

New Testament Studies

Philippians (*RVS Notes*)

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Philippians: Living Above the Grind

Introduction—Mark Twain's writings make people around the world laugh and forget their troubles for a while. Yet in private, Twain was broken by sorrow. When his beloved daughter Jean died after an epileptic seizure, Twain, too ill to go to the funeral, said to a friend, “I have never greatly envied anyone but the dead. I always envy the dead.”

Morose? Yes. But to many, life seems etched in a minor key. Its sounds are at best haunting, taunting reminders of our futility and finitude. Hardly the stuff of joy. Yet, here in Philippians, the apostle Paul finds joy while in prison, taunted by his critics, wanting necessities, and separated from those he loved. The sport of circumstance as the poet Byron would later contend. The sorry target of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune? Amid dire circumstances, Paul pens a letter radiating joy.

Paul's letter explains how to handle the joy thieves in our lives:

- Circumstances.
- People.
- Things.
- Worry and restlessness.

Circumstances—How easy it is to be on top when we are. To come home in a good mood after a wonderful day at the office is hardly an achievement. To be magnanimous when people are singing your praises is not difficult. But when our circumstances turn sour, and they will, what then? In Philippians, Paul shows us that when Christ is our life (1:21), prison can become a pulpit (1:12-14), our critics become advocates of the cause we yearn to promote (1:15-18), and our personal crises become center stages for the pioneer advances of the gospel (1:19-26). Always remember God's purposes. Our circumstances often remind us that God is far more interested in our holiness than in our hassle-free happiness. How convicting!

People—One commentator tells a story about his daughter's frustration with people. One day after getting off the school bus, she slammed the front door of their home, stomped up the stairs to her room, and defiantly shut her bedroom door. All the time she was muttering under her breath: “People-people-PEOPLE!” Her father went to her bedroom door and knocked softly. “May I come in?” “No,” she replied emphatically. Again, he tried, and she replied even more belligerently. So, he asked, “Why can't I come in?” Her answer— “Because you're a people!”

Things—One day, Abraham Lincoln was walking down the street with his two sons, who were crying and fighting. A friend asked him what the problem was. “The same thing that's wrong with the whole world,” Lincoln replied. “I have three walnuts and each of the boys wants two of them.”

Stuff. Stuff. Stuff. Recently, our community had a common yard sale. The things people crowd their lives with! We all need an invitation that an old Quaker made to one of his neighbors as he watched the newcomer move a vast amount of bric-a-brac into his new home. “Neighbor, if thou do need anything, come and see me and I will tell thee how to get along without it.”

Paul gave up everything he previously counted as valuable to follow Christ (3:7-8). As he writes, he counts everything to be rubbish (*skubala* means dung) for the surpassing value of knowing Christ his Lord. He had learned to be content in the strength and provision that Christ richly supplied (4:13, 19), whether in plenty or in want. What a testimony to our age!

Worry and restlessness—People crucify themselves between two thieves: the regrets of yesterday and the worries of tomorrow. Paul refuses to do this. “But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on (I eagerly pursue) toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (3:13b-14). His contentment in whatever circumstance he finds himself (4:11-12) is a convicting reminder that I need to learn what it is for Christ to be my strength and provision.

Background—The city of Philippi takes its name from Philip of Macedon who took the site in 360 BC and fortified it. In 168 BC, the Romans conquered the area. However, Philippi did not achieve its prominence until over a century later. In 42 BC, Mark Antony and Octavian (later to become the Emperor Augustus) defeated Brutus and Cassius (Julius Caesar's assassins) outside of the town of Philippi and turned it into a Roman colony and a military outpost. Octavian later settled groups of veteran soldiers at Philippi in 31 BC and again in 27 BC.

With colony status, the Philippians assumed Roman citizenship and special privileges, including an autonomous local government and exemption from Roman taxation. Augustus also conferred the right of “*ius italicum*” upon the city, which accorded a provincial town the superior status of an Italian city. In governing, Augustus favored Rome over Italy, and Italy over the other provinces of the Empire. Thus, Philippi was a “cut above” any other town in Macedonia, including Thessalonica, the capital of the province.

The church at Philippi was founded around 50 during Paul's second missionary journey. (see Acts 16). While at Troas, the apostle received a vision instructing him to go to Macedonia, making Philippi his first European visit (Acts 16:6-10). Acts 16 records Paul's ministry at Philippi, including a businesswoman's conversion (16:11-15), the exorcism of a demon from a slave girl resulting in Paul's imprisonment (16:16-24), and a Philippian jailer's conversion after a most unusual jailbreak—the jail broke but the prisoners stayed put (16:25-31). These diverse converts formed the nucleus of the Philippian church.

After Paul left, Luke might have stayed to lead the new church. The narrative in Acts stops using “we” after chapter 16 and resumes its use in Acts 20:5-6, during Paul's return to Philippi on his third missionary journey around 55-56.

Authorship—Paul is commonly acknowledged as the author of this epistle. Only F.C. Baur and the very liberal Tubingen School in Germany have raised questions as to the letter's authenticity. The negative opinions of that institution are not commonly shared. The straightforward claim of the epistle (1:1) is supported by the references to Paul's acquaintances, the reflection of known circumstances in his life, and the many indications of his patterns of thought.

The book's unity is questioned due to the use of “finally” in 3:1, the tone of the text, and Polycarp's reference to Paul's communications with the Philippians as “epistles”. The argument is that the original

letter ended with chapter 2 and the subsequent chapters comprise another letter. In due respect to scholarly musings, there is no manuscript evidence for multiple letters. Arguments for division are based on modern letter-writing conventions, overlooking ancient conventions.

Occasion; Place of Origin—The occasion for writing was the Philippians' gift to Paul (4:10-20). They had sacrificed to meet Paul's needs on three previous occasions, twice while he was at Thessalonica (4:15-16) and once while at Corinth (2 Cor. 11:9). There are three possibilities as to the place of origin of the letter:

- **Caesarea**—Paul was a prisoner here for two years (from 57 to 59) and his friends had access to him (Acts 24:23, 27). Paul's reference to the praetorium or palace guard (1:13) may be to the palace guard at Caesarea. However, this seems a stretch. Contrary to his situation in the epistle (1:20-26), Paul was not facing imminent death while at Caesarea, for he had appealed his case to Caesar (Acts 25:10-12).
- **Ephesus**—This view places the writing of the letter sometime around 53 to 55 during Paul's three-year stay at Ephesus. The objection that Acts does not record an Ephesian imprisonment is explained by seeing such an imprisonment from texts like Romans 16:4, 7; 1 Corinthians 15:32; 2 Corinthians 1:8-10; 11:23. However, only 1 Corinthians 15:32 actually mentions Ephesus (Paul is described as fighting wild beasts at Ephesus) and this could well be just a metaphor for the scene described in Acts 19.

