 18 and verse 19: “Indeed I shall continue to rejoice, for I know that this will result in deliverance for me through your prayers and support from the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” (NAB) “Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.” (NRSV) “Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.” (NIV) “And I will continue to be happy, because I know that by means of your prayers and the help which comes from the Spirit of Jesus Christ I shall be set free.” (GNT, Second Edition) “So I am happy, and I will continue to be happy. Because you are praying for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ is helping me, I know this trouble will bring my freedom.” (NCV) “And I will continue to rejoice. For I know that as you pray for me and as the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will all turn out for my deliverance.” (NLT)

## **Philippians 2:1-30**

### **2:1-11 Exhortation to unity and humility**

#### **Verses 1-4 The exhortation**

The introductory phrases starting with “if” (*ei*) contain the motivation for the Philippians to complete Paul’s joy. If as a result of their being disciples of God’s Son encouragement in Christ (the kind of encouragement stemming from being at one with Christ as members of his body), consolation prompted by love,

“sharing of [the] spirit” (benefiting from the influence of God’s spirit and manifesting its fruit), affection (see 1:8), and compassion exist, then the Philippians should complete Paul’s joy. They would be doing so when being of the “same mind” (the same Christlike disposition), having “the same love” (the self-sacrificing love God’s Son exemplified), being “united of soul” (acting unitedly as one person), and thinking “the one thing” (*tó hén*; other manuscripts read *tó autó* [“the same thing”]), being in agreement, or living in harmony. (2:1, 2)

In their dealings with one another, they were to avoid contentiousness, selfish ambition, or a quarrelsome disposition and vain conceit. They should instead humbly consider others as better than themselves. Such a modest estimation of themselves would enable them to appreciate the good qualities of fellow believers, be willing to serve them, and look out for their interests instead of just focusing on personal concerns. (2:3, 4)

### **Verses 5-11 The example of Christ**

Paul encouraged the Philippians to have the same mind, attitude or disposition of Jesus Christ. (2:5) As the verses (6-11) that follow reveal, the Son of God manifested an exemplary spirit of humility, and this led to his exaltation. In the Greek text, the lines of these verses are rhythmic, suggesting that they may have been part of a Christian hymn. In numerous translations, the words are, in fact, printed in poetic style (a few examples being CEV, NAB, NIV, NRSV).

Before his life on earth, Jesus was in the “form of God” or, in every respect, like his Father—“the radiance of his glory and the imprint of his being.” (Hebrews 1:3) With apparent reference to his being in the “form of God,” the Greek word *isos* used in expressing the relation to his Father appears to denote his being exactly like his Father. To this state of being like his Father, the very form of his Father, he did not cling as if it were snatched booty, but he emptied himself of all the glory associated with being in God’s form and took a slave’s form, becoming a man, “lower than the angels.” (Hebrews 2:7) So, instead of continuing to be in the “form of God,” he came to be in the “likeness of men.” As a man, Jesus humbly submitted to mistreatment, never retaliating and never reviling. He became obedient in an environment where he was subjected to reproach and suffering, and then died a shameful and painful death like the worst kind of criminal. (2:6-8; see the Notes section for additional information.)

Because Jesus humbly gave up being in the form of God, took on the form of a slave as a man, and then obediently submitted himself to the point of suffering a shameful death, God highly exalted him and granted him a name above every

name. That highly exalted state embraces his having “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18), and the “name above every name” would include his matchless authority as judge, high priest, king, mediator, and savior. As the possessor of “all authority in heaven and on earth,” every knee should bow in humble submission to him as their Lord. This includes angels in heaven, humans on earth, and the dead under the ground (whom Christ will resurrect). (2:9-11) The universal recognition to be accorded to the Son of God parallels what is said of the Father in Isaiah 45:23 (Tanakh): “By Myself have I sworn, from My mouth has issued truth, a word that shall not turn back: To Me every knee shall bend, every tongue swear loyalty.”

The universal acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord, with every tongue making it, would bring glory or honour to the Father, as he is the one who highly exalted his Son. As Jesus himself said: “The Father judges no one but has granted all judgment to the Son, so that all may honour the Son as they honour the Father. The one who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him.” (John 5:22, 23)

## **2:12-16 Working our salvation**

### **Verses 12-13 The exhortation**

Affectionately, Paul referred to the Philippians as “my beloved.” As they always had obeyed or been responsive while he was present, he admonished them to obey much more so in his absence and to work out their salvation “with fear and trembling.” Emphasizing that their doing so did not depend exclusively on their own efforts, the apostle added, “for God is working in you, [for you] to will and to work for [his] good pleasure.” (2:12, 13)

