

Philippians: An Ancient Thank You Letter

A Study of Paul & His Ministry
Partners' Relationship

by Dave Hagelberg

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(English version)

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Abbreviations

Bible Versions

ASV	American Standard Version
KJV	King James Version
NASB	New American Standard Version
NET	New English Translation
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

Other Abbreviations

BDAG	Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich <i>Greek Lexicon</i> (see Bibliography)
EBC	<i>The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i> (see Bibliography for volume applicable to Philippians)
LXX	Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament

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Introduction

Although they have existed through the centuries, partnerships between missionaries and churches have recently become a topic of greater interest both in church and in mission circles. Churches and mission leaders are increasingly aware of how they need each other to accomplish the tasks God has given them. Different forms of that partnership are being discussed and worked out.

As popular as this theme is becoming, and as well developed as it is in Paul's brief letter to the congregation in Philippi, it is ironic that so few understand how central the missionary-church partnership is in Philippians. The Apostle Paul's relationship with that young congregation is an outstanding example of how a partnership between a missionary and a church ought to be built. As we will see in the following commentary, this issue is Paul's central concern in his letter to the congregation in Philippi.

Many churches, especially in the West, want to supplement the traditional partnership role of praying for and financially supporting their career missionaries, but they are unclear about what sort of new partnerships they might build in order to increase their involvement in missions and in the lives of their missionaries.

Many missionary candidates find the idea of developing missions partnerships with local churches overwhelming. They should read Philippians carefully, and see what a high privilege it is for a church to be a part of a missions partnership! Without any sense of embarrassment or apology, Paul tells the congregations that the gifts they have sent him are "a soothing aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." These are not the words of a poor orphan going from church door to church door, hoping for a few handouts. These are the words of the Apostle Paul, giving full endorsement to a partnership between churches and missionaries, in which, as the church gives to the missionary, it is as though it were giving holy sacrifices to the sons of Aaron in the Temple of God in Jerusalem! Missionaries today that are supported by local churches give those churches the privilege of participating in the ongoing worldwide ministry of missions, in obedience to the Great Commission.

In this letter we read of a partnership in which missionary and congregation care deeply for one another. This theme of love and concern is expressed explicitly in at least eight verses, and it is implied in others. Growing out of that loving concern, they pray diligently for each other. This “good work” that this partnership produces together is a work of great significance. It is a work that God will continue to the end of the age, and it is a work that will bring great reward from the Lord, if it is done well. It is a work that will be halted neither by Roman chains nor by the whim of popular fashion. The partners of this ministry partnership put the interests of others first and thus imitate our Savior. Both missionary and congregation continue in the “good work” through suffering, and thus participate in Christ’s sufferings. Some workers in this partnership do well, like valued Timothy; others like Epaphroditus, unable to contribute to the work, are sent back to the church. Issues like this are communicated with grace and honesty. The missionary models his deep dependency upon the Lord, not merely for finances, but also for his identity, value, sense of righteousness and ongoing purpose. It is without apology a partnership of giving and receiving, but no manipulative means are ever to be employed. The financial gifts that are a part of that partnership are figuratively referred to as soothing aromas and acceptable sacrifices, just like the animal sacrifices in the Book of Leviticus. It is a partnership which above all brings glory to God, forever and ever.

The Organization of This Book

This study is broken up into several sections. There is a brief section about the city of Philippi, followed by a discussion of Paul and his relationship with the church in Philippi. After that, the place and date of the writing of the letter are briefly discussed, and the purpose of the letter is given. Then this author’s own translation of the letter is presented. It differs in some places from other translations. Sometimes this is simply a different choice of similar words, sometimes because this author has a slightly different understanding of Paul’s intention, and eleven times it is because this author accepts the Majority Text view rather than what is called the Critical Text to determine which Greek words were original in the few

place the existing Greek manuscripts of Philippians differ from one another.

After the translation, there is a section titled “Synthesis: How the Letter Unfolds.” Every book of the Bible is great literature (of course, it is much, much more than great literature), but, as great literature, its parts are not arranged in a haphazard way. Each paragraph is tied into the previous one, and each leads on the next. Sometimes these connections are obvious, and sometimes they are more difficult for us to perceive. Sometimes they are marked with a helpful “therefore” or “but,” and sometimes they are not explained at all. The synthesis section attempts to make this flow of thought more clear. It shows how all the paragraphs relate to each another. Understanding the whole flow of thought will deepen our understanding of each individual sentence, just as each sentence must contribute to the overall flow of thought. After the synthesis, the commentary begins. The synthesis and the translation are repeated as the commentary goes through each verse of the letter. Some readers may be interested in the details and comments on Greek words that have been placed in the endnotes of the print version.

Philippi: Springs, Gold Mines, Battlefields, and Citizenship

The four centuries between the day Philippi was founded and the day Paul's letter to the church there was first read were filled with a rich history of springs, gold, battles, and political privilege.

The village of Krenides, meaning “Springs,” was located on a fertile plain in northeastern Greece. Mount Pangaeus provided protection to the north and northeast, as did the rivers Strymon and Nestos on either side. Likewise a very rocky ridge protected the village from the sea. Those were all good characteristics for a settlement, so it was not surprising that 420 years prior to the writing of Paul's letter to the congregation that would live there, Greek settlers, led by an Athenian, took over the place from local residents.

Four years later, Philip of Macedon conquered Krenides. As pleased as he may have been with the lay of the land, it was the gold and silver mines nearby that attracted him. He fortified the settlement, and renamed it after himself. Krenides became Philippi. Philip of Macedon's miners extracted the huge sum of a thousand talents a year from those mines. Since Philip's son, Alexander, conquered so much of that part of the world and brought Greek culture to the whole region, it may not be too much to say that the gold of the Philippian mines bankrolled the Hellenization of the known world. The “goat” prophesied in Daniel 8:5-8 used gold from Philippi for his conquests.

About 230 years before Paul's letter was written, Rome conquered the area. Then 100 years before Paul's letter, Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar, in the Battle of Philippi. That battle brought fame to Philippi, and many of the victors' army veterans were rewarded with retirement there. Their retirement “pension” would have included tracts of valuable land. All that also brought Philippi the elevated status of being a Roman colony, with the high privilege of *ius Italicum*, or “Italian Law.” This meant that the laws of Rome applied in Philippi, and citizens of Philippi automatically possessed Roman citizenship with all its valuable legal privileges. It meant that the Macedonian

provincial government had no authority there, and Philippi was directly under the control of Rome. When Philippi was granted *ius Italicum*, it meant that legally Philippi may as well have been physically located in Italy.

We may think it a shame to be a colony of any empire, but in that day practically the whole known world of the West was a part of the Roman Empire. As a colony enjoying Roman citizenship, “Italian Law,” many tax exemptions, and direct Roman rule, they would perceive themselves with some pride as a branch of victorious Rome rather than a conquered territory. The architecture of Philippi’s buildings, the plan of the city, and the dress of its inhabitants were carefully copied from Rome. They spoke Latin. Doubtless at the time Paul’s letter was written, the children of Philippi knew by heart many stories that began, “When your great-grandfather was an officer under *Caesar Augustus* he led his men along this path right here and stormed the gates of Brutus’ camp – you can still see the ruined gates there....”

Philippi’s history produced a mix of cultures and ethnicity, with a strong component of loyalty to Rome. The Philippian congregation, especially the citizens in the congregation, lived with this high status. Their city also enjoyed good agriculture, strategic location and travel routes, and a famous school of medicine. In Acts 16:21, when the owners of the slave girl that had been delivered from a demon bring Paul and Silas to the authorities, accusing them of “advocating customs unlawful for *us Romans* to accept or practice,” we may detect a bit of the local pride of being a Roman colony. The magistrates’ alarm upon learning that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens (Acts 16:38) gives us insight into the protection and privilege of Roman citizenship.

This history of the city of Philippi reaches back to unknown springs, once fabulously rich gold mines, battles between defenders of the Republic and founders of the Empire, and pensioned soldiers.

Paul and Philippi

On his second missionary journey, in about AD 49, Paul and his team brought the Gospel to Philippi, as is recounted for us in Acts 16. The congregation in Philippi was the first in Europe of which we have certain knowledge.

While he was in Thessalonica, the Philippian church sent Paul at least two financial gifts according to Philippians 4:15-16. Later while he was in Corinth some brothers from Macedonia (most likely from Philippi) sent more aid according to 2 Corinthians 11:7-9.

Acts 20:1-6 records two later visits to Macedonia and Philippi at about AD 55-57 on the way to Greece and then on the return trip which ended in Jerusalem. During this trip the Macedonian believers, again probably in Philippi, made unsolicited contributions to the collection for the saints in Jerusalem according to 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. It was in Jerusalem of course that Paul was arrested, an arrest that finally put him under house arrest in Rome. There he probably wrote his letters to the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, and Philemon, as will be discussed below.

Place and Date of Writing

Tradition and the consensus of scholars agree that Paul wrote the Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) from the house arrest in Rome that is described in Acts 28:16-31 sometime in AD 60-62. It has also been suggested that he wrote them during his imprisonment in Caesarea (Acts 23:33-27:1), or during an unrecorded imprisonment in Ephesus.

The tone of optimism of possible release (Philippians 1:19 and 25) does not fit with the imprisonment in Caesarea, nor does the possibility of execution (1:20), because he knew he could always appeal to Caesar. Also, 1:13-17 imply that there was a considerable number of Christian workers preaching the Gospel in town, which is incon-

sistent with what we know of Caesarea, but consistent with Rome. Furthermore, there would be nothing noteworthy about the whole imperial guard of Caesarea knowing that Paul was in chains for Christ (1:13) because in Caesarea the imperial guard was a small group of men. In Rome the term would refer to a group of 9000 men, a remarkable audience. Likewise the “household of Caesar” in 4:22 would seem to point to Rome.

While Ephesus has also been proposed as the location where Paul wrote Philippians, there is no record of Paul ever being imprisoned there. As discussed above, if he were, he would not fear execution in Ephesus because as a Roman citizen he had the right to appeal to Caesar. The one advantage Ephesus has is that it would make the several journeys between the city of origin and Philippi easier to fit into the required time frame.

Between the time Paul was imprisoned to the writing of the letter, the following journeys had to take place:

- 1) Someone brought the news to Philippi that Paul was imprisoned again.
- 2) Epaphroditus had to travel from Philippi to Paul with the gift.
- 3) Someone brought the news to Philippi of Epaphroditus' illness.
- 4) Someone brought the news to Epaphroditus of how worried the congregation was about him.

Nevertheless there was frequent travel between the Philippian colony and the center of the Empire. The journey from Philippi to Rome could take as little as ten days, and the journey from Rome to Philippi as little as twenty days.¹ While it is not a certainty, it does seem most likely that the letter was written while Paul was under house arrest in Rome, in AD 60-62. To allow for those journeys, for the situation of 1:12-18 to develop, and for the impending judicial decision for or against Paul, the letter would have been written late in that period.

1 Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, pp. 151-153.

Purpose

The Philippian congregation has become partners with Paul in his missionary work, as manifested by their recent generous giving. Paul writes to thank them and to ensure that they will be the best partners in Gospel ministry they can be, as they model their lives after Christ and as they make Christ and His grace their boast and their joy in life.

Translation

1:1 Paul and Timothy, slaves of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus in Philippi, with the guardians and servants:

1:2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:3 I give thanks to my God every time I remember you,

1:4 always in my every prayer for you all praying with joy

1:5 over your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now.

1:6 I am convinced of this, that the One who began among you a good work will bring it to completion all the way until the Day of Christ Jesus.

1:7 It is right of me to have this attitude about you all, because I have you in my heart. Both in my chains and also in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel, you all are my partners in this grace.

1:8 For God is my witness how I long for you all with the affections of Jesus Christ.

1:9 And this I pray, that your love will still more and more abound in knowledge and all insight,

1:10 so that you can discern the things that really matter, so that you might be sincere and blameless into the day of Christ,

1:11 being filled with the fruit of righteousness which is through Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God.

1:12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that my circumstances have actually turned out for the advancement of the Gospel,

1:13 so that it has become obvious among the whole imperial guard and all the others that my chains are for Christ.

1:14 Also, most of the brothers in the Lord, persuaded by my chains, are even more bold to fearlessly speak the Word.

1:15 On the one hand, some of them are preaching Christ because of envy and rivalry, others because of good will.

1:16 The former are preaching Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to bring on trouble in my chains,

1:17 while the latter do so out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the Gospel.

1:18 What then? Only that in every way, whether with false motive or true, Christ is preached. And in this I rejoice. Furthermore I shall rejoice,

1:19 for I know that this will result in my deliverance through your prayers and the support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

1:20 This is in line with my eager expectation and hope, that I will not be ashamed in anything, but as always in all boldness now also I will magnify Christ with my body, whether by life or by death.

1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

1:22 Now if I live on in the flesh, for me this will mean fruitful work. I do not know which I prefer.

1:23 So I am torn between the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, which would be very much better,

1:24 but staying on in the flesh is more necessary, because of you.

1:25 So, convinced of this, I know that I shall remain, and remain on with all of you for your advancement and joy in the faith,

1:26 so that your boast might abound in Christ Jesus by me through my presence again with you.

1:27 Only live your lives in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that whether coming and seeing you or being away I will hear concerning you, that you are standing firm in one spirit, struggling together as one for the faith of the Gospel,

1:28 and do not be afraid of anything from those that oppose you. This on the one hand will be evidence to them of destruction, and on the other hand to you of deliverance, and that from God.

1:29 This is because to you it has been given on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him,

1:30 having the same struggle which you saw with me, and now hear about with me.

2:1 If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort in love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,

2:2 complete my joy: be of one mind, having the same love, united in spirit, having the same concern,

2:3 never with selfish ambition or vainglory, but in humility of mind considering one another more important than oneself.

2:4 Do not be watching out for your own interests, but each also watching out for the interests of others.

2:5 For you should let this same attitude be in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

2:6 Who in the form of God existing, did not regard being equal with God as something to be grasped,

2:7 but Himself He emptied, the form of a slave taking on,

in the likeness of men coming.

2:8 And in appearance being found as man,
He humbled Himself,
becoming obedient to death,
even death on a cross.

2:9 Therefore also God Him exalted,
and gave to Him a Name which is above every name,

2:10 so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
2:11 and every tongue should confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

2:12 Therefore my beloved, just as you used to obey, not only in my
presence, but now all the more in my absence, with fear and trem-
bling accomplish your own deliverance.

2:13 For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His
good pleasure.

2:14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing,

2:15 so that you might be blameless and pure, children of God
unblemished in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation,
among whom you shine like stars in the sky,

2:16 being intent upon the word of life, which means a boast for me
in the Day of Christ, that I neither ran in vain nor labored in vain.

2:17 But if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacri-
fice and service of your faith, I rejoice and I rejoice together with
you all.

2:18 Have that same joy, and rejoice together with me.

2:19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I
myself might be encouraged knowing your situation.

2:20 For I have no one of like heart and mind, who will genuinely be
concerned for your situation,

2:21 for they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ
Jesus.

2:22 Now you know his proven character, how as a child with his
father he has served with me in the Gospel.

2:23 So on the one hand he is the one I hope to send as soon as I see
how my situation turns out.

2:24 On the other hand, I am convinced in the Lord that even I
myself will come quickly.