The main reason for suggesting Ephesus as the place of origin is largely because of the time-consuming journeys presupposed by the narrative of Philippians. Six trips between Philippi and the place of writing may have occurred, each requiring at least a month if Rome is the destination and only a week if Ephesus is. These trips would have included:

- News of Paul's plight reaching the place of origin.
- Epaphroditus' trip with a gift for Paul.
- News of Epaphroditus' illness reaching the place of origin.
- Reports of the Philippians' concern reaching Epaphroditus.
- A trip by Timothy to Philippi.
- A return trip by Timothy to Paul.
- **Rome**—The traditional idea is that Paul wrote this letter while under house arrest at Rome sometime between 61 and 63 (see Acts 28). References to the palace guard (1:13) and Caesar's household (4:22) favor Rome as does the imminent possibility of death if his appeal failed (1:20-26). On balance, it seems reasonable to accept the traditional idea of Rome as the place of origin of this epistle.

Purpose—Paul's purposes for writing this letter include:

- To acknowledge the Philippians' gift to him and to give thanks for it (4:10-20).
- To reflect on his own circumstances as relating to the progress of the gospel (1:12-26).
- To explain why he was sending Epaphroditus back to them when they had sent him to help Paul (2:25-30).
- To address issues of rivalry and personal ambition that was threatening division and party spirit in the Philippians ranks (1:27; 2:3-4; 4:2).
- To warn against the legalism of the Judaizers (3:2-11) as well as creeping antinomianism (3:17-21).

- To encourage the Philippians to live all out for Christ (1:27-30; 2:12-18; 3:17-21; 4:4-9).

Distinguishing Features—This letter highlights several key emphases:

- **Joy**—One keynote of this warm and cordial letter is joy. The noun *chara* (joy) is used five times (1:4, 25; 2:2, 29; 4:1), the verb *chairō* (to rejoice) appears seven times (1:18; 2:17, 18, 28; 3:1; 4:4 [twice]), and the compound verb *synchairō* (to rejoice with) occurs twice (2:17, 18).

The modern notion of joy is that of being thrilled. We tend to think of joy as watching your children enjoy a trip to Disney World, enjoying a heart-stopping ride, or a special long anticipated vacation. This is not what Paul means by the term. He finds joy, a happiness that transcends circumstance, in prayer on behalf of others (1:4), in pouring his life out for the benefit of others (2:17-18), and in the ordinary events of life (4:4). Christ is supremely the source of Paul's joy. Christ is his life (1:21), his mindset or attitude (2:5-11), his life's purpose and goal (3:13-14), and the source of his contentment (4:11-12). It is the all-sufficient Christ, in whom Paul's life was hid, that gave substance to the apostle's joy in the grind.

- **Mindset or attitude**—Paul uses *phroneō* ten times (1:7; 2:2[twice], 2:5; 3:15[twice], 3:19; 4:2, 10[twice]). While this verb denotes mental process and is commonly translated as “to think,” it has implications of sympathetic interest and concern. The action expressed is of the heart as well as the intellect. The concern expressed is in the highest interests of others. The NIV translates this verb as “feel” in 1:7, where Paul's heart for the Philippians is obviously in the forefront. Frequently, the word connotes a mindset—having the humble attitude of Christ (2:5); being of the same mind with other believers (2:2; 4:2); having the firm determination to press on to the high calling of God in Christ (3:15); having a worldly mindset (3:19); or having an attitude of concern for fellow believers (4:10).
- **Fellowship or partnership** (*koinonia*) denotes a participation with someone else in gospel reality, truth, and power more than a friendly Christian atmosphere (see 1:5, 7; 2:1; 3:10; 4:14, 16). This fellowship is produced by the Holy Spirit (2:1), involves partnering in the gospel (1:5) and sharing in Christ's sufferings (3:10). This bond of fellowship moves people to sacrificially share to meet each other's needs (see 4:14-15). Out of this fellowship comes strong emotion. Both Paul and Epaphroditus express the sentiment of longing for (*epipothetai*) the Philippians. The word expresses strong yearning to be with another person.
- **Confidence**—Confidence (*pepoithos*) appears in 1:6, 14, 25; 2:24; 3:3, 4. Paul's confidence flows from God's sovereign purposes accomplished by the power of the gospel and not from his own achievements and credentials (3:3, 4). The apostle is confident that he will remain on in the flesh (1:25) and be released from prison (2:24) in order that he may continue to edify the believers and co-labor in the excellent work in them that God was completing (1:6). Paul's zeal, even while imprisoned emboldened others to preach the gospel with confidence (1:14). This confidence infused the apostle's actions, thoughts, and attitudes because he was in the Lord and was prompted by the Spirit's energy.
- **Spiritual ambition**—No letter displays Paul's spiritual ambition more clearly than Philippians. We see the completeness of his commitment to Jesus Christ and his single-minded desire to know him and to make him known (1:20, 21; 3:7-14; 4:11-13).

- **Key texts**—1:21; 2:5-11; 3:12-16; 4:12-13. The text in 2:5-11 is a classic Christological passage describing the pre-existent, incarnate, and exalted states of Christ.

Summary Outline

- I. Introduction (1:1-11)
 - A. Salutation (1:1-2)
 - B. Thanksgiving for the Philippians (1:3-8)
 - C. Prayer for the Philippians (1:9-11)
- II. Paul's Chains Advance the Gospel (1:12-26)
 - A. Paul's Chains Promote His Own Preaching (1:12-13)
 - B. Paul's Chains Encourage Others to Preach (1:14-18)
 - C. Paul's Crisis (His Pending Appeal) Exalts Christ (1:19-26)
- III. Exhortation to Live as Worthy Citizens of Heaven (1:27-2:18)
 - A. Conduct Towards Outsiders (1:27-30)
 - B. Conduct Towards the Household of Faith (2:1-11)
 - C. Working Out Your Salvation (2:12-18)
- IV. Commended Servants (2:19-30)
 - A. Timothy (2:19-24)
 - B. Epaphroditus (2:25-30)
- V. Pursuing the Goal (3:1-4:1)
 - A. No Confidence in the Flesh (3:1-11)
 - B. Pressing On to Win the Prize (3:12-16)
 - C. Standing Firm While Waiting (3:17-4:1)
- VI. Final Exhortation, Thanksgiving, and Greetings (4:2-23)
 - A. Final Exhortations (4:2-9)
 - B. Thanksgiving for the Philippians' Gift (4:10-20)
 - C. Concluding Greetings (4:21-23)