### **Verses 14-16 The result**

The Philippians had always been exemplary in responding to what the message about God’s Son required of them. While the apostle labored among them, his words and example would have contributed to their good response. Without his encouraging and motivating presence, the Philippians would have needed to put forth additional personal effort to maintain exemplary obedience to divine direction. They had not as yet attained their final salvation and needed to guard against a spirit of overconfidence. The possibility of not attaining the desired goal of their faith should have contributed to their having a wholesome fear and a terror of what a possible loss could mean. To be diligent and vigilant respecting their salvation required fully cooperating with God in what he was accomplishing within them by means of his spirit. Although justified on the

basis of their faith in Jesus Christ, they had not been freed from the sinful flesh and could choose to live in harmony with the spirit's direction or to be disobedient, grieving the spirit.

Although effort on their part would be required, the Philippians had the benefit of God's guiding influence. By means of his spirit, he prompted them to "will" or to choose and then to act. The expression "for [his] good pleasure" could either mean that God delighted to work within them as believers to enable them "to will and to work" or that he influenced them to act for his good purpose, to carry out his will, or to please him.

In their personal dealings, the Philippians were to "do all things without murmuring and disputing," preserving peace. The failings of others or the inconveniences and drain on resources resulting from extending hospitality might have given rise to murmuring or complaining. Besides shunning murmuring, the Philippians were to avoid allowing factors that might cause friction to give rise to heated arguments. By remaining free from murmuring and disputing, they would reveal themselves to be "blameless and innocent, unblemished children of God amidst a crooked and perverted generation." Like the angels, who do not rail against others, expressing themselves in abusive terms or downgrading others, God's unblemished earthly children do not speak or act in the hateful manner characteristic of persons who are a part of a "crooked and perverse generation," people alienated from God. (Compare 2 Peter 2:10-12; Jude 8-10.) While living in the "world" or among persons whose words and actions did not merit commendation, the Philippians, by their praiseworthy conduct, were to shine as lights. (2:14, 15)

The Greek term *epécho*, following the expression "word of life," could mean either "hold fast" or "hold toward." Paul either admonished the Philippians to adhere closely to the "word of life," living in harmony therewith," or to "hold [it] toward" others, offering them the message that would lead to life. By following through on the apostle's admonition, the Philippians would provide him with a cause for pride in "Christ's day" or at the time of Christ's return in glory. They would then be found approved children of God, and Paul's diligent exertion (running) and toil for them would not have been in vain or useless. (2:16)

## **2: 17-30 Paul's example of humble service**

### **Verses 17-18 The joy of such service**

Besides his having “run” and “laboured,” Paul was willing and pleased to be poured out as a libation “upon the sacrifice and service of the faith” of the Philippians. As he wrote, he would “rejoice” and rejoice with all of them even if that were to happen and wanted them to rejoice with him. His labouring for the Philippians and others in the advancement of Christ’s cause led to the possibility of his facing a martyr’s death, but this did not fill him with gloom. If it was reserved for him, he would rejoice in thus being completely spent like a libation accompanying the “sacrifice and service” for which the faith of the Philippians was responsible. (2:17, 18) Their “sacrifice and service” would have included aiding the needy and sharing the message about Christ. (Compare Hebrews 13:15, 16.) The Philippians’ faith motivated them to praiseworthy activity, and this gave Paul good reason to rejoice with them. His remaining faithful to the end and thereby bringing honour to God and Christ would have provided the basis for the Philippians to rejoice with him.

### **Verses 19-30 The service exemplified**

Paul hoped to send Timothy to Philippi soon after writing this letter. When speaking of this hope as being “in the Lord,” the apostle indicated that it depended upon the Lord Jesus Christ. With Timothy in Philippi, Paul wanted to be cheered upon receiving news from him concerning them. The apostle had the utmost confidence in Timothy, saying that he had no one of “like soul” (*isópsychos*, “like-souled”), mind, or disposition and who would genuinely be concerned about their welfare. It appears that regarding everyone else he could have sent, Paul said that they all were looking after their own interests, “not those of Christ Jesus.” Possibly they considered the perils involved in travel and the drain on their energies and did not want to undertake the mission, preferring their more comfortable and less demanding circumstances. Theirs was not a spirit of wholehearted sacrifice in advancing the cause of Christ. They were unwilling to expend themselves fully for fellow believers. Timothy, on the other hand, had already proved or demonstrated to the Philippians the kind of caring person he was, slaving with Paul like a child with a father for the evangel. Like a dependable, trustworthy, industrious son, Timothy had served shoulder to shoulder with Paul in advancing the interests of Christ Jesus. The apostle hoped to send Timothy as soon as he knew for a certainty how matters would turn out for him personally. In view of the limitations his confinement imposed, Paul doubtless depended greatly on Timothy to assist him, doing for him what he was prevented from doing for himself. Therefore, before he would be in a position to send Timothy, he needed to be sure what his personal situation would be. The fact that Paul had such high regard for Timothy and relied on him revealed the depth of his love for the Philippians when wanting to send him to assist them. (2:19-23)