2:25 Now I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier – your missionary and servant of my need,

2:26 because he is longing for you all and troubled, because you heard that he was ill.

2:27 For indeed he was ill, he was near death. However, God had mercy on him – not only on him but also on me, so that I might not have grief upon grief.

2:28 Therefore with more earnestness I send him, so that seeing him again you might be glad, and I might be more free of pain.

2:29 Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold such as him in honor,

2:30 because on account of the work of Christ he came near to death, having no concern for his own life so that he might fulfill what was lacking in your service to me.

3:1 From now on, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. Writing the same things to you is not troublesome for me, and it is more certain for you.

3:2 Consider the dogs, consider the evil workers, consider the Castration.

3:3 For we, we are the Circumcision, we are the ones serving in the Spirit of God and boasting in Christ Jesus, putting no confidence in the flesh.

3:4 Although I could have reasons for confidence also in the flesh. If someone else supposes he can put confidence in the flesh, I more so.

3:5 Circumcised on the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews – regarding the Law, a Pharisee;

3:6 regarding zeal, a persecutor of the church; regarding the righteousness that comes by the Law, blameless.

3:7 Whatever was gain to me, I have come to count as loss because of Christ.

3:8 Furthermore, I consider all things to be loss on account of the far better knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and I consider them to be refuse, with the result that I have gained Christ,

3:9 and am found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God, by faith.

3:10 I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the participation in His sufferings, becoming conformed to His death,

3:11 if somehow I might attain to the out-resurrection of the dead.

3:12 Not that I have already obtained this or already been perfected, but I pursue it if also I might seize it, the very thing for which also I was seized by Christ Jesus.

3:13 Brothers, I do not consider myself to have seized it. I have just one thing on my mind, forgetting what is past, and straining towards what is ahead.

3:14 Focused on the goal, I pursue the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus.

3:15 Therefore, as many of us as are mature, let us take this attitude, and if you take some other view, this too God will reveal to you.

3:16 However, to what we have already attained, live up to that rule, and be of one mind.

3:17 Join others in following my example, brothers, and pay attention to those that walk in that way, just as you have our example.

3:18 For as I have often been telling you, and now even weeping I say, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

3:19 Their end is ruin, their god is their belly, and their glory is in their shame. They set their minds on earthly things.

3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven, out of which we are awaiting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

3:21 who will transform our humble bodies to conformity with His glorious body by the working of His ability even to subject all things to Himself.

4:1 So, my brothers, loved and very much missed, my joy and my crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, loved ones.

4:2 To Euodia I appeal and to Syntyche I appeal to agree in the Lord.

4:3 Yes, I ask you, loyal Syzygos, to help them, who have struggled together in the Gospel with me and Clement and my other co-workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

4:5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

4:6 Do not worry about anything, but in all things by prayer and petition make your requests known to God with thankfulness,

4:7 and the peace of God that excels all intellect will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is righteous, whatever is pure, whatever is amiable, whatever is commendable, if something is excellent and if something is praiseworthy, let your minds dwell on these things.

4:9 And the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace will be with you.

4:10 Now I rejoice greatly in the Lord that now at last you have renewed your concern for me, for whom you were concerned, but you lacked opportunity.

4:11 Not that I am saying this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever situation I am in.

4:12 I know how to be humbled, I know also how to abound. In any and in all situations I have learned the secret, whether satisfied or hungry, abounding or lacking.

4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

4:14 However, you did well partnering with me in my trouble.

4:15 And as you Philippians also know, at the beginning of my Gospel ministry, when I went out from Macedonia, not one church partnered with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you only.

4:16 Also in Thessalonica more than once you sent something because of my need.

4:17 Not that I am hoping for a gift, but I am hoping for the increasing profit into your account.

4:18 But I have been paid all in full, and I have plenty; I have been filled up, receiving from Epaphroditus the gifts from you, a soothing aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

4:19 And my God will provide for your every need on the basis of His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

4:20 To God our Father be glory forever and ever, amen.

4:21 Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers with me greet you.

4:22 All the saints greet you, particularly those of the household of Caesar.

4:23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Synthesis: How the Letter Unfolds

1:1-2

Greetings, grace, and peace

1:3-11

I am grateful to God for our long-standing partnership together in Gospel work, which for various reasons I am certain will be ongoing.

1:12-18

So, loving you as I do, and with your interest in our work together in the Gospel, I want you to know that even though I am in chains, our Gospel work is as fruitful as ever.

1:19-26

Are you worried about me, your mission partner, being executed? Dying would be gain for me, but somehow I feel sure I'll live, for your advancement in the Gospel.

1:27-30

Now, if we are partners in the Gospel, and such is my willingness to keep on living for you, I can ask you to stand firm and suffer with me for Him.

2:1-4

I have just written of the struggle we have together in our Gospel partnership, but I also want to write you about the encouragement and comfort that helps us in our partnership.

2:5-11

In fact, the ultimate example of humility, suffering, and then exaltation is Christ. Follow that example.

2:12-18

I am explaining this theology to you now so that you will be Light and Life to the world around you. I will boast and we will rejoice together – are we not partners in Gospel work?

2:19-24

Yes, it is true that I may soon die, so I think of my protégé, Timothy, who serves the Lord selflessly. I want to send him to you, to strengthen our partnership. He will assure me of how you all are doing. But right now, in my situation, I just cannot spare this man until I know how it will go with my imprisonment.

2:25-30

But I have to send back to you Epaphroditus, your missionary to me. Although I appreciate his willingness to serve, even to die, he is just too worried about you all. Honor him.

3:1-3

So the crucial thing I want to remind you about is that you must put your joy and boasting in the Lord, and not in anything of the flesh – not circumcision, not anything. Get your identity from the Gospel.

3:4-9

Let me tell you my own story. I was full of self-confidence, but now I confidently regard all that as rubbish, and Christ as my righteousness, my salvation.

3:10-14

Christ is my salvation, but He is also my goal, because I press on to win the prize He has for His obedient servants.

3:15-21

Follow me in this! Unhappily, the enemies of the cross are many. They will be destroyed, but we have a heavenly citizenship and a Savior from heaven.

4:1-7

So of course you should stand firm in unity, joy, and prayer.

4:8-9

Yes, if you live like that you will experience the peace of God – furthermore, if you will fill your minds with true and good things and follow my example, the God of Peace will be with you!

4:10-20

Before closing this letter, I want to be quite specific about the financial aspects of our partnership in missions, our Gospel fellowship.

4:21-23

The brothers here greet you and I bless you with God's grace.

Synthesis, **Translation** and Commentary

1:1-2

Greetings, grace, and peace

1:1 Paul and Timothy, slaves of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus² in Philippi, with the guardians and servants:

Paul³ seems to have initiated the ministry in **Philippi** as recorded in Acts 16. This idea is supported by Paul's comments in 1:5 and 4:15 where he reminds them of their support since the early days of his missionary ministry in that region.

Timothy was there in Philippi with Paul in Acts 16. According to Acts 19:22 and 20:1-6 **Timothy** also made other trips to Macedonia. In fact in Philippians 2:20-22 we learn that **Timothy** was well known to the Philippian congregation. While **Timothy** may have done the actual physical writing of this epistle, the singular verbs and pronouns **Paul** uses and Paul's commendation of **Timothy** in 2:19-24 show that **Paul** alone was the actual author of the letter.

In the Old Testament, Moses and other prophets might be referred to as **slaves**. If in using this term **Paul** was thinking of that connection, then he may have indirectly been claiming parity with those Old Testament leaders. However, that is unlikely given that in the near context he does not even call himself an apostle, and in the broader context of this letter, Paul stresses humility.⁴

In the Greek world of that era, this term usually referred simply to **slaves**. They had severely limited civil rights, and were often simply considered human property which was to be used for the owner's purposes and profit.

The members of the congregation in **Philippi** are called **holy ones**, or "saints." It is important to remember that they are **holy**

2 O'Brien, p. 46.

3 O'Brien, p. 44, quoting Deissmann, *Bible Studies*, pp. 314-315.

4 O'Brien, p. 45.

not at all because of their careful religious life, but purely because the holiness of **Jesus Christ** is given to everyone that has believed in Him. Giving this status does not compromise the justice of God, because our unholiness was sufficiently punished when **Christ Jesus**, who was perfectly **holy**, died on the cross.

The word here translated **guardians** is often translated “over-seer,” which reflects the literal meaning of “one who looks upon.” However, the reader should also understand that the term carried the sense of **guardian**. For instance, using this term, pagan deities in that era were sometimes called upon to be **guardians** of agreements, that is they were to “look upon” the situation so that the agreement was kept.⁵ These **guardians** that Paul addresses are **guardians** of the apostolic traditions, **guardians** that see to it that the church believes and lives in accord with the teachings of the Word of God.

Besides the **guardians**, **Paul** also singles out the **servants** of the congregation. Used 29 times in the New Testament, this word can simply have the general meaning of **servant**. John 2:5 speaks of the **servants** at the wedding in Cana, and Matthew 23:11 says, “The greatest among you will be your **servant**.” Christ is a **servant** of the Jews in Romans 15:8, Paul and others are **servants** of the New Covenant in 2 Corinthians 3:6, Paul is a **servant** of God in 2 Corinthians 6:4, and a **servant** of the Gospel in Ephesians 3:7. In 2 Corinthians 11:23 others are referred to as **servants** of Christ.

Three or four times in the New Testament this term has a narrow technical sense, referring as here to officers in a local church, sometimes simply transliterated from the Greek as “deacons.” Although this term does not appear in Acts 6:1-7, the related words translated “service” and “serve” do appear there, so those events seem to have been the starting point for what became the formal church office of “deacon.” Here in the opening lines of Philippians, **Paul** endorses this office by highlighting them with the **guardians** in his greeting. By especially greeting the **guardians and servants** Paul honors

5 BDAG *ad loc*

them, but he also especially calls upon them to apply this letter to their hearts and to the life of the congregation under their care.⁶

1:2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul transforms the standard greeting of a Greek letter into a blessing of Christian **grace** upon his readers. **Peace** is of course a normal Hebrew greeting. These are not merely empty words or useless tradition. Paul is somehow giving a greeting that conveys **grace** and **peace** to his readers. May our words likewise convey **grace** and **peace**!

Even though this greeting does actually bring a measure of **grace** and **peace**, throughout this letter, and especially in chapter three and in 4:4-9, Paul teaches the reader how to experience the **grace** and **peace** of God, and how to better know the God of **peace**.

1:3-II

I am grateful to God for our long-standing partnership together in Gospel work, which for various reasons I am certain will be ongoing.

In this introduction Paul will not only bring up his main message, but he will also drop hints of all the important things he has to share with them.

1:3 I give thanks to my God every time I remember you,

As in all of his letters to the churches except Galatians, Paul expresses thanksgiving to his **God**. He was really thankful.

1:4 always in my every prayer for you all praying with joy

His thankfulness was consistent and joyful. If we were to take this and similar passages in Paul's letters (Romans 1:9; Colossians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2:13; 3:10; 5:17; and 2 Timothy 1:3) we might picture Paul as a hermit that spends every single moment in prayer, a picture contrary to the picture we have of him in Acts. He is using language very familiar to readers of letters in the ancient Greek world. Exaggeration was very normal in such opening greetings.

6 O'Brien, p. 50.

What he is saying is that he is diligent and consistent in praying for them.⁷

1:5 over your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now.

This crucial word⁸ can be translated “fellowship,” “participation,” “sharing,” or **partnership**. Early in his introduction Paul brings up this idea which is the main message of this letter, which he tastefully develops finally in 4:10-20. He is grateful, not particularly for the money they have sent him, but for their **partnership** *with him*. in this great and divine **Gospel** endeavor.

Concerning this **partnership**, in chapter 1 alone we see how long they have been with him as partners (1:5), how it is a divine and lasting work (1:6), that Paul is deeply committed to it (1:7), it is strengthened in prayer (1:9-10), it is to God's glory (1:11), it is prospering despite Paul's chains (1:12-18), it will not be ended by Paul's execution (1:19-26), and it includes suffering (1:27-30).

1:6 I am convinced of this, that the One who began among you a good work will bring it to completion all the way until the Day of Christ Jesus.

It was not really Paul that **began among** them this **good work** of church planting, but the Lord Jesus. Although Paul had to leave Philippi, he is convinced that the Lord will bring this ministry on to **completion** at the end of the age. The ministry of which they became a part, their Gospel partnership, will certainly not falter. Has not our Lord said, in Matthew 16:18, that He will build His church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it? What they experienced as the Apostle Paul and his team told them the Gospel and disciplined them in their new faith was all a part of the **work** of the Great Commission, and will continue to the end of the age.

7 O'Brien, p. 57.

8 This word, κοινωνία/*koinōnia*, and very closely related words, are also found in 1:7; 2:1; 3:10; 4:14 and 4:15. In 2:1 and 3:10 this word has a more general meaning of “fellowship” or “sharing,” but all the other four uses directly relate to this **Gospel partnership** which is introduced here in the fifth verse of the letter, and is the central theme of the letter.

Although persecution by enemies and seduction by various pleasures might seem to hinder this **good work**, nothing but the Second Coming at the **Day of Christ Jesus** will end it.

Of course, Paul does not say that they themselves will be involved in that work until the Second Coming. Even so, this is a tremendous encouragement to them to keep at their ministry partnership with him. He is telling them that this endeavor of which they are a part is not some passing fashion, nor does it depend on the whim of an emperor. They are a part of a task that God will continue and perfect **all the way** to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It is a worthy task, and future generations of believers will be called by God to carry it on, **all the way until the Day of Christ Jesus**. On that great **Day**, the **work** will be completed, and the Bride of Christ will be ready for the wedding supper of the Lamb, wearing fine linen, bright and clean. The Lord Himself will bring this **good work to completion** in that **Day**, when people from every tribe, language, people, and nation will worship Him.

Some would say that the **good work** that God began “in” them was their salvation. It is true that we cannot lose our salvation, but that point is not what Paul is making here. If that were what he meant, he would have continued on in verse 7 to say things which he has said elsewhere, like “it is right for me to have this attitude about you all because the salvation that you have is based on the perfect work of the sinless Son of God when He died on the cross. What the Lord Jesus accomplished there, no man, no angel, nothing in all of creation, can undo. It is perfect and eternal.” However, that is not what he gives to justify his assurance of the ongoing nature of the divine **work** being done **among** or in them!

1:7 It is right of me to have this attitude about you all, because I have you in my heart. Both in my chains and also in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel you all are my partners in this grace.

As strange as it may seem to us, the reason it is **right** for him to have the conviction that God will continue the work of their partnership in the **Gospel** has to do with emotional loyalty: **I have you in my heart**. They are beloved **partners** with him in his **Gos-**

pel work. He knows their partnership in the **Gospel** will continue because it is his partnership too!

When he is in **chains**, when he is defending the **Gospel**, when he is confirming the **Gospel**, they are his **partners**.⁹ This is both a comfort to the imprisoned missionary and an encouragement to the supporting church. The missionary is comforted by the reminder that although he is far from home and they are far away and he is in distress, his friends stand with him in an important sense. The congregation is encouraged to continue supporting him in the various ways available to them.

While both **defense** and **confirmation** are legal terms, and seem to be references to Paul's legal case, they also seem to refer here to **Gospel** work. Introduced here, **the defense and confirmation of the Gospel** are developed in the context of opposition and Paul's life in chapter 3.