Presentation Outline

- Loving the Brethren (1:1-11)
- Chains, Critics, Crises (1:12-26)
- When They're in Your Face (1:27-30)
- Souled Together With (2:1-4)
- Who Do I Think I Am (2:5-11)
- Shining Like Stars (2:12-18)
- Commended Servants (2:19-30)
- No Stuff to Strut (3:1-11)
- But One Thing (3:12-16)
- Standing Firm While Waiting (3:17-4:1)
- For the Road (4:2-9)
- Worry: Thief or Tutor (4:6-9)
- Contentment: Is It Christ I Want or What He Gives (4:10-13)
- Gratitude and the Gift of Giving (4:14-20)

Philippians: Living Above the Grind

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)

I. Introduction [Loving the Brethren] (1:1-11)—This warm introduction highlights four key characteristics of people who love Christ and his body, the church:

- **Thankful**—People who love the Lord and his people are thankful for their fellow believers. Paul was thankful for the Philippians. He gave grace to God because of these folks. We are to be thankful for our siblings in Christ. This trait causes us to focus on the qualities and good points of the people of God rather than their failings. It is no accident that I'm least thankful for other Christians when I'm critical in spirit and high-minded about myself.
- **Prayerful**—Paul prayed for the Philippians frequently and earnestly. He was aware of the spiritual dynamic of their lives and petitioned God for their specific growth. If we love the body of Christ, we will pray in specifics for the people of God. When we pray for people in that way, we bond with them.
- **Confident**—The apostle was confident that God would complete the work he had begun in the Philippians. Even though he was their spiritual father, he could let them go into the loving hands of a sovereign Father. When you love others, that very love is a rebuke to the control games you may otherwise unconsciously play. You can let them go—confident that God will complete his work in them.
- **Affectionate**—Their partnership in the gospel fostered deep affection between Paul and the Philippians. He sorely missed them, and they missed him. Believers grow in affection for one another as they share a partnership in faith. The truth of the matter is that people who come to church looking for fellowship frequently leave. Those who come hungry for the Word and zealous for the glory of God, frequently are the ones who find deep fellowship and affection with their fellow believers.

A. Salutation (1:1-2)—

1:1—Timothy's name is included in this typical salutation due to his association with Paul during the apostle's imprisonment and because of his special connection with the Philippians (2:19-24). These men are described as servants (*doulos*) of Christ, a title of dignity denoting God-given authority as accredited messengers of the Lord. Paul often referred to himself as a bondservant of the Lord. Deuteronomy 15:12-18 provides a vivid snapshot of a bondservant. There, a person who had served another for six years as a slave decided, of his own free will, to remain a slave to his master.

He writes to the saints (*hagioi*) at Philippi, people whose lives and hearts had been set apart to God. The term primarily emphasizes the status that believers have because Christ's merit is imputed to them. Personal holiness is also in view since believers' conduct ought to correspond increasingly to their standing.

The apostle includes the overseers (*episkopos*) and deacons (*diakonos*) in the greeting perhaps because they had taken the initiative in collecting and sending the church's gift to him (2:25; 4:18). The overseers are the chief administrative officers of the local church. Their task is to guard, guide, and graze (feed) the flock of God. The term is used interchangeably with elders (*presbuteros*) in the New Testament (see Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7). In fact, 1 Peter 5:1-2 uses the terms overseer (*episkopos*), pastor (*poimante*) and elder (*presbuteros*) to refer to the same people. The deacons were the secondary officers of the church, responsible for certain duties pertaining to the welfare of the community.

1:2—Grace is God's unmerited favor and peace is an inner assurance and tranquility that God ministers to the hearts of believers even amid turmoil (see 4:7). This order—grace and peace—appears in other epistles as well (see Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1, 2; [cf. 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2—grace, mercy, and peace]).

B. Thanksgiving for the Philippians (1:3-8)—Paul's deep affection for the Philippians is evident in this passage. This is an affection born of their partnership in the gospel and their sharing of God's grace together. He is deeply thankful for that partnership and aware of the grace that cemented their bond. Thankful people are those who are conscious of being the recipients of God's grace themselves. Thankfulness has a wonderfully beneficial effect on our high-mindedness and our self-absorption.

1:3—Paul's thankfulness might be based on the Philippians' gift to him (4:10-20). More likely the apostle is thankful for the memories he has of his Philippian friends. The NIV reflects this second option in its translation. Thanksgiving (*eucharisteo*) is a word built around the word for grace (*charis*). We only really begin to give thanks when the reality of God's grace grips our hearts.

1:4—Paul's prayer is joyful. Despite his own concerns, the apostle focuses on the well-being of his people. Paul's hardships made him better, not bitter.

1:5—He is thankful for their partnership (*koinonia*) in the gospel. *Koinonia* denotes a two-sided relationship, including the believer's participation in the life of God and the sharing among believers of a common faith. This partnership was more than their generosity to him in his time of need. The tenor here is that they had a tangible share in the actual work.

1:6—Paul's confidence (*pepoithos*=perfect active participle) indicates that he had developed the settled conviction at an earlier time that he is expressing and is now still true. God is a finisher as well as an initiator. The good work in them was God's redemptive work. Paul could let go of the Philippians confident that God would make them what he wanted them to be.

1:7—[T]o feel (*phronein*) means “to think”. This verb denotes not so much a mental exercise as a sympathetic concern, expressing the action of the heart as well as the intellect. It is a concern for the best interests of the other person. Paul's defense (*apologia*) and confirmation (*bebaiousei*) of the gospel refers to his approaching hearing where he was to give a defense of what he preached.

1:8—The way Paul's expresses his affection for the Philippians would amuse moderns. Affection (*splagchnois*) originally denoted the inward parts of an animal sacrifice. Expressing affection by, in effect, saying “I have you down in my bowels” sounds weird to modern ears. In the New Testament, the term *splagchnois* is used once to refer to the physical entrails (Acts 1:18), but predominantly in a

figurative sense as the seat of emotions.