“In the Lord” or in recognition that everything depended on the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul confidently hoped that he himself would soon be freed to undertake the journey to Philippi. This expression of confidence indicates that he felt strongly that he would soon be able to send Timothy. (2:24)

Paul did, however, consider it necessary to send Epaphroditus, whom he called “my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier [committed to the defence of the evangel], but your apostle and servant for my need.” Upon learning about Paul’s imprisonment, the Philippians had sent Epaphroditus with a gift and as a helper for Paul. As one sent, Epaphroditus was an “apostle” or “messenger.” He longed for all of the Philippian believers or, according to other ancient manuscript readings, he longed to see all of them. A major reason for his yearning appears to have been his anxiety or distress from learning that the Philippians had come to know about his having become seriously ill. (2:25, 26)

Before he finally recovered, Epaphroditus had been so sick that he almost died. “But,” as Paul wrote, “God had mercy on him, not only on him but also on me, so that I might not have sadness upon sadness.” The apostle regarded the recovery as an expression of God’s compassion both for Epaphroditus and for him. It would have added greatly to Paul’s sorrow had he lost his “brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier,” as he knew Epaphroditus had come into the perilous situation because of having been sent to assist him. (2:27) Paul’s sending Epaphroditus back to Philippi quickly would serve two purposes. The Philippians would rejoice upon seeing their brother again and in good health. Paul himself would be less troubled or anxious, likely because of concern about the anxiety the Philippians may have continued to have about Epaphroditus. (2:28)

Paul encouraged the Philippians to “receive” or welcome Epaphroditus “in the Lord with all joy” and to highly value persons like him, for he had almost died for the “work of the Lord.” Their being reunited with their brother who shared the same relationship of oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ would rightly have been an occasion for joy. When assisting Paul, Epaphroditus had performed the “work of the Lord,” for the Son of God considers such loving aid as being rendered to him. (Compare Matthew 25:34-40.) In place of the Philippian believers who would have wanted to help Paul but were prevented from doing so by distance, Epaphroditus had served, making up fully for what they could not personally do, and had risked his “soul” or life in this loving service. (2:29, 30)

## Notes:

In verse 2, the Greek words for the renderings “mind” and “thinking” are forms of the same verb (*phronéo*), basically meaning “thinking.” Paul’s emphasis is on unity. The *Contemporary English Version* interpretively paraphrases the verse: “Now make me completely happy! Live in harmony by showing love for each other. Be united in what you think, as if you were only one person.”

In 2:6, the Greek term *isos*, commonly translated “equal,” conveys the sense of being like or the same as some person or thing. In the parable about the vineyard workers, the twelve-hour labourers complained that the vineyard owner gave the same pay to those who only worked one hour, saying, “You made them equal (*isos*) to us.” (Matthew 20:12) Regarding those testifying falsely against Jesus, Mark’s account (14:56, 59) says that their testimony did not agree or was not the “same” (*isos*).

Jesus did not consider as *harpagmós* being the same as God or like God. The Greek verb form of *harpagmós* (*harpázo*) means “snatch,” “grab,” “seize,” “carry off,” or “drag away.” The noun *harpagmós* could either denote something seized as by robbery or something held onto as if seized. Jesus’ action in not clinging to his being like God to become a man would illustrate his humility more forcefully than would his not resorting to a seizure and becoming a man, and this would appear to be the preferable significance of the passage in Philippians.

Based on the suggested lexical meanings for the word *harpagmós*, translations vary considerably in their renderings. Examples are: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.” (NKJV) “Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.” (NAB) “He always had the nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to remain equal with God.” (GNT, Second Edition) “Although from the beginning He had the nature of God He did not reckon His equality with God a treasure to be tightly grasped.” (Weymouth) “Christ himself was like God in everything. But he did not think that being equal with God was something to be used for his own benefit.” (NCV) “Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage.” (HCSB) “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited.” (NRSV) “He was in the form of God; yet he laid no claim to equality with God.” (REB)

In verse 30, extant manuscripts variously read, “work of [the] Lord,” “work of Christ,” “work of the Christ,” and “work of God.”