This grace is an expression which refers to the **Gospel** ministry that Paul and the Philippian church are engaged in together. It is an appropriate summary expression because although it is a great deal of work to be involved like this in **Gospel** ministry, it is fundamentally the **grace** of God that allows Paul, the Philippians, and us to participate. It is a high privilege, and Paul is delighted that they are *with* him in it!

1:8 For God is my witness how I long for you all with the affections of Jesus Christ.

It is right for him to have this conviction about this ongoing partnership because he loves that congregation with godly longing and **affections**. It is almost as if Paul stubbornly refuses to release them from this partnership!

1:9 And this I pray, that your love will still more and more abound in knowledge and all insight,

9 Paul stresses this partnership relationship even more strongly by using the term *συγκοινωνος/sugkoinōnos*, which is a combination of *συν/sun-* and *κοινωνος/koinōnos*, so that they are his “with partners.”

Another reason why it is right for him to have his conviction about this ongoing partnership is because he is praying for them, particularly that their **love** would **abound**. This prayer is so appropriate, because it was this very **love** that motivated them to this Gospel ministry partnership with Paul in the first place! He is praying that they will have a stronger and wiser **love**, thus becoming stronger and wiser in their commitment to their ministry partnership in the Gospel. This Gospel ministry is driven by **love** and it is demonstrated by the brothers in 1:17, in contrast to those lacking **love** in 1:16.¹⁰

1:10 so that you can discern the things that really matter, so that you might be sincere and blameless into the day of Christ,

The Apostle Paul certainly believes with all his heart that as the Lord answers this prayer, they will see that the very things they are accomplishing together in their Gospel partnership are indeed **the things that really matter**. He would not be pouring out his life like a drink offering in order to develop their faith and the faith of other congregations if he did not believe this unreservedly.

The things that really matter concern the Gospel prospering in human hearts. The expression literally translated would be “the things that carry through.” They “carry through” the ages. This is because we human beings are a beloved everlasting creation, precious in God's eyes, whose own sin would have doomed us to a horrible eternity were it not for the Gospel. Only if the death of **Christ** is applied to our personal sin problem can we escape everlasting punishment, and much more than that, enjoy an incredibly wonderful eternity. After all is said and done, after all our big and little successes and failures, after all our labors and entertainment, after all our pains and joys, after all our thoughts, words, and actions, what lasts forever is the Gospel ministry accomplished in sincere gratitude to the Lord.

10 “The Theme and Structure of Philippians,” by Robert C. Swift, p. 239, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 141:563, July 1984. This article strongly supports the central thesis of this commentary, which is that Gospel Partnership is the central core and unifying concept of Paul's letter to the Philippians.

If they have such discernment and consistently act upon it, then they will be **sincere and blameless into the day of Christ**. All that believe in the Lord Jesus have His perfect righteousness before God, but that positional righteousness does not seem to be in view here. The righteousness that Paul writes about here would be realized if Paul's prayer for them is answered, and their love abounds still more and more in knowledge and all insight. If that happens, and they truly **discern the things that really matter**, then they will enjoy this sincerity and blamelessness. In Paul's experience in chains, this would be unlike the brothers in 1:16; in the congregation's experience, this would be unlike the false teachers in 3:1.

1:11 being filled with the fruit of righteousness which is through Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God.

If Paul's prayer is answered, and if they then know what really matters and acting upon that insight become pure and blameless all the way to the Day of Christ, in other words if Paul succeeds in praying them into greater commitment to their Gospel ministry partnership, not only will they be sincere and blameless at that Day, they will also be full of **fruit!** They will have a fruitful life and a fruitful ministry behind them, empowered by the Lord, bringing **praise and glory to God**. That is a good way to appear before the King as He decides what sort of rewards to distribute to His loyal subjects. In 2:14-18 as he is again urging them to "hold fast to the word of life" he explains that that will result in him having "a reason to boast that he did not run in vain nor labor in vain." In 4:1 Paul boldly speaks of the boasting that he will have before the Lord in that Day because they, his "joy and crown," are doing so well.

1:12-18

So, loving you as I do, and with your interest in our work together in the Gospel, I want you to know that even though I am in chains, our Gospel work is as fruitful as ever.

1:12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that my circumstances have actually turned out for the advancement of the Gospel,

As he turns for the moment to his side of the **Gospel** partnership, he first wants his partners to fully understand that what has hap-

pened to him was not a surprise to the Lord of the Harvest, and is being used by Him to advance the **Gospel**. This is very important to the relationship, because they are his well loved partners in his **Gospel** ministry, and the last thing he wants is for the congregation to come to the conclusion that because he is in chains the ministry that is “through Jesus Christ” has somehow been successfully opposed. Indeed it has not been stymied at all, and Paul himself values this despite the dreadfulness of his situation, because he knows how important the **Gospel** work is. Paul can write this only because he himself has come to discern “the things that really matter,” that is, the **Gospel** prospering in human hearts.

1:13 so that it has become obvious among the whole imperial guard and all the others that my chains are for Christ.

His imprisonment has been working out for the advancement of their Gospel partnership in two ways. The first is that people all around, including all the guards that are assigned to guard him every day, every hour, thoroughly understand that he has been imprisoned because of **Christ** and the Gospel. As we and the original readers know, this apostle preaches the Gospel even when imprisoned.

1:14 Also, most of the brothers in the Lord, persuaded by my chains, are even more bold to fearlessly speak the Word.

The second way he has discerned that his imprisonment is working out for the advancement of the Gospel is that the believers there in Rome, seeing him imprisoned, are getting bolder in their preaching. Perhaps some of them are thinking, “If Paul can trust the Lord and be so bold in the very hands of those Roman guards, should I not trust the Lord for my safety while no Romans guards are around?” Paul's example influenced them to greater Gospel ministry.

1:15 On the one hand, some of them are preaching Christ because of envy and rivalry, others because of good will.

But Paul knows there are two kinds of Gospel preachers out there. Although the idea of **preaching Christ because of envy and rivalry** might sound strange to some, Paul explains what he means in the next two verses.

1:16 The former are preaching Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to bring on trouble in my chains,

Paul does not object to the content of their message, only to their motives, so we should not assume these were Judaizers. These were real Christian preachers overcome with **selfish ambition**. Perhaps in their **ambition** they had such a low view of God's perfect sovereignty that they thought they could get that rival preacher out of the way permanently if they brought enough of the local population to faith in Christ!

1:17 while the latter do so out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the Gospel.

Some of those that were preaching boldly out there in response to Paul's imprisonment were doing so because of a conviction that the Lord has allowed him to be imprisoned as a part of the divine plan. Their **love** was abounding still more and more, and they too knew what it is that really matters.

1:18 What then? Only that in every way, whether with false motive or true, Christ is preached. And in this I rejoice. Furthermore I shall rejoice,

As he rejoices that **Christ is preached**, Paul is showing the readers that he does understand what really matters. The ambitious motive of some is of no concern to this slave of **Christ** Jesus.

1:19-26

Are you worried about me, your mission partner, being executed? Dying would be gain for me, but somehow I feel sure I'll live, for your advancement in the Gospel.

Some of Paul's readers may have felt that it is all very well that this is the Lord's good plan, but how is Paul doing there? Is he going to survive?

1:19 for I know that this will result in my deliverance through your prayers and the support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Not only does he rejoice that **Christ** is preached, whether from a good heart or a bad heart, he also has assurance that **through** their **prayers** and the work of **the Spirit** that very preaching will result in his **deliverance**.

One of the aspects of their partnership in the Gospel work is that they are praying for him, just as he is praying for them. Paul is convinced that their **prayers** will be answered. Paul believed in the power of prayer, and the power of the God he served. His assurance of **deliverance** is exactly the opposite of what some of those preachers were hoping for as they sought to stir up trouble for him. Paul was assured that he would be delivered, but what sort of **deliverance** was he writing of here? As the congregation read verse 19 they probably thought that Paul was writing about being freed from his chains because of their **prayers**. However, a closer look shows that he is assured of **deliverance** as a **result** of his rejoicing in the Gospel being preached, whether from false motives or true motives. He clarifies the nature of this **deliverance** in the next verse.

1:20 This is in line with my eager expectation and hope, that I will not be ashamed in anything, but as always in all boldness now also I will magnify Christ with my body, whether by life or by death.

Paul is in chains for **Christ**, and therefore faces the temptation to deny his Lord in exchange for freedom. The deliverance that he is assured of must be understood in accord with his overriding **eager expectation and hope** that he will continue to boldly glorify the Lord **by life or by death**. In other words, he has assurance that he has set his joy in the right place, so their prayers will be answered for him and he will be delivered from the temptation to dishonor his Lord in exchange for physical freedom. His heart is still set in accord with his life principle of glorifying the Lord regardless of the expectation of **life or death**. Paul is not considering denying **Christ**. He would much rather die. The deliverance he writes of in verse 19 is deliverance from failure to **magnify Christ with his body, whether by life or by death**.¹¹

1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

In this simple statement, the Apostle reveals the depths of his love for the Lord. This sentence, beginning with the word **for**, is an explanation of the life principle he gave in the previous verse, that

¹¹ Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, p. 97.

in life and in death he wants to glorify **Christ**. That is the only deliverance that matters to Paul. Even so, in verse 25 we understand that he was sure he would survive because that would be better for his partners, the congregation in Philippi. Nevertheless that is secondary to the simple fact that while he is alive he is dedicated to **Christ**, and when he dies it is for his **gain**. Expressions of the themes of life and death alternate back and forth in verses 20-24.¹²

In this attitude about life and death, he is urging his partners not to be anxious about his safety.

1:22 Now if I live on in the flesh, for me this will mean fruitful work. I do not know which I prefer.

Paul is so committed to the partnership relationships that he has, which call him to **fruitful work**, that he is torn between that and the gain of being with Christ.

1:23 So I am torn between the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, which would be very much better,

Here Paul explains a little of what he meant by “to die is gain” in verse 21. He is assured that dying, a very real possibility when imprisoned awaiting a Roman trial, would mean being **with Christ**, and that is **very much better**.

1:24 but staying on in the flesh is more necessary, because of you.

Paul puts their interests above his own personal preference, as he will teach them to do. He is committed to his Gospel partnership with them as long as the Lord gives him life.

1:25 So, convinced of this, I know that I shall remain, and remain on with all of you for your advancement and joy in the faith,

¹² O'Brien, *ad loc.*

Here Paul expresses confidence that indeed the Lord will grant him to live and serve together with them in the Gospel partnership.¹³ Paul summarizes his ministry with them with the term **advancement**, and the expression **joy in the faith**. Although it is not the central theme of this letter, **joy** is an important element in this letter. Paul will help his ministry partners find their **joy** in their **faith** later on in chapter 3, which is all an explanation of what 3:1 means with the command to rejoice *in the Lord*. See the notes on 2:2 below for more on the theme of **joy** in this letter.

The Pastoral Epistles, including 1 Timothy 1:3 and some historical records outside the New Testament, seem to indicate that Paul was freed from his first Roman imprisonment and was able to travel to Macedonia (and most likely Philippi) before being imprisoned again and martyred.¹⁴

1:26 so that your boast might abound in Christ Jesus by me through my presence again with you.

Paul explains what he meant in the previous verse when he wrote of being with them “for your advancement and joy in the faith.” People do boast, it is a normal human activity to take pride in particular things, abilities, and relationships. Paul wants to be there with them in Philippi to help them **boast in Christ Jesus**, and not in any religious compliance like the Galatians. Their **boast** abounding **in Christ Jesus** is the “advancement and joy in the faith” that Paul wanted to shape in them. He will do that very thing in this letter, but in the case of the Philippian congregation the written communication was meant to be accompanied by Paul's personal presence and ministry. The expression **that your boast might abound in Christ Jesus** would be an excellent summary of the entire purpose of Gospel ministry, and is wonderfully spoken of in Jeremiah 9:23-24, in which the LORD says “Let not the wise man

13 The source of this confidence seems to be his faith and the “inner dialog” that he has shared with his readers in the last several verses (O'Brien, *ad loc*). If the source of this conviction had been a revelation, it would have been appropriate for him to share that as well with his readers.

14 EBC *ad loc*. lists Clement of Rome's First Epistle to the Corinthians ch. 5, the Muratorian Canon, and Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* II.2.

boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight.”

1:27-30

Now, if we are partners in the Gospel, and such is my willingness to keep on living for you, I can ask you to stand firm and suffer with me for Him.

This call for Paul’s Gospel partners to be united and steadfast introduces chapters 2 and 3, where the Philippians will learn that the best Gospel partners humbly put the interests of others ahead of their own, and that steadfastness in glorying in Christ rather than in any human achievement characterizes the hearts of strong Gospel partners.

1:27 Only live your lives in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that whether coming and seeing you or being away I will hear concerning you, that you are standing firm in one spirit, struggling together as one for the faith of the Gospel,

Paul has been writing about his own situation there in chains, and whether he would be freed or executed. Now he shifts his attention to the congregation in Philippi, the other side of the partnership, so to speak. He insists that **whether** he is freed so he can minister to them face to face **or** he stays under house arrest, they need to conduct their lives appropriately.

Living our **lives in a manner worthy of the Gospel** is a common theme for Paul, as in Romans 12:1 and Ephesians 4:1. It is true that in the life of faith crises arise in which we need to pray and believe God in a dramatic situation that can only be resolved as an answer to prayer, but that life of faith is more especially a calling to live out our daily routine **in a manner worthy of the Gospel**. That means that our thoughts, attitudes, words, and deeds all take place in recognition of the truth of the **Gospel**, and are consistent with the **Gospel**. This requires faith, wisdom, and discipline. It also requires the help of other believers.

As this verse points out, people that live their **lives in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ** are doing that in unity with other believers. They are **standing firm in one spirit, struggling together as one**, not alone in study and meditation, but in the community of the Body of Christ. A plant that has healthy roots in good soil can thrive in the garden because of those roots. In the same way a believer lives in the world **in a manner worthy of the Gospel** because of the strength he gains in a healthy unified church.

This is the first indication that there is opposition which they need to struggle against. This is more developed in the next verse and in chapter 3.

Paul has not diverted from his central message of **Gospel** partnership. Their struggle is **for the faith of the Gospel**. If they walk worthily, then they will be effective **Gospel** partners with him. **1:28 and do not be afraid of anything from those that oppose you. This on the one hand will be evidence to them of destruction, and on the other hand to you of deliverance, and that¹⁵ from God.**

The missionary that wrote these verses had learned a great deal about suffering during the course of his ministry, and at this point he gives some of that insight to the congregation. He wants them to understand that their lack of fear towards their enemies should be compelling **evidence** of the fact that **God** is with the congregation and will bring **destruction** upon its enemies. Likewise their lack of fear is **evidence** that this **God** that gives such peace will also deliver the congregation from dishonoring God, the same **deliverance** Paul was assured of for himself in 1:19-20.

Just as the fearlessness of the congregation is **on the one hand evidence of destruction** to the enemies and **on the other hand evidence of deliverance** to the congregation, so in 2 Corinthians

15 Since this word is neuter, unlike **evidence, destruction, and deliverance**, it cannot refer specifically to any of those nouns, but must refer to the whole concept. It might therefore be translated “and all that from God” (O'Brien, *ad loc*).