C. Prayer for the Philippians (1:9-11)—God did not call us to a frolic, but a fight, and prayer is the main battle line. Paul's prayer is intense because of his affection for the Philippians and because the stakes are so high. The old spiritual is so apropos—It's not my brother, Lord, it's not my sister, Lord—it's me, standing in the need of prayer.

1:9—Paul prays that their love would abound, intelligently and with moral discernment. Love must be based on knowledge (*epignosei*), meaning the intellectual perception of the principles of God's Word as illumined by the Spirit of God. Depth of insight (*aisthesei*) stresses moral perception and the practical application of knowledge to the situation at hand.

1:10—The purpose of this knowledge and insight is moral discernment. “To discern the best” (*dokimazein humas ta diapheronta*) is “to test or distinguish the things that differ”. The sense is one of sorting things out and then doing the excellent thing.

Pure (*eilikrineis*) denotes passing a test. The picture is one of a prospective buyer holding pottery up in the intense Attic sunshine to discern whether the pottery has cracks filled with wax or some other substance. The import is that a pure or sincere Christian is not afraid to stand in the light. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the prince of preachers in another century, once told a prospective biographer “You may write my life in the clouds! I have nothing to hide.” This is not the stuff of prissy perfectionism, but of a forgiven and thoroughly sincere disciple who is all in on following his Lord. Paul is praying that his Philippian friends will have the kind of character that will pass the test.

1:11—[F]illed (*pepleromenoi*) with the fruit of righteousness (*karpon dikaiosunes*) conveys the sense of God's past action on the Philippians (perfect passive participle) resulting in their continuing fruitful lives in the present.

II. Paul's Chains Advance the Gospel [Chains, Critics, Crises] (1:12-26)—The Stoics taught that your circumstances did not matter so much as your attitude toward them. They focused on individual self-sufficiency. Paul agrees for a different reason. God, in his sovereignty, uses hardship for his glory and produces a focused devotion to the Lord Jesus. Sufficiency is divinely supplied, not humanly generated.

When Christ is your life (1:21) then the gospel is furthered, sometimes in odd ways. Here, God uses strange tools indeed to help pioneer the faith in Rome. Paul's chains (1:12-14), his critics (1:15-18), and his legal crisis (1:19-26, his pending appeal to Caesar) help him take the gospel to the Praetorian Guard, the emperor's elite bodyguard, and to others at Rome. God used Paul's limit situation to advance the gospel. His prison became a pulpit, his critics became promoters of the gospel, albeit for the wrong motives, and his judicial crisis became a unique opportunity to become a spiritual benefit for multitudes of people. Paul wanted the Philippians to learn an important truth from his circumstances—there are no accidents with God.

This is so important for modern Americans to process. We tend to see any limits as terrible impositions. In analyzing our society's idea of autonomous freedom, Time Magazine, in its 60th anniversary issue, stated: “Behind most of the events of the so-called American century lay the assumption, almost a

moral imperative, that what was not free, ought to be free, that limits were intrinsically evil, that science and humanity should go wherever they please in a spirit of self-confident autonomy.” Such of view of freedom with no limits is not only unbiblical, but it blinds us to God's creativity in working pioneer advances of his purposes.

A. Paul's Chains Promote His Own Preaching (1:12-13)—Paul's chains advanced the gospel by allowing him to proclaim it throughout the Praetorian Guard. Sometimes God puts chains on his people to get them to accomplish a pioneer advance of the truth that could never happen any other way.

Illustrations—Young mothers can feel chained to the home as they care for young children. Susannah Wesley had nineteen children to care for, long before the days of labor-saving devices and disposable diapers. Out of that family came John and Charles Wesley, whose life work shook the British Isles. Fanny Crosby was blind but not chained by darkness. Her hymns and songs have given wings to countless voices in praising God and to others in seeing and embracing the truth.

It is a simple secret really. When Christ is your life, you look upon your circumstances as God-given opportunities for the furtherance of truth. You learn to rejoice at what God is going to do rather than complaining about what he did not do.

1:12—Behind “what has happened to me” lies the emotional reality of chains after freedom; the stark difference between preaching the gospel everywhere and being handcuffed night and day to a Roman soldier. By God's design, this reality was an excellent opportunity to preach to a captive audience. Furtherance (*prokopen*) of the gospel means pioneer advance. It is a military term referring to army engineers going before the troops to open a way into new territory. Instead of finding himself confined to a prison cell, Paul discovered that his circumstances opened new areas of ministry to him.

1:13—The first way Paul's chains promoted the advance of the gospel is that they provided the occasion for its proclamation to members of the Praetorian Guard. The praetorium was originally a reference to the commander's tent in a Roman military encampment. Later, it came to mean various things given the context of the reference—a Roman governor's residence (see Mt. 27:27; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:28[twice], 33), the barracks of soldiers either at Rome or in a senatorial city like Ephesus, or a group of soldiers themselves.

Some commentators think that the provincial governor's residence, such as Paul's place of detention at Caesarea, is in view. Others think that “Caesar's household” (4:22) makes the reference to praetorium here refer to a Roman imprisonment guarded by members of the Praetorian Guard. This reference does seem to be to the emperor's imperial guard stationed at Rome. A prisoner under house arrest like Paul (Acts 28:30) was typically chained to a soldier. Paul had an around-the-clock captive audience!

B. Paul's Chains Encourage Others to Preach (1:14-18)—Paul's imprisonment inspired others to preach the gospel. Some were noble-minded, sweet-spirited co-laborers with Paul. Others were motivated by envy and rivalry and using Paul's confinement to promote themselves.

1:14—This provides the second reason for why Paul's imprisonment was a catalyst for gospel advance—it encouraged others to preach fearlessly. Paul describes his chains as being persuasive (*pepoithotas*). This is the same word translated “confidence” in 1:6. Paul's chains inspired God's people

to live up to their calling.

1:16—Paul was appointed (*keimai*) for the defense (*apologian*) of the gospel. *Keimai* is another military term. Paul was on assignment.

1:17—Selfish ambition (*eritheias*) conveys a sense of canvassing for office to get people to support you. Paul's aim in preaching the Gospel was to glorify Christ and to move people to follow him. Paul's critics aimed to promote themselves and to win a following of their own.

Quotes—*Charles Finney*: “If you're slandered, never mind. It will come off when it's dry.”
—*Will Durant*: “To speak ill of others is a dishonest way of praising ourselves.”