## **Philippians 3:1-21**

### **3:1-6 Christ the true goal vs. False goals**

#### **Verse 1 The true goal in life presented**

Paul encouraged his Philippian brothers to “rejoice in the Lord.” This would be a joy resulting from their being at one with the Son of God as their Lord who loved them and continued to be their helper. (3:1)

Although the apostle wrote to the Philippians the same things he likely had mentioned while with them, this did not trouble him. He regarded the reminders as a safeguard for his beloved fellow believers, especially as there were those who were bent on undermining their faith. (3:1)

#### **Verses 2-6 False goals warned against**

Paul urged the Philippians to watch out for the “dogs,” “workers of evil,” and the “mutilation.” As a term of contempt, “dogs” would have been descriptive of persons who acted like filthy, ferocious, promiscuous, wild scavenger dogs. “Workers of evil” could include those who were morally corrupt or who through false teaching harmed others. Those whom the apostle linked to “mutilation” apparently insisted on circumcision as being needful for salvation and perverted the truth of the evangel, which revealed faith in God’s Son to be the basis for an approved standing with God. Their wrong view of circumcision made it nothing more than an act of mutilation. (Compare Galatians 5:7-12; 6:12-16.) It may be that Paul referred to the same group of false teachers as “dogs,” “workers of evil,” and the “mutilation.” If so, he applied to them the very term of contempt (“dogs”) they used when speaking of uncircumcised persons. (3:2)

Circumcision had significance when it served as a sign of the covenant relationship with God the true Israelite enjoyed. Otherwise, it did not count with the Most High. (Compare Jeremiah 9:24, 25) On the other hand, disciples of God’s beloved Son enjoyed an approved relationship with his Father. Therefore, as Paul wrote, “we are of the circumcision” (God’s approved people who had been inwardly transformed to reflect the reality of which circumcision was but

an outward sign in the flesh). In the case of Christ's disciples, the spirit directs or guides their service to God, their boasting or taking pride is "in Christ Jesus" (being at one with him as their head), and they do not rely on the flesh or any fleshly distinction setting them apart from others. (3:3)

Paul, however, did have a basis for confidence or reliance on the flesh or fleshly distinction and, in fact, much more so than others who thought they could rely on the flesh. He was not a proselyte but had been circumcised on the eighth day (as the law directed). He belonged to the people of Israel and was a member of the tribe of Benjamin. This made him a descendant of the only son of Jacob born in the land of Israel and a member of the tribe that provided Israel's first king, and the only tribe that remained loyal to Judah and the royal line of David. Both his parents were Hebrews, he being a "Hebrew from Hebrews." As to the law, he lived the life of a Pharisee, the "strictest sect" of Judaism. (Acts 26:5) As to zeal for Judaism and the cherished traditions, he persecuted the church or congregation of Christ's disciples, for he blindly considered them to be in opposition to what he valued as a Pharisee. (Compare Acts 26:9-11; Galatians 1:13, 14; 1 Timothy 1:13.) From the standpoint of righteousness associated with the law, Paul lived the life of an exemplary Jew, proving himself to be blameless. (3:4-6)

### **3:7-9 Christ the one goal in life**

**Verse 7-8a Counting all lost.**

**Verse 8b-9 Reckoning the gain**

At one time, he had regarded his privileges and distinctions as "gains" and trusted in his own efforts to attain a righteous standing before God. These "gains," however, he came to consider as "loss" because of Christ. Nothing in which he formerly took pride had brought him closer to Christ but had hindered him from attaining the inestimable honor of belonging to Christ, and that was a great loss. To the apostle, the most precious possession was knowing Christ Jesus his Lord, having an intimate relationship with him. Paul regarded as loss everything that diverted the focus from the superior value of knowing God's Son. To gain Christ, he considered as "refuse" or "garbage" everything he had lost but had once highly valued. Paul ardently desired to be found in Christ, inseparably attached to him as a member of his body, and in possession of the righteousness based on faith in Christ and granted by God on the basis of this faith. He did not want his own righteousness dependent upon observing the law, as he knew that flawless keeping of the law was an impossibility for him as a sinful human. (3:7-9; compare Galatians 2:15, 16.)

### **3:10-14 Concentration of spiritual purpose**

#### **Verses 10-11 The object of concentration**

Paul wanted to “know Christ and the power of his resurrection.” In this context, the apostle’s knowing Christ appears to mean more than just enjoying an approved relationship with him. It involves actually sharing in what the Son of God experienced. The power of Christ’s resurrection could signify Paul’s experiencing the same kind of resurrection as did Christ Jesus or the working of the same power within him that was involved in Jesus’ being raised from the dead. (Compare Ephesians 1:18-20.) Part of his “knowing” Christ would be through “sharing in his sufferings,” being submitted to the same kind of sufferings Christ experienced from the world alienated from God. Jesus Christ finished his earthly course in faithfulness to his Father, and Paul wanted his own death to be like Christ’s, so that he might attain to the resurrection of the dead. (3:10, 11)