2:15-16 the aroma of Christ is **on the one hand** the smell of death to those that are perishing and **on the other hand** the fragrance of life to those that are being saved.

1:29 This is because to you it has been given on behalf Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him,

The opposition they are facing should not cause them to fear, **because** that opposition, that suffering, has been **given** to them **by Christ**. Just as our believing in **Christ** is a gift of God's grace, so is the suffering we endure for Him. He grants the one for our eternal salvation, and the other for our present sanctification *and* to bring Gospel salvation to others. We are urged to be thankful for the second of these grace gifts in several passages including Matthew 5:10-12; Philippians 2:17-18; James 1:2-4; and 1 Peter 4:12-16. In Philippians 3:10 Paul wrote of his longing to know **Christ**, the power of His resurrection, and the participation in His sufferings.

This verse shows that the Philippian congregation was suffering, apparently from the enemies mentioned in verse 28. Verses 27-29 seem to refer to people that are persecuting the congregation, while 3:2, 4, and 18-19 seem to be warnings of a subtle danger of seduction into a false Gospel at the hands of the Judaizers that dogged Paul's steps in his missionary journeys, whose teachings made such serious inroads into the congregations of Galatia.

1:30 having the same struggle which you saw with me, and now hear about with me.

Opposition does not make Paul afraid, and he invites his partners in Gospel work to take the same attitude. He understands that for himself and for them, it is a gift of God. He has already demonstrated this exact attitude when he wrote in 1:18, "What then? Only that in every way, whether with false motive or true, Christ is preached. And in this I rejoice." Later in 3:10 we learn that Paul longs to share in Christ's sufferings, the sufferings they are experiencing.

In Acts 16 we read of the initial Gospel ministry in Philippi, and most likely the founding of the Philippian congregation. They **saw** Paul struggle with opposition then, and as they **hear** this letter read to them they know he is **now** struggling with opposition. So their

struggle against those that oppose them is a part of their participation with Paul in Gospel ministry. They are partners in Gospel adversity.

The readers of Paul's letter today should likewise not be afraid of adversity in Gospel ministry. These things are a gift from God and are not to be avoided. Partnership in the Gospel is a divine and ongoing work which should not be avoided because of opposition or a fear of loss.

2:1-4

I have just written of the struggle we have together in our Gospel partnership, but I also want to write you about the encouragement and comfort that helps us in our partnership.

As Paul continues his exhortation to the kind of life that will make their partnership in Gospel ministry all the more effective, he reminds them of the Gospel blessings they enjoy in Christ.

In the overall structure of Romans and Ephesians, after the blessings of the Gospel are explained, they become the basis for Paul's exhortation to Christian living. The same pattern is apparent within these few verses. *Since* there is such encouragement, comfort, fellowship, affection, and compassion for us in the Gospel, *therefore* we are urged to live a life of unity, love, and humility. With a profound understanding of the Gospel, with the humility that flows from that understanding, and with the fellowship of the Spirit we can truly live in loving unity!

2:1 If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort in love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,

There are certainly too many Christians who do not recognize the rich **encouragement** we have in knowing **Christ**, who take their **comfort** from other sources besides the **love** of God, and who prefer their **fellowship** outside of what **the Spirit** produces, but they are not the kind of Christians that make highly effective partners in Gospel ministry.

2:2 complete my joy: be of one mind, having the same love, united in spirit, having the same concern,

Paul asks them to **complete my joy** by living in unity, **love**, and humility. He uses **joy** and rejoice in two complementary ways in this letter. First, we should rejoice in who the Lord is and in all that He has done for us, that is, we should find our **joy** (1:25; 3:1; and 4:4) and our boasting (1:26 and 3:3) in the Lord and in the Gospel. Second, that **joy** (1:18; 2:2, 17-18; and 4:1) and our boasting (2:16 and 4:1) become **complete** as our partners in Gospel work live their lives in harmony with the implications of the Gospel. We should remember that Paul's letter to the Philippian congregation is not primarily

about **joy**, it is about the Gospel Partnership he has with them, and about making that partnership more effective. So as that partnership prospers there is great **joy** to be found in the Gospel, and there is a “completed” **joy** to be found when one’s Gospel partners are **united in spirit**. It should be clear that without **joy** in the Lord and in the Gospel, any **joy** in ministry would be without a sufficient foundation, and in danger of collapse.

The basic command to **be of one mind** is further elaborated upon in the rest of verse 2 and verses 3-4.

2:3 never with selfish ambition or vainglory, but in humility of mind considering one another more important than oneself.

The unity called for in the previous verse, the unity that would make Paul’s joy complete, is so easily destroyed whenever we consider ourselves **more important than** the people we interact with. **Ambition** to promote ourselves, however well approved it may be in our culture, is nevertheless destructive. **Vainglory**,¹⁶ the pursuit of honor from men, does not build healthy lives. We really grow as we simply decide that others around us are **more important than** ourselves. This is of course the great irony of the Christian life. As the Lord taught us in Mark 9:35, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.” Paul has already supported this exhortation with the negative example of those that preach out of self-interest (1:15-16), and the positive example of himself (1:12-26). He is about to support that exhortation with the positive examples of the Lord Jesus Christ (2:6-11) and Timothy (2:19-24).

2:4 Do not be watching out for your own interests, but each also watching out for the interests of others.

This verse explains what it means to “consider one another more important than oneself.” Doing this is much more difficult than understanding what it means. Our opportunities for applying this verse are endless, and our excuses for not applying it are abundant. This radical call to service and humility is only slightly toned

¹⁶ This word, which literally means “empty glory,” refers to “a vain or exaggerated self-evaluation” or “empty conceit” (BDAG *ad loc*).

down by the single word **also**. In using that word Paul acknowledges that we have a basic responsibility to take care of ourselves, but the balance of the verse indicates that we will look out for ourselves sufficiently, without any encouragement from him to do so. When the Lord said “Love your neighbor as yourself,” He told us that we already love ourselves with sufficient diligence, and simply do not need any encouragement from Him in *that* direction!

2:5-11

In fact, the ultimate example of humility, suffering, and then exaltation is Christ. Follow that example.

Paul's command to not be looking out for our own interests, to not be selfish, is certainly not a concept foreign to our faith. It lies at the very core of our faith, at the cross. Paul insists that all who have believed in Christ, who have been saved by His work on the cross, should likewise adopt the attitude that took Him to the cross. We should do this, not to be saved, or to prove we are saved, but in gratitude, *because* we are saved, thus becoming more effective partners in Gospel ministry for *others*.

Because of their style and content, verses 6-11 are sometimes presented as poetry or as a hymn. Unlike for instance in Ephesians 5:14, where Paul writes, “This is why it is said: ‘Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you,’” here there are no clues for us in the text as to whether this was an early Christian hymn or poem, well known to the congregation, which Paul then quotes, or something that he himself wrote particularly for this letter. However, if these words were written by someone else and then adopted by Paul, he must have done so because he approved of how they expressed what needed to be said. Verses 6-11, whatever their source, help us understand what our Savior did, so that we can more fully adopt the attitude of selflessness we need to have.

The parallels between Philippians 2:6-11 and the “Servant Songs” of Isaiah 43:13-53:12 are striking. Both speak so powerfully of humiliation all the way to death, and of the exaltation that results from that humiliation. This relationship between these two passages is strengthened by the fact that Philippians 2:10-11 clearly draws from

Isaiah 45:23. The substitutionary atonement so obvious in Isaiah 53 is not mentioned in Philippians 2:6-11, but that might simply be because the atonement is outside our humble service, so it would be inappropriate for Paul to write that we should follow Christ's example in that.¹⁷

2:5 For you should let this same attitude be in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

The distilled theological truths that follow are abused if their use is limited to building our understanding of the incarnation, death and exaltation of **Christ Jesus**. These truths are written here as a guide to the **attitude** of selflessness that we are called upon to have in 2:1-4.

The word order of the following translation of verses 6-11 may seem somewhat stilted in English because some of the Greek word order is preserved, carrying over some of the poetic feel of the original.

2:6 Who in the form of God existing, did not regard being equal with God as something to be grasped,

This verse assumes that Christ was and is the eternal **God**. Who else could have been **existing in the** glorious and shining **form** or outward appearance of **God**?

The passage is saying that even though Christ had all the glory of divinity up to the time of the incarnation, He was willing to exchange that for the **form** of a slave. Thus this is the perfect illustration for the kind of selflessness we are called upon to manifest. We need to imitate the attitude of the glorious Lord of Lords, who was willing to somehow shed all that glory and take on the outward **form** of a slave, for us.

He did not think that such glory, that outward **form of God**, was something precious that had to be clung to even at the cost of disobeying “the One who sent Him,” to use the expression so common in the Gospel of John. He was willing to let go of that outward glory for the task set before Him by the Father.

17 Feinberg, *Trinity Journal of Theology* 1:1, Spring 1980, pp. 36-40.

**2:7 but Himself He emptied,
the form of a slave taking on,
in the likeness of men coming.**

The question of precisely what Christ **emptied Himself** of has occupied theologians for many centuries. The most straightforward answer might simply be that He **emptied Himself** of the “form of God” mentioned in the previous verse. That is, He somehow let go of the outward manifestation of the glory of God, and took on the outward **form of a slave**, the least glorious human status.

In His incarnation He took on **the likeness of men**. This expression emphasizes the similarity He had with all **men**, but does not require a complete match with all mankind. This may be to allow for the fact the Jesus Christ, although He became truly human, was not exactly like everybody else in that He never sinned.

The expression **taking on** contrasts sharply with **existing** in verse 6. While He eternally exists as God, at one point in time He took on His humanity.

**2:8 And in appearance being found as man,
He humbled Himself,
becoming obedient to death,
even death on a cross.**

Here the word **appearance** refers simply to the outward visible **appearance**. What people saw was a **man**.

The expression “humility of mind” in verse 3 and the expression **He humbled Himself** here use the same root word. He did this out of **obedience**, likewise we need to obey this calling to unity, humility, and love.

When we read verses 1-4 we are likely to ask, “Yes, but to what *extent* are we to look out for others rather than ourselves? Should not we be looking out for ourselves to some extent?” However, in the example set before us, the example that we are to follow, He was **obedient to death, even death on a cross**. He was sent to take upon Himself the form of the lowest status of humanity, a slave. He

also was sent to the most cruel and shameful form of death known in the Roman Empire, **death on a cross**.

2:9 Therefore also God Him exalted, and gave to Him a Name which is above every name,

The connecting word used, **therefore**, should not be overlooked here. Jesus Christ obeyed the Father, and *because* of that obedience, **God exalted Him**. Likewise we read in passages like Matthew 23:12; James 4:10; and 1 Peter 5:6 that we will be **exalted** if we humble ourselves. Here too, the Lord Jesus is our example.

God exalted Christ in several stages. The first stage was the resurrection (Romans 1:4). At some time prior to His ascension He received “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). He was certainly exalted in the ascension (Ephesians 4:8-10). Finally, as the reference to Isaiah 45:23 in 2:10-11 shows, this exaltation will continue until the Second Coming and the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God (Daniel 7:9-27; Matthew 24:29-31; 1 Corinthians 15:22-28; and Revelation 19).¹⁸

Before He was obedient to death, He received the **name** “Jesus,” so that is probably not the **name** intended in this passage, even though it is mentioned in the next verse. Verse 11 suggests that the **name** given here is “Lord,” or the related Hebrew name of God in the Old Testament, and Paul would understand that as the most exalted **name**. This text seems to be saying that despite the equality of the Son with the Father, the Son did not possess the **name** “Lord” prior to the cross. At any rate, in the Bible and the cultures around the New and Old Testaments, the term **name** could carry with it the idea of position, dignity, or office, as in 2 Samuel 7:13; Ephesians 1:21 and Hebrews 1:4. Also, in Jewish culture, the term “The Name” was commonly used as a reference to God, as in Acts 5:41 and 3 John 7¹⁹.

2:10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

¹⁸ Feinberg, *Trinity Journal of Theology* 1:1, Spring 1980, p. 44.

¹⁹ EBC *ad loc.*

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

The exaltation of verse 9 has already happened, but universal worship in acknowledgment of that exaltation awaits the end of the age. Some of those knees will **bow** with ready thankfulness, and others only by force, but all will **bow**.

2:11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This worship is related to Isaiah 45:23, in which **God** says, “Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.” This aspect of Christ's exaltation clearly takes place in an age in which everyone will worship the true **God**. It awaits the end of the age for fulfillment.

It is **to the glory of God the Father** that **Jesus Christ** be glorified. There is no competition between the Son and **the Father**. This should remind us of our calling to consider one another more important than ourselves.

2:12-18

I am explaining this theology to you now so that you will be Light and Life to the world around you. I will boast and we will rejoice together – are we not partners in Gospel work?

The teaching of how Christ exchanged His glory for the humility of a human being, how He obediently died on a cross, and further, about how He was “super-exalted,” was all given as an example for us to follow. Focusing on that word “obedience,” Paul urges the congregation to more consistent and deeper obedience.

2:12 Therefore my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now all the more in my absence, with fear and trembling accomplish your own deliverance.

This encouragement to ever more consistent obedience is rooted in the rich theological truths Paul has just written to them. He might have said, “Therefore, since what I have just written is true, don't just obey me, don't just follow this preacher when he is with you, but follow Christ in the great example He has given of putting the

interests of others ahead of our own.” While he wants to encourage their Gospel partnership, he also wants to discourage dependence upon him.

So, as the congregation imitates the humility of Christ, they can **accomplish** their **own deliverance** in the midst of the trouble and persecution they are experiencing. This is certainly not about eternal salvation.²⁰ It is about some sort of **deliverance** that they can **accomplish** through the suffering brought on by those that oppose them. The specific kind of **deliverance** Paul is writing of is already clear from the other passages in which he has written of **deliverance** in this letter, that is, 1:19-20 concerning himself and 1:27-30 concerning them. As Gospel partners, Paul and the congregation need to be accomplishing a **deliverance** from dishonoring Christ, whether in life or in death.

The nature of this task can be seen more clearly from the context of this command. In 2:5 Paul called upon the congregation to “let this same attitude be in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,” then he wrote about the humble obedience of the Lord that led to the suffering of the cross, and then about the exaltation that Christ earned by His humble obedience. After all that, he gives them this command which begins with the word **therefore**. If because of His humble obedience, God delivered Him to exaltation, you also should be humbly obedient into suffering, and God working in you will deliver you from dishonoring Him and on into an exaltation.

This will only happen **with fear and trembling**. They need to **fear** God and shudder at the very idea of dishonoring God.

2:13 For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

In stark contrast to the fact that they will have to be obedient to produce their own deliverance from dishonoring God, Paul encour-

²⁰ Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, pp. 96-100, and Robert Wilkin, “Working Out Your Salvation: Philippians 2:12,” *The Grace Evangelical Society News*, May-June 1993, pp. 2-3.

ages them by reminding them that **God** is working in them so that they have the **will** and the strength to do **His good pleasure**.

2:14 **Do everything without grumbling or arguing**, Whether undercover **grumbling** or out in the open **arguing**, disunity is forbidden.

2:15 **so that you might be blameless and pure, children of God unblemished in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the sky**, They are **children of God**. If they will cease their grumbling and arguing, they will be **blameless and pure children of God!** Of course positionally they are already **blameless and pure**, but Paul would like to see their heavenly position work its way down to their earthly practice!