1:18—These preachers were not a group of Judaizers (cf. Gal 1:6-9 for Paul's response to such a challenge). These opponents were preaching Christ but from pretense (*prophasei*), a word used for the prayers of the scribes in Mark 12:40 and of the sailors' pretense in the shipwreck recorded in Acts 27:30. Pretense is the opposite of sincerity. When criticized, our reputation, our being right, our vindication is not the point. God's purpose can be served by our critics.

C. Paul's Crisis (His Pending Appeal) Exalts Christ (1:19-26)—Paul has been in chains for several years and his judicial journey is ending with his appeal to Caesar. Paul weathers his personal crisis hid in Christ. Christ is his joy; the apostle's secret for living above his trials, having good cheer while in bonds, and being expectant in the face of death. Paul is confident he will not be ashamed (1:19-20) and believes his ministry will be useful during the trial (1:22-26). We minister from our brokenness, not from our completion.

Read this passage along with 2 Corinthians 1:8-11. The Philippians passage strikes a cheerful, buoyant note even amid great difficulty. The Corinthians passage indicates that the apostle was not always on top. His emotions could waver, but not his faith.

1:19—Paul is confident of deliverance because of the prayers of the Philippians and the staunch support of the Spirit of God. Deliverance (*soterian*) can mean either physical or spiritual salvation. Here, it is doubtful that it means deliverance from prison since Paul is uncertain of that. His confidence is that of 2 Timothy 4:18—that the Lord will rescue him from every evil and save him for the heavenly kingdom.

Help (*epichoregias*) is a supply which undergirds and strengthens an object (see Ephesians 4:16, where the term describes a ligament which acts as a support). The root of this word gives us our English word “chorus”. Whenever a Greek city was going to put on a special festival, someone had to pay for the singers and dancers. The donation called for had to be lavish. Frequently, in the era of the prosperity of the pax Romana, the wealthy citizens of the Empire's provincial cities strove to outdo one another in their generosity. The word translated here as “support” came to mean “to provide generously and lavishly.” Paul was not depending on his own dwindling resources, but the generous resources of God, administered by the Holy Spirit.

1:20—Paul wants to exalt Christ in his situation. “[T]o be exalted” (*megalunthesetai*) is in the passive voice. In exalting Christ, Paul is the one acted upon, not the primary actor. The apostle is not relying on

his own courage and wherewithal, but upon the action of the Holy Spirit in response to the prayers of the Philippians.

Eager expectation (*apokaradokian*) denotes a keen expectation of the future, a craning of the neck to catch a glimpse of what is ahead. This is a concentrated and intense hope which ignores other interests and strains towards Christ.

1:21—“For me, to live is Christ”. Such a statement! Christ was the motive for Paul's actions, the goal of his life and ministry, the source of his strength. The word used for life here is *zen*. It deals with the essence of life—what makes a person tick. *Bios* was the word used for the external affairs of life, our physical lives. Paul's point is that Christ is what makes him tick. This entire chapter hinges on this thought. In Christ, nothing external to us need waylaid us. For Paul, death itself would be gain (*kerdos*), not only in receiving his heavenly reward but also in promoting the gospel by his fearless martyrdom.

1:22—This verse does not mean that Paul had the prerogative of choosing his fate. He conveys his personal preference. The choice is between the continuance in fruitful work and sealing his testimony in his blood. In 1:24, the term *sarki* is translated and used synonymously with *soma*, which typically refers to our physicality. Paul does not use *sarki* to refer to our sinful nature in this context.

1:23—Paul is hard pressed to choose which fate he desires. Torn (*sunschomai*) depicts a person or object held under pressure from two different directions so that movement in either way is difficult or impossible. The apostle is in an emotional straight jacket.

Depart (*analutai*) was a word used for a ship weighing anchor, or for a group striking camp. For the Christian, death need not be a fearful thing, but a departure for our true home. Alfred Lord Tennyson used this figure of death in “Crossing the Bar.” This term was also a political term for setting a prisoner free and an agricultural one for unyoking oxen. Each of these uses lifts our eyes to our true home and moves us beyond death's immediate horror. With Paul we can say “Where, oh death, is your victory? Where, oh death, is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55).

“Better by far” (*pollo mallon kreisson*) utilizes a triple comparative found nowhere else in the New Testament.

1:25-26—Know (*oida*) does not mean knowing by prophetic inspiration or else the apostle would not have written as he did in 1:20-24. He is concluding that it seems necessary for him to continue in this life for the Philippians' edification and he is confident that God would grant this. Thus, he looks forward to seeing them again. Joy (*kauchema*) is a word that normally renders the sense of a boast and differs from the common word for joy (*chara*) Paul uses throughout this letter.

III. Exhortation to Live as Worthy Citizens (1:27-2:18)—This section deals with Paul's expectations of the church at Philippi and points to the self-emptying attitude of the Son of God himself as the paradigm for believers. They were to stay firm in one spirit, contending for the truth of the gospel among those outside the faith. They were to be souled together with those within the community of faith exhibiting among themselves the selfless sacrificial gentleness of Christ.

A. Conduct Towards Outsiders [When They're in Your Face] (1:27-30)—This first section

deals with conduct towards those adversaries outside the faith. The Philippians were not to let their opponents intimidate them.

1:27—Conduct yourself (*politeuesthe*) means “to live like a citizen”. The Philippians were proud of their Roman citizenship with its privileges and responsibilities. They needed to remember that as citizens of the heavenly realm (3:20; Eph. 2:19) they were called, not only to accept the benefits of the gospel, but also to model their lives after the pattern laid down by the Lord.

In using the phrases “standing firm in one spirit” (*en eni pneumati*) and “contending as one man” (*mia psuche*) the way he does, Paul is not drawing a sharp distinction between spirit (*pneumati*) and soul (*psuche*, translated “man” here in the NIV). These two terms are used interchangeably in most places in the New Testament, denoting spirit or soul. If there is a distinction, *pneumati* denotes a person's spiritual center, one's center of motivation. *Psuche* denotes the arena of sensory and psychological experience.

Contending (*sunathountes*) conveys the idea of competing on an athletic team or a contest in war. “Wrestle in company with” renders the sense of the term. It envisions a highly honed unity that seeks to promote the faith of the gospel. It entails both courage in relating to a hostile society and unity as a badge of their church life.