#### **Verses 12-14 The reason for concentration**

Paul did not identify what he had not as yet received, but the context shows that he was referring to the object of his faith and hope or to being with Christ and enjoying life in the state of absolute sinlessness. The apostle had not as yet been perfected, as the righteousness he possessed on the basis of faith in Christ had been reckoned or imputed to him. The state of flawlessly reflecting the image of God in attitude, word, and deed would prove to be a future possession. In his defence before Agrippa, Paul indicated that Christ had laid hold of him when on his way to Damascus and stated his purpose for doing so as being to “serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me [or, according to other ancient manuscripts, the things that you have seen] and to those in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles — to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” (Acts 26:16, 17, NRSV) Ultimately, Christ’s taking hold of Paul was for the purpose of his being united with him in glory. (3:12)

In response to Christ’s having taken hold of him, Paul began his “race,” finally to be united with Christ in the heavens. Like a runner, the apostle did not consider himself as having attained the final goal. He did not rely on past privileges and attainments, becoming complacent. Instead of looking to the past, he forgot about what lay behind him and looked ahead to the future, continuing

to exert himself with all the strength he could muster and with his eyes focused on the prize. Single-mindedly, he pursued his course for the “prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” God in Christ or through his Son had directed the call to Paul to participate in the heavenly inheritance or all the joys and blessings to be shared in association with his Son. (3:13, 14)

### **3:15-19 Another appeal for unity**

#### **Verses 15-16 The appeal**

#### **Verses 15-19 The example**

In the case of those who had attained the level of maturity as disciples of God’s Son that he had, the apostle admonished them to be of the same mind about diligently pursuing the prize of the “upward call of God in Christ.” Regarding all who had not as yet come to have this attitude and thought differently in certain respects, the apostle confidently expressed that God would reveal to them the right way of thinking. In the case of all, Paul encouraged them to conduct themselves in harmony with the advancement they had made, not falling short of their individual level of progress. (3:15, 16) He had set an example worthy of imitation and, therefore, could encourage his beloved Philippian brothers to join in imitating him and to take note of others whose walk or conduct corresponded to his. (3:17)

Sadly, not all whom the apostle knew continued to walk or conduct themselves in a divinely approved manner. Many of whom he had often spoken in the past he “now” spoke of accompanied by weeping, for they were walking or conducting themselves as enemies of the very purpose for which Christ had died a shameful death. Christ’s death provided the basis for forgiveness of sins to those who accepted it in faith, a faith that would be evident from their ceasing to live a life of sin. Those whom Paul mentioned with tears, however, disowned the Son of God through their corrupt way of life. Their end would be destruction or ruin. This would mean losing out on all the joys and blessings associated with being loyal disciples of God’s Son. Their god proved to be their “belly” or their corrupt fleshly desire, as they gave in to their craving in full submission as if it were a god. They should have been ashamed of themselves and their course of life, but they gloried in or boasted about their wayward way as if it had been honorable. Their minds were focused on earthly things or the activities of persons alienated from God and to whom his “upward call” was completely foreign and unknown. (3:18, 19)

### **3: 20-21 Christ the believer’s expectation**

#### **Verse 20a Our heavenly citizenship**

## **Verses 20b-21 The privileges of our citizenship**

For disciples of God's Son, it would be inconsistent with their hope to focus primarily on things that are earthly, perishable, or transitory. As possessors of heavenly citizenship, their home is a heavenly one, and it is from the heavens that they eagerly await the glorious return of their Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will refashion the "body of lowliness" or the corruptible, mortal body marred by sin to be like his glorious, sinless, incorruptible, immortal body. Believers can be confident of this, for the Son of God has the power to subject everything to himself. (3:20, 21)

### **Notes:**

In 3:3, the oldest extant Greek manuscript (P46) reads "in spirit serve," whereas later manuscripts read either "in [the] spirit of God serve" or "in [the] spirit serve God."

In 3:8, the Greek word (*skybalon*) for "refuse" or "garbage" is plural. It is a crass expression that can apply to manure, excrement, or any type of refuse or garbage.

In 3:11, the Greek word for resurrection is *exanástasis*, not *anástasis*, as in the previous verse. Possibly the prefix is to be understood as indicating that the individual is raised up "out" from among the dead and thus is brought to a fullness of life, whereas the word without the prefix focuses on being raised up from lying prone in death.

In 3:17, the change from first person singular ("me") to first person plural ("us") may indicate that Paul was including his loyal companions. There is also a possibility that he simply switched to the editorial first person plural pronoun.