Paul wants them to be **blameless, pure, and unblemished** on the day when we will receive what is due us “for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

The beautiful image of the congregation as **stars** shining in a black **sky** is reminiscent of Daniel 12:3 which reads, “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.” Some have suggested that this figure of speech refers to evangelistic activity, in that the **stars** are shining Gospel light upon a dark world. However, Paul speaks of the **unblemished** congregation (like **stars**) being in the midst of the **crooked generation** (like the night **sky**). The **stars** do not illumine the night **sky**. They do just the opposite, showing how dark it is. Just as **stars** stand in contrast to the dark **sky**, so the **unblemished** congregation is to be in stark contrast to the **perverted generation**. This is not about evangelism, it is about being utterly different from the sinful society around us. Part of the difference we have with the world is the Gospel we proclaim, but that is not the emphasis of this image.

2:16 **being intent upon the word of life, which means a boast for me in the Day of Christ, that I neither ran in vain nor labored in vain.**

The verb translated **being intent upon** has about eleven definitions listed for it in the Greek lexicon.²¹ Among them all, the two that might fit this context are “to hold out, present, offer” and “to direct one's mind to a thing, to attend, to be intent upon.” Basically this phrase here either means “holding forth the Word” or “holding fast to the Word,” so it is either about doing evangelism or being steadfastly faithful to the Word of God. Because the verb itself could easily have either meaning, the near and more distant contexts must be considered to decide which of these meanings is meant here.

The near context speaks of not grumbling, of being blameless, and of shining like stars in contrast to a dark night sky. That certainly fits well with the idea of **being intent upon the word of life**. If this phrase were to be translated “holding forth the word of life,” it would be introducing a new concept. It is not likely that Paul would introduce a new concept with a verb that is so ambiguous.

The more distant context is the entire letter to the Philippians. In it there are many calls to serious discipleship entailing obedience, but in the whole letter 1:27 is the closest thing to an actual command that the congregation be preaching the Gospel, and it only says, “that you are standing firm in one spirit, struggling together as one for the faith of the Gospel,” or perhaps, “that you are standing firm in one spirit, struggling together in Gospel faith.”

So, given the context of the passage and the context of the entire letter, it seems best to translate this passage **being intent upon the word of life**.²²

As Paul draws near the end of these exhortations to his Gospel partners, he reflects personally on the impact their obedience will have on him. Their obedience will be *his* **boast in the Day of Christ**. The success of this Gospel partnership will bring God-glorifying boasting **in the Day of Christ**.

21 Liddell and Scott, *ad loc.*

22 That would be against the KJV, the NEB, and the NIV, but with the RSV, the ESV, the NASB, and the NET translations. Swift (p. 245) agrees.

If the Greek war heroes of the *Iliad* were devoted to battle and contest to collect the war trophies with which they were honored by men and in which they boasted, the Jewish apostle Paul was devoted to serve in such a way that on that **Day** he would be honored by the one Man whose approval he sought, the One who had died and obtained perfect righteousness for Paul, for the Philippians, and for every believer in **Christ**.

So Paul was motivated by the anticipation of **the Day of Christ**. He clearly wants to have his boasts ready for that day. He writes a great deal about that **Day** in his letters. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 9:24-27; Colossians 2:18; 2 Timothy 2:3-6, 11-13; and also 4:8 are all about how motivated he is because of that expectation, or how he motivates others by reminding them of that coming **Day** when believers' actions will be assessed, not to demonstrate that they are really believers, but so that rewards for fruitful labor are properly allocated by the King.

In Philippians 1:6 he wrote, “the One who began among you a good work will bring it to completion all the way until the Day of Christ Jesus.” Perhaps rewards for them and for him is the completion of the “good work” that Paul mentioned in 1:6.

There is also a hint of a negative side here. Paul implies that if they grumble and argue, if they are not blameless, pure, and unblemished when their works are evaluated **in the Day of Christ**, then sadly he will have run **in vain** and **labored in vain**. Paul feels that he would be bringing an empty **boast** to that **Day**, if all his running and laboring in Philippi only produced a grumbling and arguing congregation. As he wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:12-13, he hopes for himself and for the congregations that the “fire” of that **Day** will reveal “gold, silver,” and “precious stones” rather than “wood, hay, or straw.” What a joy that will be!

Paul was motivated in his life and ministry by the prospect of having his Lord and Savior rewarding him for his faithful ministry on that **Day**. However, that motivation would be one of several motivations which would all be secondary to the motivation of thankfulness for the grace of God which qualified him to even be present on

that **Day**. Paul never said, “The Gospel has completed the joy that I have because you are living for the Lord.” What he did write in 2:2 was “make my joy complete by being like-minded...” This would seem to indicate that joy in effective ministry should be *secondary* or *supplemental* to our joy in the Gospel.

Furthermore, serving to gain a reward from the Lord would be quite different from serving to gain salvation, or even to gain God's love. This can be illustrated easily enough if we think about a child and his parents. A child that grows up feeling that he must perform well to earn his parents' love grows up with a painful burden that may never be lifted. However, in a healthy family parents love their children simply because they are their children, not because they perform well. The children know this and they perform well, not to earn their parents' love, but because their parents love them. Their parents reward them in their successes, and discipline them when they do wrong, but always out of a heart full of love. That rewarded or disciplined child never doubts his or her place in the family, and the effects of reward or discipline are heightened by the love the child senses. He or she will say, “My daddy loves me and he was happy that I did that!” When disciplined, he or she may say, “My daddy loves me and he doesn't want me to do that anymore, so I won't ever do that again....”

Likewise in our relationship with our heavenly Father, if we feel that we must work harder to experience God's love, we place ourselves under a burden that can never be satisfied, because our hard work does not bring God's love. However, if we delight in God's love as expressed in the Gospel, if we rejoice in the Lord, then the power of His discipline and His reward is heightened by the love we enjoy.

2:17 But if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and I rejoice together with you all.

As the Day of Christ and Paul's boasts on that Day come to his mind, he considers his own death. He uses a wonderful figure of speech to tell his readers how he views that prospect. He looks at himself as a **drink offering** which is **poured out**. The figure of speech is extended: this **drink offering** is being poured out **upon the sacrifice and service of your faith**. This might also be translated

upon the sacrifice even the **service of your faith**. As he builds them up in their **faith**, that is, as he works towards drawing them to a more mature **faith**, his life is like a **drink offering** that infuses into a grain **offering** and disappears there. In this way he and they are living according to the model of Christ that is explained in 2:5-8.

This for Paul is a joy not a burden or a loss, and he wants to **rejoice together with all** of them. Here Paul restates what he wrote in 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

2:18 **Have that same joy, and rejoice together with me.**

His view of death is so different from the normal human way of viewing death. For Paul the idea of being utterly “poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service” of their faith is a cause for rejoicing, and he is calling his Gospel partners into that same **joy**. He wants his rejoicing to be mirrored with their rejoicing. He wants to draw them into this celebration of their partnership in the Gospel and the end times boasting it should entail.

2:19-24

Yes, it is true that I may soon die, so I think of my protégé, Timothy, who serves the Lord selflessly. I want to send him to you, to strengthen our partnership. He will assure me of how you all are doing. But right now, in my situation, I just cannot spare this man until I know how it will go with my imprisonment.

2:19 **I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I myself might be encouraged knowing your situation.**

Paul has been writing quite a bit about himself, and he seem to realize that it has been too long since he heard an accurate assessment of how the Philippian congregation is doing. He writes as if he is sure the report will be encouraging, but we are left to wonder if he himself is just being optimistic, or whether he himself might have some doubt the report will be positive. At any rate, **Timothy** would be the right man to go and assess the situation.

2:20 **For I have no one of like heart and mind, who will genuinely be concerned for your situation,**

Timothy really stood out among the disciples who were on Paul's team. Perhaps there were others of similarly good **heart and mind**, but for whatever reason they were not available. Perhaps they had been sent out on other tasks.

2:21 for they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.

Paul, who spoke so positively of how the Gospel was advancing even though he was in chains, was not just putting a “positive spin” on everything so that the Philippians would not feel bad about him being under arrest again. He was no blind optimist. It must have deeply grieved him to write this verse. Although he knew that Timothy had a deep understanding of and commitment to “the things that really matter,” Paul could not say that the other believers around him had that commitment. Although capable of being Paul's emissary to Philippi, we can almost imagine that one brother felt he really should stay in Rome to help with the family business, another could not leave because he was preoccupied with romance, another thought Philippi too distant from home, and yet another thought he could not live in the primitive environment of a colony. Another, though he was very diligent in getting the Gospel to his own people in Rome, was not interested in getting that same benefit to “those people off in the colony.” They were all seeking **after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus**. They did not have that understanding of “the things that really matter.” May we all understand the things that really matter, and may these excuses never be heard in our congregations when we are challenged to follow Paul's footsteps as missionaries.

2:22 Now you know his proven character, how as a child with his father he has served with me in the Gospel.

Timothy is brought on to Paul's missionary team in Acts 16 during Paul's second journey, and he is mentioned by name in every subsequent chapter of Acts except the very last chapter, in all six times. Paul also mentions Timothy by name eighteen times in his own letters, including the two that he wrote directly to Timothy.

As he opened this letter, Paul wrote of himself and Timothy as “slaves of Jesus Christ.” Going into more detail here, he tells us they have something like a **father-son** relationship. The Philippian

congregation already knew Timothy and his relationship with Paul from the times they had been together in Philippi, but Paul reminds them, perhaps so that they will be even more open to his ministry, despite his lesser status and younger age.

2:23 So on the one hand he is the one I hope to send as soon as I see how my situation turns out.

As Paul summarizes his plans about sending Timothy, the delicate issue of his **situation** in chains has to come up. As he writes, he cannot imagine being without the help of his protégé, and despite the assurances he has already given and gives in the next verse, it is hard to be absolutely sure about what the authorities will do with his case.

2:24 On the other hand, I am convinced in the Lord that even I myself will come quickly.

Though not complete, this is the same assurance Paul expressed in 1:19, 24, and 25.

2:25-30

But I have to send back to you Epaphroditus, your missionary to me. Although I appreciate his willingness to serve, even to die, he is just too worried about you all. Honor him.

In striking contrast, Paul now tells them of one of their own number whom he is sending back to them because he is hard to have around.

2:25 Now I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier – your missionary and minister of my need,

For reasons that he will make clear, Paul has deemed it **necessary** to **send** back to them one whom they had sent to serve Paul's needs. This man is only mentioned in Philippians (in this verse and in 4:18), so we do not know for certain that the Philippian congregation sent him to take care of Paul because Paul was under house arrest, but that would have been a reasonable thing for them to do. He probably had not been with Paul for too long, because his coming and the gifts he brought seem to be what Paul was referring to

in 4:10 when he wrote, “Now I rejoice greatly in the Lord that now at last you have renewed your concern for me.”

Paul certainly does not speak ill of **Epaphroditus**. He refers to him as his **brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier**. He is also called **minister of my need**. It is possible that the congregation found a suitable young man and sent him simply to see to it that Paul was well fed while he was under house arrest. There is no evidence to support the idea that **Epaphroditus** was an elder or pastor in Philippi, and the man's unacceptable worrying seems to indicate something of a lack of spiritual depth.

2:26 because he is longing for you all and troubled, because you heard that he was ill.

Here Paul gives the problem, but only in the next two verses do we learn why his past illness, his **longing**, and his being **troubled** are the reasons Paul actually has to send him back to his sending church.

2:27 For indeed he was ill, he was near death. However, God had mercy on him – not only on him but also on me, so that I might not have grief upon grief.

Paul confirms what they had already heard, their missionary was **ill**, in fact **he was near death**. Then he immediately relieves their concern by telling them that **God had mercy on him**.

He does not say what **grief** he is already experiencing, but it is easy to guess that he is indirectly reminding them that it is already hard enough to be under house arrest and facing a capital trial in Rome!

2:28 Therefore with more earnestness I send him, so that seeing him again you might be glad, and I might be more free of pain.²³

Epaphroditus worried that the church at Philippi was continually worrying about him. Epaphroditus' worrying was excessive and inappropriate for that situation, and Paul wanted to quickly return him to his sending church. Paul saw that Epaphroditus just would not entrust the Philippian congregation to the Lord's care. That servant was fretting too much about their worries over him, so Paul graciously but firmly sent him home. If, as some suppose, the reason Paul sent him back was simply so that they could see that he was no longer ill, Paul could have simply told them that Epaphroditus had recovered, and they would have believed him.

2:29 Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold such as him in honor,

Although he was too troubled for Paul to have on his team, he is nevertheless very clear that Epaphroditus should be honored by the congregation, and he expects them to welcome him joyfully.

There are honorable men that are just not qualified for high stress cross-cultural Gospel work, and Paul was not afraid to say so.

2:30 because on account of the work of Christ he came near to death, having no concern for his own life so that he might fulfill what was lacking in your service to me.

Paul speaks highly of this man, never questioning his devotion or willingness to suffer. The man just had a serious problem with worry,

23 This key word (here translated **more free of pain**) seems to be Paul's clearest expression of the reason he is returning Epaphroditus to the church in Philippi. The word is composed of three parts. The root means "pain of mind or spirit, grief, sorrow." The suffix generally adds the element "more." Finally, the prefix means "without," or "free of." When all three parts are then "reassembled," the meaning is clear: Paul is sending Epaphroditus back so that he can be relieved of the **pain** of mind that he has while Epaphroditus is there! This does sound harsh to our ears, but it has to be taken in the context of the generosity of Paul's other comments about the man. Neither Paul's negative nor his positive comments should be softened.

so serious a problem that it brought too much trouble on Paul and he had to send him home.

Nevertheless, the Philippians – of all people – should give their missionary a warm and honorable welcome. After all, he was just fulfilling **what was lacking in their service to Paul**. The details behind this reminder to the congregation are now enigmatic. Philippians 4:15-16 indicates that the Philippian congregation had been financially generous to Paul in the past, so it does not seem likely that **what was lacking in your service to me** refers to lack of financial support. Since the same word for **lacking** was used in 1 Corinthians 16:17 concerning the “lack” that was made up for by the arrival of three men from Corinth, it seems like the “lack” that Paul refers to here was the lack of their ability to care for him while under house arrest.

There is an interesting comparison between these men on Paul’s team. Paul simply could not spare Timothy, but he quickly sent back worrying Epaphroditus, with an honorable discharge. To think in modern terms, one wonders what Paul might have put in these two men’s personnel files.

3:1-3

So the crucial thing I want to remind you about is that you must put your joy and boasting in the Lord, and not in anything of the flesh – not circumcision, not anything. Get your identity from the Gospel.

3:1 From now on, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. Writing the same things to you is not troublesome for me, and it is more certain for you.

All of chapter 3 is an explanation by Paul of what it means to **rejoice in the Lord**. He wants us to understand how to learn to make our salvation in Christ, our relationship with Christ, and the service that flows from that salvation, our joy. Just as **rejoice in the Lord** looks forward and summarizes chapter 3, the statement in 4:1, “in this way stand firm in the Lord,” looks backwards and summarizes chapter 3.

Paul has already shown the congregation how he rejoices that the Gospel is being preached (1:18), and how he rejoices in his ministry (2:17), and called them to **rejoice** with him in 2:18. Even so, with his warm pastoral heart he does not hesitate to write this out again, so that they, and we, see Christ and the Gospel as our best boast and our best joy, in fact our only safe boast and our only safe joy, apart from, of course, ministry that flows out of that boasting and rejoicing in the Lord.