1:28—The noble character of their cause and the recognition that Christ is on their side should cause believers to avoid the unreasoning terror that prevents intelligent effort. The term “frighten” or “terrify” (*pturomenoi*) was used to describe the fear experienced by a startled horse. It is important to remain steadfast and resolute in the work of Christ. To oppose the servants of God is to fight against God himself (Acts 5:39) and to take the path that leads to destruction (2 Thess. 1:4-8). A Christian's lack of alarm in facing this type of opposition is a sign of destruction for those opponents. The fear they are trying to place on us rebounds upon them. Their destruction (*apoleias*) is the typical term for eternal destruction (see Mt. 7:13; Jn. 17:12; Rom. 9:22; 2 Pt. 2:1, 3). What is meant is not simple extinction of existence but everlasting state of torment and death.

Illustration—Think back to the trial scene before Emperor Caligula in the movie, *The Robe*. The tribune Marcellus, the Roman officer played by Richard Burton, is standing before the ultimate judicial bench in the Roman world, defending his new-born faith in Christ. In his own defense, he suggests that the imperial directives he violated were wrong. Caligula, screaming, asks Marcellus if he was implying that the divine emperor could be wrong. Marcellus replies: “Sire, it is I who is on trial here, not you.” He might as well have added “yet.” We are all accountable!

1:29—Both suffering and salvation are bestowed upon a believer freely in accordance with Christ's teachings. Granted (*scharisthe*) is a word derived from *charis*, which means “grace” or “favor.” Both salvation and suffering are associated with God's grace. God has his purposes for allowing suffering in our lives. Some of these may include:

- It cements our identity with Christ (Jn. 15:18-21).
- It produces perseverance and character in us (Rom. 5:3-5).
- It reflects the divine economy in which the Cross precedes the Crown (Rom. 8:16-18; 2 Tim. 2:12).
- It enables us to comfort others with the comfort God has supplied to us (2 Cor. 1:3-7).

- Resurrection power and suffering go together (Phil. 3:10).
- We are perfected through suffering (Heb. 2:10).
- Suffering proves genuine faith (1 Pt. 1:6-9).
- Suffering grows us sin-resistant (1 Pt. 4:1).
- Suffering reminds us that we will stand before the judgment seat of God (1 Pt. 4:12-5:1).

Quote—Polycarp, a second century martyr for the faith, while at the stake: “My Lord Jesus has never failed me and I’m not going to let him down now. It is an honor for me to die for him.”

1:30—They were going through the same struggle (*agona*) as Paul. We get our English word “agony” from this term.

B. Conduct Towards the Household of Faith (2:1-11)—Paul urges the believers to unity and to stand firm in the face of persecution, pointing to the examples of the Lord Jesus (2:5-11), Paul himself (2:17-18), Timothy (2:19-24), and Epaphroditus (2:25-30).

1. Exhortation to Unity [Souled Together With] (2:1-4)—A fourfold spiritual reality—

- Encouragement in Christ.
- Consolation of love.
- Fellowship with the Spirit.
- Affectionate sympathy.

s the basis for a fourfold charge to be of—

- One mind.
- One heart.
- One soul.
- One goal or purpose.

2:1—The unity that Paul is invoking is possible because of the four qualities mentioned here. The “if” clauses (protases) that begin this verse are first-class conditional sentences in the original language. In these kinds of sentences, the protasis is treated as a certainty; the “if” could be replaced by “since” or “because.”

Paul’s appeal to unity is first based on encouragement (*paraklesis* can be translated “exhortation” or “comfort”) from a vital union with Christ.

Illustration: Coming along side to encourage—Dad silently sitting next to me on the bench after Chuck D’Aloisio hit a late inning grand slam off me to win a baseball game.

Second, the comfort and consolation (*paramuthion* = speaking closely with someone) provided by the love of Christ should prompt the Philippians to join hands in common action. Imagine the solace of a faithful friend with ready access to the inner sanctum of your soul.

Quote: (*George Elliot aka Mary Ann Evans*)—“Oh the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of being safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words but pour them all out just as they are, chaff and grain together, knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth

keeping and then with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.”

Third, the fellowship produced by the Holy Spirit should stimulate the practical exercise of unity. *Pneumatōs* (with/of the Spirit) is a genitive which could convey the sense of fellowship with the Spirit (objective genitive) or fellowship of or produced by the Spirit (subjective genitive). The subjective genitive is the sense here, particularly considering the first two clauses (encouragement from being in Christ and the consolation of his love).

Fourth, the apostle grounds his call for unity on the power of compassionate sympathy, whether expressed directly by Christ or derivatively by and through other believers. “If any tenderness” (*splagchna*, literally “bowels, for that culture the seat of the emotions) “and compassion” (*oiktirmoi*, conveying a deep feeling of sympathetic yearning) is the way the apostle says this.

2:2—The fourfold appeal in 2:1 leads to the fourfold exhortation in this verse. First, they were to be “like-minded” (*to auto phronete*). This phrase implies moral interest and reflection, not necessarily agreement on opinions. Second, they were to have the same love (*agapen*). This is not an impulse of feeling, it does not necessarily run with our natural inclinations, nor spend itself only on those for whom we have some affinity. It is to love from deliberate choice not for human cause or worth. It comes from the new nature that God supplies to believers. Third, they were to be united in spirit (*sumpsuchoi* = *souled together with*). A ready communion of spirit was to categorize their life together. In their relationships, there was to be easy access to a common page. Fourth, they were to be intent on one purpose—Christ and his glory.

2:3—Contentiousness and party division were problems at Philippi. Selfish ambition (*eritheian*), used by Paul to refer to his opponents in 1:17, denotes self-seeking ambition and a partisan spirit. *Kenodoxian* used here means “empty glory,” the root cause of their self-seeking spirit. Paul gives two practical ways of overcoming this spirit. First, they should consider one another before themselves. This does not mean belittling ourselves; it means prioritizing others before ourselves.

Quotes: *Philip Brooks*— “The true way to be humble is not to stoop until you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your real height against some higher nature that will show you what the real smallness of your greatness is.”

Garrison Keillor— “For fear of what it might do to me, you never paid a compliment, and when other people did, you beat it away from me ... You trained me so well I now perform this for myself ... I do this under the impression that it is humility, a becoming quality in a person. I’m starving for a good word, but after the long drought of my youth, no word is quite good enough. “Good” is not enough. Under this thin veneer of modesty lies a monster of greed. I drive away faint praise, beating my little chest, waiting to be named Sun-God, King of America, Idol of Millions, Bringer of Fire, the Great Haji, Thun-Dar the Boy Giant. I do not want to say, “Thanks, glad you liked it.” I want to say, “Rise, my people. Remove your faces from the carpet. Stand look me in the [eye].”