## **Philippians 4:1-23**

### **4:1-5 Standing fast in Christ's sufficiency**

#### **Verse 1 The reason for the injunction**

When referring to his Philippian brothers as "beloved and longed for, my joy and crown," Paul revealed his deep appreciation and affection for them. He yearned to see them. As a "crown," they were a real credit to him in their response to the evangel, and they had also brought him much joy in the love they had shown for God, for his Son, and for him and his companions, and in their exemplary appreciation of the message about Jesus Christ. In view of their

heavenly citizenship and the glory that awaited them, he urged his beloved brothers to stand firm in the Lord, maintaining their faith in him without wavering. (4:1)

### **Verses 2-5 The result of the injunction**

It appears that a rift had occurred between Euodia and Syntyche, and Paul admonished both of them to be of the same mind in the Lord. As women with faith in God's beloved Son, they needed to be at peace with one another as members of the same spiritual family. For this purpose, the apostle enlisted the aid of a Philippian brother whom he called his "genuine yokemate" or his loyal fellow worker. Possibly Syzygos ("yokemate") was the brother's actual name. The apostle asked this brother to be of assistance to Euodia and Syntyche in resolving their misunderstanding. Paul highly valued them, for they, Clement, and other fellow workers had struggled with him for the evangel, which could have included efforts to advance and defend the message about God's Son. Therefore, with confidence, Paul referred to their names as being in the "book of life." (4:2, 3)

Earlier, Paul had urged the Philippians to rejoice (3:1) and again admonished them always to do so. Possibly his having mentioned the book of life reminded him of all the blessings believers enjoy and in which they will ultimately share, and this may have prompted him to encourage the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord or to express the joy having its source in being at one with him. (4:4)

As his admonition to Euodia and Syntyche revealed, Paul desired that a spirit of mutual agreement continue to exist among believers. In their relationship with unbelievers, he urged them to maintain a disposition that would promote peace. He admonished the Philippians to let their tolerant, forbearing, or yielding spirit be known to "all men" or be recognized by all with whom they had dealings. The Greek word *epieikés*, conveying the sense of being "tolerant" or "yielding," is expressive of the disposition that does not insist on unyielding conformity to rules, regulations, or customs but that is willing to make allowances, taking circumstances into consideration. The realization that "the Lord is near" serves to promote this commendable spirit, as he is the one who knows all the factors and can render a flawless judgment. (4:5)

## 4: 6-9 The secret of God's peace

### Verses 6-7 The prescription of God's peace

Paul admonished the Philippians to avoid giving in to anxiety or worry but to commit all their concerns to God. In answer to their prayers, supplications or fervent appeals, and expressions of thanksgiving, the "peace of God" would come to be their cherished possession. This peace is an inner calm or tranquillity from being fully aware of God's love and care. It is a peace that surpasses understanding, as it transcends any kind of peace, tranquillity, or calmness that comes from another source, one that does not rest on a truly dependable basis. The "peace of God" guards the mind from becoming preoccupied and distracted with needless and unproductive worries. It also protects the "heart" or deep inner self from unsettling feelings of foreboding and alarm, as the deep inner self is calmed from an abiding awareness of God's love, care, and assistance. This safeguarding of mind and heart, however, is "in Christ Jesus" and so is only experienced by those who are united to him as their Lord. (4:6, 7)

### Verses 8-9 The prescription for maintaining God's peace

Possibly, the opening words of verse 8, *to loipón* (literally, "the rest," or "finally," "furthermore," or "in addition to") are to be linked to the previously expressed thoughts about the "peace of God." To maintain this peace, the qualities Paul wanted the Philippians to consider or think about would need to guide their thoughts, words, and actions. *Alethés* applies to what is "true," "honest," "genuine," "upright," or "sincere." *Semnós* describes whatever is "honourable," "noble," "serious," "dignified," "venerable," or "deserving of respect or reverence." *Díkais* means "righteous," "right," "upright," "just," "fair," or "equitable." *Hagnós* designates whatever is "pure," "immaculate," "chaste," or "holy." *Prophilés* describes things that are "pleasing," "lovely," "amiable," or "lovable," or things that induce affection. *Eúphemos* literally means that which sounds good and so denotes what is "appealing," "praiseworthy," or "commendable." *Areté* is "virtue" or "moral excellence." *Épainos* is descriptive of whatever is deserving of "praise," "commendation," "approval," or "approbation." It appears that the true, noble, just, chaste, and lovable things are then included in the expression "if any virtue or if any praise." Whatever is true, noble, just, chaste, and lovable can be described as virtuous or morally excellent, and whenever such qualities are manifest they deserve praise or commendation.