Just as Paul has exhorted them with a command to humility, a negative example, and three positive examples, here too he gives the command to **rejoice in the Lord**, and he will give the negative example of having confidence in the flesh in 3:2-7, and the positive example of enjoying the righteousness of Christ in 3:9.

3:2 Consider the dogs, consider the evil workers, consider the Castration.

As Paul begins to teach on what it means to “rejoice in the Lord,” he first points out the greatest example of those that do not rejoice in the Lord at all. They rejoice in their own achievement, especially their own supposed ability to obey the Law of Moses. In writing about them, Paul suddenly uses very strong terms. **Dogs** is of course very negative to both Jewish and Gentile ears. The sense of **evil workers** is plain and literal. Further, to refer to the party of

the Circumcision with the figurative wordplay **Castration** shows us something of how adamantly Paul opposed their teachings.

Paul preached a Gospel of grace, teaching that sinners through *no activity* of their own may be given the actual life and righteousness of God Himself. This gift is possible, and is in no way opposed to the justice of God, because of the work of Christ upon the cross. Because Christ took upon Himself the punishment that we deserved, God can freely share with us Christ's righteousness. The *only* condition that is imposed upon this gift is that we believe in Him. It is not a work; it is a question of a decision to be made. It simply does not concern one's strength, wisdom, discipline, or other resources. This believing is in radical contrast with human work or action, as Paul emphasized in Romans 4:4-5, which says, "Now to the one who works, his pay is not credited due to grace but due to obligation. But *to the one who does not work*, but believes in the one who declares the ungodly righteous, his faith is credited as righteousness." The problem with the teachings of the Circumcision was that they added circumcision and other Old Testament commands to the only condition described above. *Any* addition to grace alone distorts the Gospel and feeds human pride, pushing us away from the thankfulness to God, reliance upon Him, and true humility which together bring real spiritual growth and effective ministry.

In Acts 11:2 and 15:1 we read that some Jewish believers in Christ held to the idea that Gentiles that came to believe should also follow the Law of Moses. In fact, in Acts 15 the leadership of the church in Jerusalem took a formal stand against that view, and in Galatians the seriousness of that view's effect upon some of the local congregations is also painfully evident, since that entire letter is Paul's response to some churches that let themselves be led astray by the teaching of the party of the Circumcision. However, there is simply not enough information in Philippians to confirm more than the fact that Paul considered them a threat to the congregation. Whether they were active in Philippi or merely likely to go there is not clear from the text.²⁴

24 "No Confidence In The Flesh: The Meaning and Function of Philippians 3:2-21." David A. deSilva, *Trinity Journal* 15:1 (Spring 1994) p. 2.

For the Apostle Paul, the Judaizers were entirely different from those Gospel preachers in 1:14-17 who preached for wrong reasons. Those in 1:14-17 were preaching the true Gospel in an inappropriate way, while the Circumcision was preaching a false and destructive imitation of the Gospel.

Their boast was in their achievements in the flesh, their supposed compliance with the Law of Moses. Since we may not be tempted to boast in compliance to the Law of Moses, perhaps we would do well to inventory our hearts (which are invisible) and our homes (which are visible) and look for those boasts that are outside of Christ and His Gospel.

3:3 For we, we are the Circumcision, we are the ones serving in the Spirit of God and boasting in Christ Jesus, putting no confidence in the flesh.

Paul exudes the joy of the Lord as he emphatically asserts that he and all who have sided with him in the pure Gospel against the Judaizers are the only ones with the valid claim to be known as the Party of the **Circumcision**. He explains this idea in more detail in Colossians 2:11, writing, “In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision accomplished without hands, by the stripping off of the sinful body that is the flesh, the circumcision that Christ accomplishes....” See also Romans 2:28-29. This idea of an inward **circumcision** is also in the Old Testament, particularly in Leviticus 26:41 and Ezekiel 44:7.²⁵

Paul strongly asserts that unlike the party of the Circumcision, they were the ones **boasting in Christ Jesus**, rather than in some human accomplishment. What a profound difference in life, to exult in our Savior, rather than in this and that “success,” here and there where we have met some arbitrary religious standards of conduct, all the time trying to cover over the unseen sins of our hearts. That insidious kind of hypocrisy appears to have also been our Lord's target in passages like Luke 10:25-37 (the Good Samaritan story, told to a scribe that “wanted to justify himself”) and Luke 18:18-25 (the conversation with the rich young ruler that loved his wealth). He served His hearers by helping them understand that

25 EBC *ad loc.*

they were far from successful in their attempts at obeying the Law, because of their hatred of Samaritans or their love of wealth.

3:4-9

Let me tell you my own story. I was full of self-confidence, but now I confidently regard all that as rubbish, and Christ as my righteousness, my salvation.

3:4 Although I could have reasons for confidence also in the flesh. If someone else supposes he can put confidence in the flesh, I more so.

As was stated earlier, all of chapter 3 is an explanation by Paul of what it means to rejoice in the Lord. Here Paul is continuing his explanation of what it means to find our joy in the Lord by dealing with whether or not we can have joy, boasting, or confidence in anything other than the Lord. He knows from experience all about what it means to have **confidence in the flesh**. By birth and by religious attainment he has already outdone them all, as he will explain in some detail in the verses that follow.

3:5 Circumcised on the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews – regarding the Law, a Pharisee;

Since the ultimate example of those that boast in the flesh and therefore not in the Lord was the Party of the Circumcision, and since their ultimate boast was their physical circumcision, Paul reminds them that he too was **circumcised** according to **the Law, on the eighth day**, in accord with Leviticus 12:3.

It may be that Paul mentions that he is a member of the tribe of **Benjamin** because that tribe had a special status in **the nation of Israel**. **Benjamin** himself was the beloved second and youngest son of Rachel. It was only Judah and **Benjamin** that stayed with the house of David when the tribes of the North seceded (1 Kings 12:21), and **Benjamin** was untainted by the sin of Judah against Tamar (Genesis 38). Also, **Benjamin** and Judah seem to have been the core of the restored nation under Zerubbabel (Ezra 4:1). However, that tribe also had its shameful episodes. King Saul was from the tribe of **Benjamin**, and it was Benjamites that sinned so dreadfully against the Levite's concubine in Judges 19. So perhaps the

tribe of **Benjamin** did not have special prestige among the Jews, and Paul was just being specific about his family heritage.²⁶

The expression **a Hebrew of Hebrews** seems to indicate that he was an exemplary Jew. The proofs he has already given concern his parentage, and he continues with proofs concerning his own decisions and performance.

He was a member of the **Pharisees**. They were more numerous than the Sadducees and more strict in their application of **the Law** of Moses. They were also more geographically dispersed in synagogues, while the Sadducees' power was based in the Temple in Jerusalem.

3:6 regarding zeal, a persecutor of the church; regarding the righteousness that comes by the Law, blameless.

When Paul relates the story of his conversion (Acts 22 and 26, as well as in Galatians 1), he always includes the fact that he was **a persecutor of the church**. At the time he must have considered his efforts against the **church** to be like Phinehas in Numbers 25, so that he felt he was serving the Lord God of Israel.

Paul did not claim that the **righteousness that comes by the Law** was worth anything before God. In fact in passages like Galatians 2:16 he explicitly rejects that idea. Here he simply says that whatever sort of **righteousness** there was in it, he had it all.

3:7 Whatever was gain to me, I have come to count as loss because of Christ.

Paul is giving his personal testimony concerning what he has come to understand about where our confidence should be. He used to put confidence in his lineage and his works, but then at some point he came to realize that all those sorts of things are of no benefit at all, in fact they are **loss**. Confidence in that sort of thing actually works against us, moving us farther from the confidence in **Christ** Jesus which both brings eternal life and develops our ability to rejoice in Him.

²⁶ EBC, *ad loc.*

3:8 Furthermore, I consider all things to be loss on account of the far better knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and I consider them to be refuse, with the result that I have gained Christ,

Paul is not saying we must utterly renounce everything, consider everything in our lives to be trash, so that we can be saved. If that were the case, we must for instance look at the dinner that has been prepared for us, and say, "Ah, this dinner is rubbish, it has no value. I only value my Savior, and I think everything else in the world is trash." Those that would read this text this way imply that without this ascetic attitude, we are doomed to hell.

Paul does not consider being Jewish or obeying the Law to be evil, but he clearly understands that these things are utterly worthless to trust in for our salvation or our standing with God. As means of salvation, as things to put your confidence in, these things are all as useful as **refuse**.

We need look no further than the very next verse to be reminded that Paul is not advocating becoming a hermit as a requirement for salvation. All these things need to be renounced as means of salvation, but to carry this verse on to mean that the only way to be saved is to utterly remove ourselves from every bit of wealth or status in our lives is to make a new work that must be performed in order to earn salvation!

Both the expressions "gaining Christ" and "being found in Him" seem to refer to initial salvation *and* the life long process of gaining maturity in Christ. Indeed, the word "gain" can refer to gaining a profit from an initial capital. It is used that way four times in the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30. If that is so, then Paul is saying that as he continues to reject everything that the Judaizers put their confidence in, he gains an ever closer relationship with Christ. The aspect of salvation is more fully developed in verse 9, while the aspect of growing in an ever closer relationship is developed in verse 10.

By writing **on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things**, Paul reminds us in a general way, without going into specif-

ics, of the personal losses he himself has experienced because of his relationship with **Christ**. He is not, however, claiming that he deserves to be saved because of all the sacrifice he has made!

Although the irreligious, with their own various forms of pride, would benefit wonderfully from hearing and believing this passage, it is particularly meant not for them but for the religious. It is not here for those that are religious in any religion, it is meant here for hard working, serious, committed Christians. The danger is that a subtle but terrible shift can take place in our hearts, so that the hard work which earlier in our Christian experience we did out of thankfulness to our Savior, we now do without the thankfulness. Worse yet, we find ourselves feeling we deserve some status and respect from those around us because of all our hard work!

3:9 and am found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God, by faith.

Paul already has this righteousness, and has already been **found in Him**. Here he emphasizes the Gospel, that **righteousness** given to believers is **from God**, not from any effort at obedience to **the Law**.

3:10-14

Christ is my salvation, but He is also my goal, because I press on to win the prize He has for His obedient servants.

3:10 I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the participation in His sufferings, becoming conformed to His death,

In verse 8 the idea of gaining more of Christ was presented. Here this idea is more fully developed. Knowing Christ can refer to simply being redeemed and in the family of God, as in Jeremiah 24:7; 31:34; Ezekiel 38:16; Galatians 4:9; and 1 John 4:7. However it can also go beyond that to refer to a deep, rich, and joyful personal nearness with Him, as in Daniel 11:32; Jeremiah 9:24; John 17:3; 1 John 2:14; and 5:20.

In these few well chosen words, Paul expresses a great deal about what it is to rejoice in the Lord. He longs as well to more deeply

experience **the power of His resurrection**. He prayed for this to happen in the lives of the Ephesian congregation in Ephesians 1:18-20.

While the first and second elements of this verse seem attractive enough to us, we might cringe from the third and fourth. However, since Christ was Paul's joy and his boast, and because Paul was following the pattern of Christ's humility that he showed us in 2:5-11, he decided not to cringe from the third and fourth elements. He wanted all he could get of Christ, and if that included **participation in His sufferings**, that was certainly no reason at all to turn away. Paul wanted to be like Jesus, and to imitate His utter obedience and humility. How could that not include suffering?

In Philippians 1:29 Paul reminded his partners in Gospel ministry that their sufferings, like his, are a grace gift of God. He also wrote in 2:5-13 that just as in humble obedience Christ suffered and was exalted, so they should be humble and obedient and accomplish their own deliverance because it is God who is at work in them. Furthermore, he who dared to write of "completing what was lacking in the sufferings of Christ" in Colossians 1:24 dares here to write of participating in **His sufferings**. Christ's **sufferings** produced the Evangel, the Gospel, but "what was lacking" was the Evangelization that would spread the Evangel to the ends of the earth. That is not to say that the Gospel is imperfect, but there is a part yet to be played for the Lord's servants. In other words, we are offered a **participation in His sufferings**. Of course our **participation in His sufferings** does not contribute to the Evangel, but to the Evangelization of the nations.

As if the idea that **participation in His sufferings** was not radical enough, Paul clarifies further that in that **participation** he longs to be **conformed to His death**. Paul would have the same utter obedience that Christ had by which He went to **His death**.

Hudson Taylor once said, "Do we know much of fellowship with Him in this? There are not two Christs – an easy-going Christ for easy-going Christians, and a suffering, toiling Christ for exceptional believers. There is only one Christ. Are we willing to abide in Him

and so to bear fruit?"²⁷ Rather than suggesting that Christians should toil and suffer so that they can earn their salvation, he was candidly pointing out that people are following someone or something other than Christ if their intent is to avoid pain and trouble.

Could it be that some branches of Christendom tend to take this passage too seriously, as it were, and seem to forget that all of the work of obtaining our eternal salvation was accomplished perfectly by Christ Himself once and for all upon the cross, while other branches of Christendom do not live out this passage at all, feeling fine about a lifestyle of avoiding suffering, out of a concern that somehow wanting to participate **in His sufferings** will dilute the Gospel?

This letter was written to encourage the church in the partnership in the Gospel that they have enjoyed together for so long, but Paul understands very deeply that that partnership together in Gospel ministry must not be founded merely upon their affection for him, or their allegiance to him. It must be founded upon their relationship to Christ: He is the One that saved them at the Cross, and He is the one that modeled for them how to live real life as He died in obedience and humility on that Cross. In order for them to have a truly rich partnership in Gospel ministry, they need to imitate Paul as he imitates Christ, in partnership in Christ's **sufferings**.

3:11 if somehow I might attain to the out-resurrection²⁸ of the dead.

In Romans 6:5 Paul wrote, "If we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection." He taught that all believers will be resurrected. If by **out-resurrection** Paul was referring to that resurrection, which according to his own teachings was certain for every redeemed person, then he is in effect admitting two very strange things. First, that he has *no assurance* of his own participation in this event, and second, that participation in that resurrection was to be *earned* by

27 *Behind the Ranges*, p. 170, quoted in *The Believers' Bible Commentary*, *ad loc.*

28 This term is not found elsewhere in the NT, but it is made up of the prefix "out" followed by the noun "resurrection."

participating in the sufferings of Christ and by becoming conformed to His death. The second of those two things is not only very strange, it is “another gospel,” a gospel in which salvation must be earned by incredible self-sacrifice. These two difficulties suggest that **out-resurrection** has a different meaning.

The “better resurrection” of Hebrews 11:35 points to the solution to this problem. In the context of the great faithfulness of the heroes of the faith in the Old Testament, Hebrews 11:35 says, “Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, *so that they might gain a better resurrection.*” Clearly, believers worked for that “better resurrection” through suffering. Paul wanted “to know ...the participation in His sufferings, becoming conformed to His death,” all in order to attain to the **out-resurrection of the dead**. He was striving with all his effort to attain to the same thing the heroes in Hebrews 13:5 sought to attain, a better **resurrection**. The **resurrection** of those who “were tortured and refused to be released” will be better, because it will involve rich heavenly rewards.