Considering the qualities of another person’s character will check our tendency to take pride in our own attainments and find fault in others. The ancient Greeks regarded humility (*tapeinophrosuen*=lowliness of mind) as a despicable trait. Humility properly understood begins with our recognition of our creaturely dependence upon God and our true condition in his sight. It breaks down barriers of envy,

strife, jealousy, suspicion, and self-interest. It checks our tendency to self-absorption and focuses on the needs of others.

2:4—The second practical way of overcoming a self-seeking spirit is to make a habit of giving ourselves to the interests of others and not just to our own concerns. Paul is telling us to stay connected and to avoid self-absorption. Always good advice for introverted souls like me.

2. Example of Christ [Who Do I Think I Am] (2:5-11)—The structure and language of the passage suggests that this is a pre-Pauline hymn, an early statement of Christian faith in who Jesus was and what he accomplished. It is a preeminent statement of Christology.

There can be no better example of humility and selflessness than the Lord Jesus. His humility is evident in his preincarnate, incarnate, and exalted states. Paul uses the text to trace the steps in the humiliation of Christ:

- He emptied himself, laying aside, not his divinity, but the independent exercise of his own divine attributes.
- He became a human being in a sinless physical body.
- He used that body to be a servant.
- He took that body to the cross and willingly died.

When Christ is my attitude, then problems take on a different hue. People can rob us of our joy. Having the attitude of a servant ameliorates that. Look at the Lord's attitude. It involved an unselfish regard for his own position (2:6) and a willingness to lower himself for the sake of others (2:7). The bottom line is to lay aside our "rights," our pride, and our "proper estate."

2:5—Our attitudes are to be the same as the Lord Jesus. Attitude (*phroneite*) is the same word used for like-minded in 2:2 (see also 1:7; 3:15, 19; 4:2, 10). This is a concentrated focus, a mindset.

Some Bible scholars think that Isaiah 14:12-15 describes the mindset of Satan before his fall. If that is so, note the stark contrast between the enemy and the Lord:

Christ	Satan
• Did not grasp at equality	I will ascend to heaven.
• Emptied himself of divine prerogatives	I will raise my throne above the stars of heaven.
• Made in appearance and likeness as a man	I will ascend above the tops of the clouds.
• Obedient to death, even on a cross	I will make myself like the Most High.

Illustration: An example from our own Civil War highlights this attitude of self-effacing humility. In 1862, General George McClellan assumed command of the Army of the Potomac. He fancied himself a great military commander and loved to hear people call him a "young Napoleon." One evening, President Lincoln and two of his staff went to visit McClellan, only to learn that he was at a wedding. They waited an hour for the general to return home. When McClellan arrived, he went directly upstairs without paying any attention to the President. Half an hour later, Lincoln sent a servant to inform McClellan that the men were still waiting. The servant returned to tell the President that the General had gone to bed! His staff was furious as Lincoln got up and led the way home. "This is no time to be making points of etiquette and personal dignity," the President explained. "I will hold McClellan's horse if he will only bring us success."

2:6—Nature (*morphe*) refers to that external form that represents what is intrinsic and essential. The thought is that Jesus was God but did not cling to his divine prerogatives. “Equality with God” (*isa theo*) is not a future experience to which Jesus would attain but an actuality that attached to his very being. *Isa theo* flows out of *morphe*. Equality with God describes more fully what the nature or form of God means.

2:7—Made himself nothing (*ekenosen*) is literally “he emptied himself.” This passage is frequently called the kenosis passage, a name derived from the verb. Paul is saying that the Lord Jesus divested himself of his self-interest and of the insignia of his divine majesty, not of his deity itself. Mark Twain’s *The Prince and the Pauper* is a good illustration of this concept.

“Very nature servant” parallels 2:6 “very nature God”. Both divine and human natures in the Lord Jesus were essential and genuine. Likeness (*homoimati*) suggests similarity but also with a difference. His humanity is thoroughly genuine, but different in that it was sinless.

2:8—The death of the Lord Jesus was the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual devotion to God’s purpose which characterized his whole earthly life. “[B]eing found in appearance [*schemati*] as a man” denotes an outward form perceptible to the senses. Outwardly, the Lord Jesus was no different from other people. The death on the cross was so degrading. From the Roman point of view, there was a strong revulsion from this extreme and gory form of capital punishment. From the Jewish view, death by crucifixion would come under the rubric of Deuteronomy 21:23 and meant that the victim was outside the pale of Israel and excommunicated from God’s covenant.

Illustration: Wallace was a missionary to China during the Communist takeover and provides a vivid picture of this type of spirit in action in our time. For an extended period, he gathered food for hospital patients under the most stressful of conditions. The patients got the best of the food he gathered, while he fed himself with pieces of burnt rice that he found on the ground in the marketplace. One day, a Communist soldier caught him. Instead of arresting and charging Wallace, the soldier was awe-struck. “If there is a God who can enable a man to live like this, then I want to know that God.”

2:9—The pattern of exaltation following humiliation is thoroughly biblical and is in response to the Lord’s High Priestly prayer in John 17:5. However, the final analysis is *gloria patri*—the glory of God. Self-aggrandizement never was, is, or will be the Lord’s agenda. His name that is above every name is not merely a title. It refers to his Person and his position of dignity and honor.

2:10—The supreme name is that of “Lord.” Paul quotes Isaiah 45:23 and applies the text to the Lord Jesus. Every knee will bow before him either willingly or under compulsion. The genitives “in heaven” (*epouranion*), “on earth” (*epigeion*), and “under the earth” (*katachthonion*) are either masculine or neuter in gender. The reference is to personal beings (given the language of knees bowing) and therefore the genitives should be understood as masculine. However, the thought expressed by taking these genitives as neuter is true as well. All creation whether animate or inanimate will submit to him (see Rom. 8:19-22).

2:11—Every intelligent being in the universe will not only bow but also confess that Jesus is Lord. The word confess (*exomologesetai*) is an intensive form of the normal word (*homologeō*). This confession

will be an open, public one.

C. Working Out Your Salvation [Shining Like Stars] (2:12-18)—In the movie *The Hiding Place*, Betsy and Corrie ten Boom's interview by the Dutch Resistance highlights the oddity of their situation. It is difficult to imagine two more unlikely candidates for the movement. Yet, at the end of the movie, with the running of the credits, we discover that the entire ten Boom family, except for Corrie, heroically gave their lives in obedience to their Lord. Corrie, by the grace of God, lived to tell the story that no matter how deep the pit, Jesus' love is deeper yet. Unlikely Resistance fighters shone like stars on the dark page of Jewish agony and German shame.