From Paul they had learned and accepted the message about Jesus Christ, and the apostle had been exemplary in speech and action. His words could be relied

upon and his conduct proved to be praiseworthy. Therefore, Paul could admonish the Philippians to practice what they had been taught and accepted and what they had heard and seen in his case. Their doing so would assure having the God of peace with them, guiding and sustaining them in whatever circumstances they might face. (4:9)

#### **4: 10-23 Paul's testimony of God's peace**

##### **Verses 10-14 His contentment in the Lord**

The apostle rejoiced greatly in the Lord or on account of what the Lord Jesus Christ had done for the Philippians, with their resultant loving and caring response reflected in their coming to Paul's aid. It made the apostle very happy that the Philippians had once again revived their thinking about him or showed their concern for him. This did not mean they had forgotten about Paul, but they lacked the opportunity to provide aid in a personal way. Although deeply appreciating their kindness and generosity, he was concerned not to suggest being intent on receiving gifts. The apostle made it clear that he did not speak from the standpoint of being in need. He had learned to be "self-sufficient" in whatever circumstances had come his way. Paul knew what it meant to be "low," basically having nothing or being in humble circumstances, and what it meant to have an abundance. In all things and every circumstance, he had learned the secret of how to be content. Whether he was fully satisfied or experienced hunger, whether he had an abundance or suffered lack, Paul enjoyed a state of self-sufficiency or contentment. He did not, however, attribute this to his own self-reliance but gave the credit to the one who imparted power to him. Based on expressions in his other letters, Paul evidently meant that the Lord Jesus Christ had strengthened him. (2 Corinthians 12:9; Ephesians 6:10; 1 Timothy 1:12; 2 Timothy 4:17) Nevertheless, he appreciatively acknowledged that the Philippians, through their kindly assistance, had done well or acted commendably in becoming sharers in his tribulation or suffering. (4:10-14)

##### **Verses 15-23 His gratitude for benefit received**

The expression the "beginning of the evangel" appears to mean when Paul first began to proclaim the message about Christ in Europe. After he left Macedonia, where Philippi was located, the Philippians knew that as a congregation of believers they were unique in providing assistance to him. No other congregation reciprocated as did the Philippian believers. While Paul served in Thessalonica, they sent something "once and twice" (an expression apparently meaning "more than once") for his need. In commending them, however, the

apostle did not mean to suggest that he was “seeking the gift.” He saw in their generosity the desirable fruit accruing to their account, and this spiritual benefit to them is what he really was seeking. (4:15-17)

With the generous gifts the Philippians had sent through Epaphroditus, Paul considered himself as having everything, abounding and being filled. The apostle referred to what he had received from them as a delightful fragrance, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. Confidently, Paul looked to God to superabundantly fill every need the Philippians might have. The Most High would do so in Christ Jesus or through his Son and “according to his riches in glory” or his magnificent riches that far transcend anything that humans can even imagine, for God owns everything. Having focused his thoughts on what God would do for the Philippians, the apostle was moved to direct a prayerful expression of praise to God, the Father of believers. (4:18-20)

Paul requested that his greetings be given to all the holy ones in Christ Jesus or all the Philippians who, because of being at one with God’s Son, enjoyed a pure standing as members of God’s people. The brothers or all his beloved associates then with him sent their greetings. All others of God’s people or “holy ones” from the area, especially those from the “household of Caesar,” also did so. Members of Caesar’s household could have included slaves, freedmen, or even minor officials. Their being specifically singled out as wanting their greetings conveyed may have been of particular interest to the Philippian believers. Philippi was a Roman colony where retired soldiers and government servants resided, and some of the Philippian believers may have known the individuals from Caesar’s household. (4:21, 22)

Paul concluded his letter with the prayerful words, “The favour of the Lord Jesus Christ [be] with your spirit.” (4:23) The spirit of the Philippians revealed them to be a group of loving, caring, and generous believers, and upon this noble disposition of an inner life transformed by God’s spirit Paul desired the favour of the Lord Jesus Christ to remain. (4:23)

## Questionnaire

Every book of the Bible is important because each one is inspired by God. Certain books draw us close to them time and again because of their strong encouragement, powerful teaching and practical wisdom. The Apostle Paul provided us with great examples of the joy we will experience when we serve in the name of Jesus.

### Generalities

#### Chapter One

Chapter 1 is where the Apostle Paul tells of his longing to see the believers in Philippi and explains how his sufferings have resulted in glory for God Almighty.

#### Chapter Two

In Chapter 2 we learn that we're united in humility and learn of the great model that the humbled and exalted Christ provided us and that we are to shine as lights.

#### Chapter Three

In Chapter 3 of the Book of Philippians Paul tells us about how he is sold out to Christ and how he presses on to reach his goal and then encourages us to follow in his footsteps as we follow Christ.

#### Chapter Four

In Chapter 4 of the Book of Philippians we're encouraged to be unified in joyful prayer and to meditate on things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy.