We know that it was because the Lord Jesus “humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross,” that “God exalted Him, and gave Him a name that is above every name.” The Lord Jesus received more than a **resurrection** body, He attained the **out-resurrection of the dead**, because of His humble obedience. In the same manner, Paul would participate or partner in His sufferings, and so attain to the **out-resurrection of the dead**. In other words, Paul's attaining to the **out-resurrection of the dead** is parallel to the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. Both are contingent upon suffering. Both are contingent upon humility. Both are contingent upon obedience.

3:12 Not that I have already obtained this or already been perfected, but I pursue it if also I might seize it, the very thing for which also I was seized by Christ Jesus.

Paul does not, in this verse, mention what it is that is **obtained**, pursued, or seized, but it must be the status that he mentions in the previous verse, attaining to the “out-resurrection.” This same status is the goal also in the next verse and in the verse after that, where it is finally described with the word “prize.” With all the effort that

Paul tells us is required to obtain this status, one wonders how it could ever be interpreted as the free gift of eternal salvation, given how explicit Paul is that eternal salvation is not won by our own efforts, but wholly by the work of Christ.

As the “if somehow” of the previous verse made clear, Paul simply does not have assurance that he will attain to the status he aspires to. Here he emphasizes that he has not yet attained it, but it is the object of his diligent efforts. This could hardly be about his eternal salvation. Because Paul knew something of the depths of his own sin, because he knew how near dreadful sin lurked in his heart, he could have no assurance that he would persevere in good works all his days and thus win the prize and attain to the out-resurrection of the dead. At the same time, because he knew of the perfect work of Christ on the cross, he had perfect assurance of his salvation. In 2 Timothy 2:11-13 we see that he was assured of his eternal security.

Christ Jesus has **seized** Paul to make him into a faithful disciple whom He will reward with crowns, a throne, and authority over nations in His coming Kingdom. In fact, He has **seized** all believers for that goal. In his old age Paul wrote 2 Timothy 4:7, saying, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” At that point in his life, near death, he finally had assurance that he had **obtained** the status spoken of here in this verse. In 2 Timothy 4:8 he told Timothy more concerning that status when he wrote, “Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.” That is indeed **the very thing for which also he was seized by Christ Jesus**.

3:13 Brothers, I do not consider myself to have seized it. I have just one thing on my mind, forgetting what is past, and straining towards what is ahead.

Again Paul stresses that he has not attained to the status he is writing about, but here he goes on to describe the single-minded zeal with which he pursues that status. Although we know that he has not literally forgotten the **past** (he has just written about his **past**), he will not be distracted with that sort of thing. After a race, a runner may think through how he ran, where he ran well and where he

ran poorly, but during the race he focuses on the course in front of him. Likewise Paul, in thinking about his **past**, does not distinguish between his former misguided efforts to justify himself through the Law (as in verses 5-6), or his more recent success in being devoted to Christ (as in verse 10). He will not dwell on any of that, lest he be distracted from the “race” that lies before him.

3:14 **Focused on the goal, I pursue the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus.**

Look at how strenuous the tone is of this work of Paul's. He uses terms like “seize,” “strain,” and **pursue**. They are terms that indicate hard work, utterly inappropriate for any discussion about receiving the free gift of eternal life. That is not the topic here! Here Paul is describing the diligent work and suffering required, not to obtain citizenship to the Kingdom of God, but to gain a better resurrection, to reign with Christ in His Kingdom, to be given authority over ten cities, to be given crowns and a throne. Those are the things he is striving for with such single-minded diligence.

Paul works hard for this **prize**, which he refers to as a “crown” in 1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 Timothy 2:5; and 4:8, as a “reward” in 1 Corinthians 3:14 and 9:17, and as a “repayment” in Colossians 3:24. In this context Paul has no assurance that he will succeed in this. He tells us of the possibility of being disqualified in 1 Corinthians 9:27. In 2 Timothy 2:5 he reminds Timothy that he needs to compete according to the rules to win the crown. In 2 Timothy 4:7-8 we read that since Paul finished the race, he will receive a crown, and further, that such a crown will be given to all who have longed for His appearing. These are not conditions that are set down for our salvation, they are rather conditions set down for receiving a reward for hard work.

3:15-21

Follow me in this! Unhappily, the enemies of the cross are many. They will be destroyed, but we have a heavenly citizenship and a Savior from heaven.

3:15 Therefore, as many of us as are mature, let us take this attitude, and if you take some other view, this too God will reveal to you.

Paul wants his partners in Gospel ministry to know how to live their lives rejoicing in the Lord. Having put before them the negative example of the Judaizers and the positive example of taking pride in the cross rather than his own human status and attainment, and having reminded them of the rich rewards by which the Lord would motivate us, with winsome language he now calls upon them to adopt this heart **attitude** and approach to life. Rather than using a second person imperative here, rather than commanding them “think this way, you all!,” Paul draws them in. “Friends, I know you all. You are not babes in Christ, you are mature in the faith. Let’s think this way.” It is winsome language.

Then he puts more force into his language, by suggesting that if we do not take this heart **attitude** and approach to life as our own, our **God** is a gracious **God**, and He will show us what this means. He might do that by a supernatural revelation, but the next verse hints that He may do that simply through the course of events of our lives. If we choose to encourage ourselves on in the Christian life by priding ourselves on our status and our religious attainments and performance, our Lord has ways of showing us the spiritual shipwreck we are heading towards. Even the strongest of us will find that the fountain of human status and performance eventually runs dry. Strong or weak, rejoicing in the cross is the spring that will sustain us through all our years.

3:16 However, to what we have already attained, live up to that rule, and be of one mind.

If we allow ourselves to indulge in some hypocrisy and disharmony, we can extend the time that pride of status and performance can sustain us. To prevent that delay in our insight that this heart attitude is not really working, Paul discourages hypocrisy and disharmony. He does that by urging us (if indeed we have decided to “take some other view”) to be sure to try to **live up to** that standard to which **we have already attained** and to **be of one mind**. If we have not taken the attitude that Christ is our righteousness and our boast, and if we diligently try to **live up to** a performance standard, Paul knows we will not succeed. By disallowing hypocrisy and dis-

harmony Paul would hasten the realization of the spiritual dryness into which we have wandered. In verses 15 and 16 Paul certainly hopes that we will learn the easy way, but he offers a slower and more painful alternative as well. The easy way is to learn from the Word that Christ is our righteousness, our joy, and our boast; the painful way is to try to perform at some standard, to **live up to a rule**, and then to fail, and realize what we should have known from the beginning, that Christ is our righteousness, our joy, and our boast.

3:17 Join others in following my example, brothers, and pay attention to those that walk in that way, just as you have our example.

Paul returns to a positive note by boldly calling the congregation to imitate him and others that conduct their lives with the heart attitude he has been describing. This is not just a general call to be holy or to be a missionary, it is a specific call to imitate Paul in the heart attitudes he has been describing, so that they will find their joy in the Lord, not in their own accomplishments or efforts at sustaining a Christian lifestyle. If someone were to follow his **example and pay attention to those that walk in that way**, in terms of outstanding holiness and awesome ministry effectiveness, but, at the same time, miss the point of rejoicing in the Lord and in the Gospel, they would not be doing what Paul is saying here *at all*, and in fact they would be heading towards that spiritual dryness that Paul is steering the congregation away from.

Paul was not ignorant of his sin. In 1 Timothy 1:15-16 he twice refers to himself as the worst of sinners. However, he knew of and exulted in God's grace. He knew that he was primarily and essentially a "holy one." No false humility prevents him from calling congregations to imitate him and to follow his **example**. He makes similar calls in 1 Corinthians 4:16 and 11:1, and there is a related commendation in 1 Thessalonian 1:6.

3:18 For as I have often been telling you, and now even weeping I say, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

The reason Paul has to urge them so strongly to follow the mindset he has been telling them about, the heart attitude of taking our delight in our salvation in Christ and our relationship with Christ, is

because there are so many people around that would draw them into another heart attitude, a heart attitude which will eventually result in spiritual dryness or even apostasy.

The identity of these people living **as enemies of the cross of Christ** has been debated. Some say they were the Judaizers, who taught that a person must obey the Law of Moses in order to please God. Others say they were Antinomians, who taught that all laws, rules, and regulations must be cast off. The harsh verdict on them in the next verse, and the contrast with the situation of believers (“but our citizenship is in heaven”) in the verse after that, make it seem that they were not Christians. Also, it does not seem that these **many** were part of the Philippian congregation, to whom he wrote with great warmth and affirmation.

Nevertheless there is great danger here for us. Not only do we need to be ready to reject the seduction by which people like this would draw our joy away from Christ, we also need to watch our own hearts, and help each other beware of that tendency in our own hearts. As we Christians slip away from the attitudes that Paul has been trying to develop in this entire chapter, and fall into the attitudes that he has repeatedly warned us against in this chapter, do we not then resemble too much those **enemies of the cross of Christ**? We are not His **enemies** but His beloved children – and that lasts forever – but if we lose our first love, if we slip away from that joy in the Gospel, and if we then begin to pride ourselves instead on our spiritual attainments or quality of life, without losing the salvation He has guaranteed we may act much too much like **enemies of the cross of Christ**. The **cross** calls us to humility, but we have become proud. The **cross** calls us to find our identity in our salvation, but we find our identity in our accomplishments. The **cross** offers us joy in being loved by our Savior, but we scramble and scrape around to grasp at a bit of joy in our accomplishments, a bit in the praise and respect others give us, and now and then even a bit in the dark entertainments the world offers its citizens. Is not this all too prevalent heart attitude the reason Paul was **often telling** them, **and even weeping** to write of again as he composed these lines?

The specific identity of the **many** that would threaten the Philipian congregation of the middle of the first century AD is an interesting historical issue, but if we want to apply the Word of God we must consider carefully who in our lives are **enemies of the cross of Christ** that threaten to draw us away from the mindset of finding our worth in Christ, delighting in the Gospel, and rejoicing in the Lord. *Anyone* that would draw us away from such goals, which they might refer to as our “quaint religious ideas,” towards the mindset and activities they are using to try to fill the empty ache of their hearts are on the one hand **enemies of the cross of Christ**, and on the other hand people in need of the Lord. The earnestness of Paul's warning here should remind us that we live with the real danger of being tricked into believing that something other than **Christ** can bring us the deep settled joy Paul is writing about.

3:19 Their end is ruin, their god is their belly, and their glory is in their shame. They set their minds on earthly things.

While it is possible that he is simply saying that the **end** result of their attitudes is rot and **ruin** rather than eternal hell, the **end** Paul writes of here seems to refer to their ultimate status in hell. Given the contrast with “our citizenship” in the next verse, it does seem like Paul is saying these people are not citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven at all.

While our Savior was glorified because He was willing to endure humiliation for us, these people's **end is ruin**, because they delight in what is shameful.

As Paul looked for value in life, as he looked for what would bring true joy, he realized that his religious status and attainments were all as good as rubbish, and he decided to find his joy in the Lord. These people did not make the same decision.

Whether these people are sensual antinomians or scrupulously religious, they have nothing of the joy of the Lord, because they are focusing **on earthly things**. From a human perspective, we might be tempted to think that Paul is a bit out of balance if he has *often* been telling them, and as he wrote this letter was even *weeping*, warning them about people that **set their minds on earthly**

things. However, this is crucial to our spiritual development. Like Paul we can consider all things rubbish and refuse, rejoicing in the Lord, or we can be led along by the enemies of the cross to their substitute joys.

3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven, out of which we are awaiting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

In contrast with those who set their minds on earthly things, **our citizenship is in heaven.** They are headed to ruin, but **we are awaiting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.** By pointing out how fundamentally different our situation is, Paul reminds us again how utterly inappropriate it would be for us to act like them, or look for joy in the same places where they look for joy.

3:21 who will transform our humble bodies to conformity with His glorious body by the working of His ability even to subject all things to Himself.

Our Savior will not simply save us from our sin, He will **transform** our **humble** physical **bodies** making them **like His glorious body.** When He does, our **bodies** will be appropriate for our citizenship! This is the wonder of the resurrection, and it is promised to all believers.

4:1-7

So of course you should stand firm in unity, joy, and prayer.

Having developed this mindset of rejoicing in the Lord and having warned the congregation about the kinds of people that will pull them away from that mindset, Paul now summarizes and brings some specific application for the Philippian congregation.

4:1 So, my brothers, loved and very much missed, my joy and my crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, loved ones.

Two things stand out very clearly in this verse. First, Paul is very warm, encouraging, and winsome towards his partners in Gospel ministry as he turns his attention specifically to them. Second, he is not just urging them to **stand firm in the Lord**. Rather, he is claiming that, in the preceding discussion, he has given them the proper approach to standing **firm in the Lord**. This is not simply a warm encouragement to try as hard as they can to be **firm** in their faith. It is rather a warm encouragement to take all the preceding discussion to heart *and live it*.

Paul referred to them as his **joy and crown**. There and then in their partnership relationship they were a great **joy** to him. When that great Day would come, Paul was assured that the Lord would give him a reward for the Philippian part of his Gospel work, so he uses a figure of speech to refer to them as his **crown**.

4:2 To Euodia I appeal and to Syntyche I appeal to agree in the Lord.

Although he has said almost exactly the same thing in the first half of 2:2, Paul repeats himself specifically to **Euodia** and to **Syntyche**. We do not have any other information about these two women. Their conflict was serious enough that Paul decided to intervene through this letter.

4:3 Yes, I ask you, loyal Syzygos, to help them, who have struggled together in the Gospel with me and Clement and my other coworkers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

Paul calls upon a **loyal** servant in the congregation to work to reestablish unity between these two women, reminding him that the two women have been an effective part of a partnership in **Gospel** ministry in the past. We simply do not know any more about the situation there, but it is a good guess that Paul thought the situation was serious enough to ask for this man's intervention.

Although there was a **Clement** in Rome who was identified as the third bishop of Rome in later tradition, it is not clear that these two were the same man.

These people's **names are in the Book of Life**. As is clear from Revelation 20:15, this is another way of saying they are born again individuals.

4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

Paul understood, probably more than they did, about trials in ministry, both from outside the congregation and from within, as in the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche, but he does not shy away from calling them to consistently **rejoice in the Lord**. He knows that if they can do that, as he has been describing for them in chapter 3, they will have the spiritual resources to work through problems from the outside and problems from within as well.

4:5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

A heart rejoicing in the Lord will be **gentle**, and that should be evident **to everyone**. It is not stated here, but we may suppose that sooner or later a heart rejoicing in performance and the maintenance of religious standards will be unyielding, ungentle, unkind, discourteous, and intolerant.

In James 5:8 we see a similar connection between our heart attitudes and the anticipation of the Lord's soon return.

4:6 Do not worry about anything, but in all things by prayer and petition make your requests known to God with thankfulness,

As we rejoice in the Lord, we should easily be free of **worry** and full of **prayer** and **thankfulness**. However, without the mindset

of the Lord as our pride and our joy, instead of being easy this seems unattainable, appearing to be a habit only saints and monks can maintain. However, we can imitate Paul in this, rejoicing in the Lord, so that, free of **worry**, we are ready with thankful **prayer**.

4:7 and the peace of God that excels all intellect will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Because of what **Christ** has done, because of the Gospel, we are at **peace** with **God**, but if **Christ** is not our joy, and if we therefore cannot thankfully bring all our concerns to Him, we will not be experiencing that **peace of God**. This is a promise of one of the rich benefits of letting **Christ** be our joy and our boast, and of the prayer life that follows: the **peace of God**.

4:8-9

Yes, if you live like that you will experience the peace of God – furthermore, if you will fill your minds with true and good things and follow my example, the God of Peace will be with you!

4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is righteous, whatever is pure, whatever is amiable, whatever is commendable, if something is excellent and if something is praiseworthy, let your minds dwell on these things.

Our thought life is of the highest importance in our spiritual development. A great deal of this letter to Paul's partners in Gospel ministry is taken up with teaching and exhortation concerning the mindset and attitude that they should have, so that they can be the best possible partners with him. This and the next verse make up Paul's final exhortation to them. Empowered by having Christ as our joy and our boast, the devotion and discipline these two verses require will be available.

4:9 And the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace will be with you.

Paul himself has embodied the things he spoke of in the previous verse, so he can now boldly tell them to imitate the model he has lived in front of them. Although there may be a great deal of hypoc-

risky in Christian ministry, Paul is claiming here that he was no hypocrite. Before them he did not say one thing and do another. This was not accomplished out of sheer self-discipline, however. It must be understood in light of the source of this devotion, which was no longer an attempt to meet the inward and outward moral standards of his religion. The source of his devotion was his personal delight in Jesus Christ and the Gospel, as he described in chapter three.

As his partners in Gospel ministry model what they saw in Paul, they will experience what he experienced: not only will the **peace** of **God** guard their hearts, but they will enjoy the presence of **the God of peace**.

4:10-20

Before closing this letter, I want to be quite specific about the financial aspects of our partnership in missions, our Gospel fellowship.

Paul began this letter, in 1:3-11, by expressing his gratitude for their long-standing and ongoing partnership in Gospel work, and then he worked hard teaching them various things they need to understand about their Savior and themselves so that they can be the best Gospel partners they can be. Now Paul is returning to this initial subject, their Gospel partnership, to explain in more detail how finances fit in. Just as he opened this topic with thankfulness in 1:3, he reopens it with thankfulness now in 4:10.

4:10 Now I rejoice greatly in the Lord that now at last you have renewed your concern for me, for whom you were concerned, but you lacked opportunity.

Now that Paul has finished exhorting them to root their lives, their joy, and their boasting in Christ, he can return to the theme of his response to their partnership in ministry and the Philippians' gift. Because they are renewing their partnership with him in the Gospel, Paul rejoices.

These verses, 4:10-20, match the opening verses, 1:3-10. Paul was concerned about them in 1:7, they are concerned about him in 4:10, with the same verb. Also, the words for partnership occur twice in

1:3-10 and twice in 4:10-20. In this way the whole letter is enclosed within these “bookends.”²⁹

They had sent him at least four gifts in the past and in this letter he is thanking them for their fifth in ten years. This was a serious Gospel partnership.

Note carefully that in apostolic gentleness Paul does not rebuke them for failing to consistently support him through the years. He does not rebuke them for failing to search him out, to make their own **opportunity**. Although it may be common enough in our age's fundraising environment, such a self-serving attitude was far from Paul's heart. He is very understanding about this gap in their attention, and simply rejoiced **greatly in the Lord** that they **renewed** their **concern** for him. He does not even allow for the idea that they stopped thinking about him, but comments that they did not have a fit **opportunity** to express that ongoing **concern**. Given the difficulty of keeping track of people in an age far before telecommunications, this little congregation in Macedonia may not have known at all where Paul was. In that case they simply could not send him any gifts or help because they could not find him.

If such is the attitude of the one often considered the second greatest missionary of all the ages towards a little church that he himself founded, how much more humble and gentle should present day missionaries be towards their supporting churches, even in their complete assurance that God Himself has called them to a highly significant ministry?

Any missionary today that receives a gift from a church or a family that used to support him, with whom he then had lost contact, should very much empathize with Paul as he writes these lines. Because of their *participation* – not because of the cash in his hands – he will be encouraged that “they really do care about getting the Gospel out to the such-and-such people group.”

4:11 Not that I am saying this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever situation I am in.

29 Swift, p. 248.

In this verse and the next two verses Paul tells them that the joy he expresses is not about having some more money, because he is content with any financial **situation**.

4:12 I know how to be humbled, I know also how to abound. In any and in all situations I have learned the secret, whether satisfied or hungry, abounding or lacking.

Although we know that at least by shipwreck and imprisonment Paul experienced humble circumstances, we have little specific information about what bountiful circumstances he experienced. However, we do know **the secret** that he refers to here. Paul himself told us **the secret** in chapter three. When we find our joy and our boasting in Christ, it is a simple matter to be content in humble *and* in bountiful settings.

4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

He tells us the secret again. It is **Christ**. However, we should look closely at the idea of **all things** here. This statement is given right in the middle of a passage on how Paul is content in poverty and in abundance, and how he is certainly not clamoring after more donations from them. What he tells us is that with the power of the One **who strengthens** him, he can accomplish every single thing the Lord is calling him to do in life and ministry.

4:14 However, you did well partnering with me in my trouble.

By using this word, **partnering**, here, as well as the related word in the next verse, Paul brings us back to his early comments in 1:5-7. The contentment that Paul possessed was not to be taken as a refusal to partner with them, even financially. In fact their participation with him was commendable.

4:15 And as you Philippians also know, at the beginning of my Gospel ministry, when I went out from Macedonia, not one church partnered with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you only.

In this verse and the next verse Paul continues to commend them, by reminding them of how far back their Gospel partnership goes. It was about ten years back that they sent him that first gift. There were other churches that could have entered into that Gos-

pel partnership with the then obscure missionary named Paul, but none of those others did.

Here finally, with only nine verses left in the letter, Paul directly connects the idea of “sharing” or “partnering” or “participating” (all various possible translations for the same family of words that Paul has been using in this letter) with **the matter of giving and receiving**. It is important to understand that when in the NIV we read “partnership in the Gospel” in 1:5, “all of you share in God’s grace with me” in 1:7, “it was good of you to share in my troubles” in 4:14, and “not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only,” Paul is consistently using words from the same root word, and all his readers would understand that in all four of these key passages Paul is developing the idea of their partnership with him in Gospel ministry, and some of that partnership has to do with **the matter of giving and receiving**.

If someone in upper-class Greek or Roman society received a gift, that brought him into a moral obligation to reciprocate. He might do this with another gift, or by showing proper gratitude.³⁰ By using the expression **giving and receiving** Paul acknowledges that societal concept of reciprocity. Since the root idea of the word translated **partnered** is “hold something in common,” Paul seems to be saying that both the congregation and he too did some **giving** and some **receiving** in their relationship. He implies that he gave something to the Philippians, even though he was certainly not able to reciprocate financially. They seem to have sent a sizable cash gift and the services of Epaphroditus, but all Paul could offer was direction, encouragement, and insight into who Christ is, what He has done for us, and how Gospel ministry works, gifts which later led up to the letter which we are now studying! It may be that **in the matter of giving** in their partnership Paul also contributed to them a sense of satisfaction that they could be a part of something eternal that was taking place there in Rome. In 2:17-18 he certainly urged them to share with him in his joy. While some of the congregation may have thought it rather quaint that the missionary would

30 See Stephen Charles Mott, “The Power of Giving and Receiving: Reciprocity in Hellenistic Benevolence,” *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*. (ed. G. F. Hawthorne, Eerdmans, 1975) pp. 60-72.

claim parity **in the matter of giving and receiving**, we might hope that others in the congregation saw that the gifts Paul gave them were of immeasurably greater value than the cash and services they sent to Paul!

The missionary whom the Philippian congregation supported so many years ago was, among other things, a Bible teacher. He used his spiritual gifts on the field and with his supporters. Whatever spiritual gifts he might have, may every missionary today be as careful and diligent as Paul was to enrich the lives of his supporters.

4:16 Also in Thessalonica more than once you sent something because of my need.

The gifts Paul mentions here could not have been too substantial, because in 1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:8-9 Paul reminds them how hard he worked so that they did not have to support him. It would appear that he did work hard to support himself in **Thessalonica**, and the Philippians supplemented that income, but the Thessalonians did not. While it was good for the congregation in Philippi to send gifts while he worked for his physical needs and served the Thessalonians' spiritual needs, he apparently did not want to receive gifts from the Thessalonians, lest that young congregation interpret his willingness to be supported as an example of an undisciplined life.

4:17 Not that I am hoping for a gift, but I am hoping for the increasing profit into your account.

Now shifting back to his own attitudes, Paul clarifies his own motive, which is selfless. Although there may be many that would say these sorts of things to manipulate people into giving more, Paul would have none of that. He is only seeking their good.

The books are closed in the matter of whether or not believers have obtained eternal deliverance from damnation, because we have eternal forgiveness based not on our activity but on the work of Jesus Christ upon the cross. However, even as permanently redeemed believers we each still do have an **account** with the Lord Jesus. Furthermore, according to this verse what we do or do not do influences **the increasing profit into** our accounts. While this is merely a passing reference to these accounts of ours, their existence

is undeniable, and they matter! Clearly, the people of a church that is active in Gospel partnership with missionaries will have **increasing profit into** their accounts.

We read in the parable of the Minas in Luke 19 that at the end of the age those servants' Master will return and settle accounts with them. If He is pleased with a man's **account**, He will say something like, "Well done, my good servant! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities." If He is displeased with one of His servants' accounts, then He will rebuke him. However it is His enemies, not His lazy servants, whom He destroys (compare Luke 19:20-26 with 19:27).

In short, Paul is saying that he wants his Gospel partners to be effective in their partnership so that they will receive a rich reward from the hand of the Lord Jesus at the end of the age. He has already alluded to various aspects of these rewards in 2:16; 3:11, 14; and 4:1.

4:18 But I have been paid all in full, and I have plenty; I have been filled up, receiving from Epaphroditus the gifts from you, a soothing aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Paul emphatically dispels any notion that he is manipulating them so they will give more. Not only has he learned how to be content in poverty and in abundance, but he is also well supplied now because of their recent **gifts**. He goes on to praise their **gifts**, using terminology unmistakably reminiscent of Old Testament sacrifices. Their giving, a part of their Gospel partnership with Paul, is given the high status of being equated to the physical sacrifices that the nation of Israel made at the temple of God in Jerusalem. For Paul those **gifts** were acts of worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

As with all things spiritual, we must decide whether we believe this, or consider it merely to be some insincere public relations material from a missionary to a supporting church. Whether we agree or not, Paul elevates their giving to that high level.

4:19 And my God will provide for your every need on the basis of His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

While some mistakenly say that the Lord will give great **riches** to any that donate generously to their ministry, this text says that as they give generously **God will provide for their every need on the basis of His riches**. This text should not be distorted to say that someone with a **need** for transportation will be given a new Mercedes Benz as long as that person gives generously to Christian ministry. Paul says their **every need** will be wonderfully fulfilled, not their every desire. Our **God** who has infinite **riches in glory will** wonderfully fulfill all the needs of generous donors like the Philippians, who gave with good motive, out of **His riches in glory**, but the text cannot be pressed to say that His gifts to us are commensurate to **His riches in glory**.

4:20 **To God our Father be glory forever and ever, amen.**

While this brief doxology might close the comments above about the perfect provision of **God** for those involved in Gospel partnership like the Philippians, it more likely closes the entire epistle that revolves around that Gospel partnership. What is clear is that **God** should receive praise because of His **glory** through all the ages.

To summarize 4:10-20, in this Gospel ministry partnership,

- the missionary is thankful (vs. 10)
- but not dependent or grasping (vv. 11-13)
- the church does well to help the missionary in trouble (vs. 14)
- this fellowship relationship goes back to the early days (vv. 15-16)
- the missionary is not materialistic about it, but seeks the spiritual good of the church (vs. 17)
- the church's gifts are like a sweet smelling sacrifice to God (vs. 18)
- the missionary assures them that God will meet their needs (vs. 19)
- the missionary praises God (vs. 20)

4:21-23

The brothers here greet you and I bless you with God's grace.

4:21 Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers with me greet you.

As was his custom, Paul sent his and his coworkers' greetings to the entire congregation. It is not clear whether any of these particular **brothers** were imprisoned **with** Paul. Perhaps they simply had access to visit him, like Epaphroditus and Timothy. To Paul these interpersonal relationships were important matters. Even in these closing greetings Paul is building up the interconnectivity of the Body of Christ.

4:22 All the saints greet you, particularly those of the household of Caesar.

The expression **the household of Caesar** refers to people that are engaged in imperial service.³¹ There is no indication in this text why the **saints of the household of Caesar** would be singled out in sending greetings to the congregation in Philippi, but such was the case.

4:23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

It is so fitting that Paul would close this letter with a benediction of **grace**, given how central **grace** has been to the message he has been giving the Philippians, that they will be the best partners in Gospel ministry they can be as they make **Christ** and His **grace** their boast and their joy in life.

³¹ EBC *ad loc.*

The Importance of Philippians for Today's Missionary and His Ministry Partners

Whether you are a missionary raising support in England to preach the Gospel in China, a church planter in Davao City that needs funds to start a church in northern Luzon, or a church leader that is supporting missions and missionaries through the church, what Paul has said to his supporting church, the Philippian congregation, should shape your attitudes as you go about forging the partnerships God is calling you to make in order to further the work of the Great Commission.

As you read Philippians chapter one, you should have noted that missionary and church pray for each other. The missionary prays that the congregation will be graced with discernment for the “things that really matter,” which clearly means that they will see ever more clearly that it is the Gospel prospering in our hearts, and the Gospel prospering throughout the world, that really matters. The missionary understands and communicates that his difficult circumstances have “actually turned out for the advancement of the Gospel,” and there is no word of bitterness or complaint. Also, the missionary models godly priorities for the congregation, in that death simply means being with the Lord, and continued life is preferred for the sake of the partners’ spiritual growth.

As you read chapters two and three, you were reminded that the spiritual growth of Gospel partners is an important ministry. You will want to model your life after Paul, who lived for others rather than for himself. In doing so, you will then be able to help all your partners to more thoroughly abandon self-interest, and more thoroughly model themselves after you, after Paul, and after Christ Himself. In this way, your partners will become more effective in Gospel ministry with you, just as Paul urged the Philippians to become even better partners with him in their ministry together. Good partners in Gospel ministry are deeply concerned, as Paul was, that they all find neither their boast nor their joy outside of the rich relationship they have with Christ through the Gospel. This is

not done out of a hope for more donations, but out of a deep concern for one another's spiritual life.

As you read the fourth chapter of Paul's letter to Philippi, you should have been relieved to see that worldly patterns of pressuring and manipulating donors are completely absent. As he finishes his letter, Paul returns to the theme of financial giving, a part of their partnership which was not specifically discussed at the beginning of the letter. Because he looks to the Lord for his needs and he knows contentment in all circumstances, he does not pursue donations, but knows that it is good for the hearts of the members of the church to give. It is good for all our hearts to be generous, and giving with a good heart will enrich our heavenly reward, our "account." It is not the gift, but the giver and the giving that are the missionary's concern. Paul also assures the readers that, as they give, the Lord will meet all of their needs.

Let us, as partners in Gospel ministries, live out these principles and follow Paul's example, to the glory of God!

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