### Meditation on Philippians

Epistle to the Philippians reveals the timeless message that *true* joy is to be found only in a dynamic personal relationship with Jesus Christ and in the assurance that God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is able to work good in all situations as through, in, and by Christ, we can joyously proclaim alongside Paul, that “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” Joy only

comes through a foundation built on and in Christ. “Joy,” wrote the great theologian Augustine, “is a bird; let it fly in the open heavens, and let its music be heard of all men. Sinners are attracted to Jesus by the joy of Christians.”

Listen to the cries of the world: people are desperate to be rescued. To the businessperson, to live is wealth; to the scholar, to live is knowledge; to the soldier, to live is victory or honour; to the young man, to live is pleasure; to the man desirous of recognition, to live is fame; to the middle aged man, to live is youthful beauty. We could go on and on, listening to the voices of the world and their quiet desperation leads to hopelessness. But ultimately, for followers of Christ, only one voice is heard—To me to live is not wealth, nor fortune, nor knowledge, nor fame, nor glory, but Christ. Christ first, last, midst all, and always Christ.

- Christ is the *giver of life*—“I have come that they may have life and have it to the full” (John 10.10).
- Christ is *life itself*—“I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2.20).
- Christ is the *model of my life*—“Be perfect, therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5.48).
- Christ is the *aim of my life*—“I desire to make known the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pe 1.16).
- Christ is the *reward of my life*—“Thanks be to God for His indescribable!” (2 Cor 9.15).

What Paul writes to the Philippians—that is, what he once said—it is also written (or spoken) in the present tense, here and now. The truth then that Paul exposes is the reality that his thanksgiving arises from theological conviction: he and his readers must think of one another on the basis not of their contingent worldly situation but of their eternal standing before God and in Christ.

From this standpoint, the various interpersonal relationships of which the letter speaks, with their accompanying anxieties, tensions, or reservations, are comprehended within the peace of God that passes understanding.

This is crucial to remember because we are created to be in relationship and must not forget what Scripture continually seeks to remind us of—that thanksgiving is the acknowledgement that, whatever else may be true, the follower of Christ is who he is because he is *in* Christ. All human action takes place against the background of the great *drama* of the movement in God and from God towards humanity.

The letter to the Philippians, in the end, cannot be reduced to a single, foundational statement. Its beginning, middle and end cannot be sharply differentiated from one another, for everything is simultaneously beginning, middle and end. A merely formal and static order would be a denial of the *movement* of the living God and the living human beings set in motion by it.

We are God's beloved, called to LIVE CHRIST, BE IN CHRIST, GROW FROM CHRIST'S POWER, and TO LIVE OUT THE FULLNESS OF PEACE AND LIFE FROM CHRIST! Amen Jesus!

## **Advanced Questions**

What are the Pauline epistles?

What are the prison epistles?

What should we learn from the life of Paul?

What does it mean 'to live is Christ' (Philippians 1:21)?

What does it mean and when will it happen that every knee shall bow?

What does it mean to work out salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12)?

Who was Epaphroditus in the Bible?

Can I really do all things through Christ?

How can I experience joy in my Christian life?

What is the peace that passes all understanding?

## **Inductive Questions**

1. Approve What Is Excellent (Philippians 1:1-11) Explain
2. In Every Way Christ Is Proclaimed (Philippians 1:12-21) Explain
3. For Me to Live Is Christ (Philippians 1:18-30) Explain
4. He Emptied Himself: Humility and Exaltation (Philippians 2:1-11) Explain
5. God Is at Work in You (Philippians 2:12-18) Explain

6. Christian Character: Timothy and Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:19-30) Explain
7. That I May Know Him (Philippians 3:1-11) Explain
8. Pressing Toward the Goal (Philippians 3:12-4:1) Explain
9. Rejoice in the Lord Always (Philippians 4:2-9) Explain
10. A Partnership in Giving and Receiving (Philippians 4:10-23) Explain

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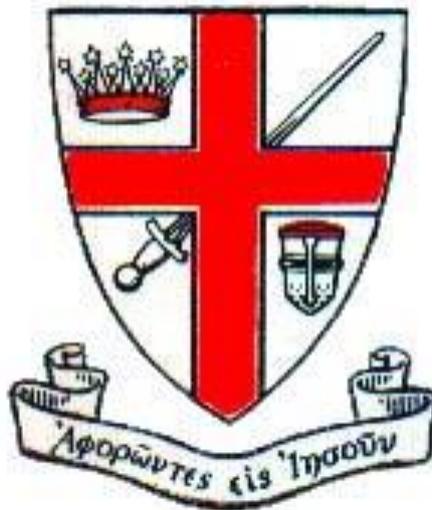
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