Paul speaking of believers shining like stars in the universe leaves us nonplussed. Is this guy taunting us? We deeply sense our inadequacy of living up to our privileges and our heavenly calling. But by the grace of God in Christ, like Betsy and Corrie ten Boom, we can shine like stars amid a watching world for the glory of God.

Paul emphasizes three points in this section of the text:

- We must understand God's work and our own. We must work but what God has worked in.
- We must avoid grumbling and complaining. Our God is sovereign, and we must receive from his hand gratefully even if it means inconvenience and pain.
- We must blamelessly hold forth the Word of life. Our witness to Christ must be one of character as well as content. God's reputation is at stake in our lives.

2:12—We are to work out what God has worked in. Someone has said that Christianity is not so much about us getting to heaven as heaven getting into us and through us to a hurting world. Working out your salvation does not mean working for your salvation but making salvation operational. It means taking responsibility for our manner of life. Justification, God's declaration of our being right with him, must lead to the experiential aspects of sanctification, by which new life in Christ is consciously and received and visibly demonstrated. We need to learn how to show forth the excellencies of our Lord Jesus in our age.

This statement is often interpreted as relating to the personal salvation of the Philippians. Some interpret Paul's challenge as applicable to the collective life at Philippi as well. That is, the salvation that Paul refers to here involves deliverance from disunity, pride, and selfishness that harms life together. It is best to see both the outworking of personal and corporate salvation to be in the purview of the apostle's exhortation. They were to be diligent in receiving life from above delivering them from whatever held them back from experiencing God's best.

Fear (*phobou*) refers to a reverential respect for God as a controlling motive in life. This is a fear not only of his power of retribution, but of displeasing him at all.

2:13—God energizes us and enables our working things out. He makes us both willing and desirous to do his work. The word family to which *energon* belongs conveys the thought of energy fully active and effective in reaching its goal. It is not mere resident energy, but energy in operation. Certain individuals have interpreted "good will" or "good pleasure" (*eudokias*) as being oriented towards fostering harmonious relationships within the church community. While that certainly pleases God, to limit his goodwill to just that seems overly restrictive.

2:14—Paul instructs them to do all things without complaining. Complaining (*gongusmon*) means to say in a low tone, grumbling with a bad attitude. Think of Deuteronomy 32 when Israel in the wilderness is grumbling against God (see 1 Cor. 10:9-10). How often have we been guilty of this?

Arguing (*dialogismon*) is an inward reasoning that disputes and doubts. It is a logical question launched with an undertone of criticism. The word mainly refers to evil thoughts or anxious reflection and doubt.

2:15—Blameless (*amemptoi*) means irreproachable, living a blameless life. Pure (*akeraioi*) is a term used of undiluted wine or of a metal which contains no weakening alloy. The Philippians were to be blameless and pure amid a crooked and perverse generation. While believers are redeemed out of the present evil world (Gal. 1:4) and no longer share its condemnation or its spirit, we are still in the world (Jn. 17:15) and must not withdraw and shut ourselves up in some secluded place. We have a direct commission to go to the world. In the world is our proper place as the Lord's people (Mt. 28:19-20). For the world, against the world is our operational balancing act.

2:16—It is our privilege to hold out the Word of life. Hold forth (*epechontes*) can mean either “hold forth” or “hold firmly”. We are to do both—hold forth the Word firmly. There's a word picture here. This word was used in secular Greek of offering wine to a guest at a banquet.

2:17-18—These are touching verses. A vivid picture of Paul's joy amid suffering in prison. He pictures his life poured out as a sacrifice along with the Philippians' sacrifice. They were priests together, making spiritual offerings to God because of their faith in Christ. Poured out (*spendomai*) occurs only twice in the New Testament, both times in the passive voice and as metaphors for Paul's suffering and eventual martyrdom (Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6). Both Jewish and Greek religious practice included that use of wine poured out ceremonially in connection with certain sacrifices. Paul regarded his own life as a sacrifice in the interests of the spiritual advancement of the Philippians. Service (*leitourgia*) originally denoted official service to a political body but later developed a cultic use, describing priestly functions.

IV. Commended Servants (2:19-30)—Paul was longing for news about the Philippians and the Philippians for news about Paul's circumstances and trial. Timothy was the bearer and bringer of news. Paul's commendation of his trusted young associate suggests a larger ministry role, one of which we can only speculate.

News can suggest unwarranted conclusions. Paul's concern for Epaphroditus' situation is touching and seems tailored to heading these conclusions off. Epaphroditus was sent by the Philippians to help Paul but fell sick, nearly died, and was a deep source of concern for the apostle rather than a helpful assistant. Paul wants to head off any conclusions by the Philippians that Epaphroditus had failed when Paul needed him most.

In Timothy and Epaphroditus, we see the character of a yielded servant:

- a genuine, unselfish concern for the spiritual welfare of others (2:20).
- a willingness to take a lower place and serve alongside others (2:21).
- dependable when needed (2:25).
- not calling attention to themselves (2:26-28).

- deserving of honor (2:29-30).

A. Timothy (2:19-24)—Paul met Timothy on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:6ff), at which time Timothy came to faith (1 Cor. 4:17). Timothy’s mother and grandmother were believers before him (2 Tim. 1:3-5). He was the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father, but Paul always considered the young man as his own “dearly beloved son” in the faith (2 Tim. 1:2). When Paul returned to Derbe and Lystra on his second missionary journey, he enlisted Timothy as one of his fellow laborers (Acts 16:1-4). Timothy replaced John Mark, whom Paul refused to take along on the journey because of Mark’s previous abandonment on the first journey (Acts 13:13; 15:36-41). Timothy served as Paul’s personal representative to various churches (see 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; 1 Thess. 3:2).

Paul’s selflessness is evident here. Timothy was close to Paul, like a son to him. If Paul ever needed Timothy, it was now while he was in prison. Yet he was willing to part with Timothy’s companionship for the benefit of others. Paul is modeling the surest antidote to self-absorption—to widen our horizons and so enlarge our hearts of sympathy that we share the burdens of others.

Timothy’s portrait offers deep insights into Christian ministry. Timothy may have been a nervous soul who was of himself. Genuine ministry has much more to do with sheer unselfish love than with the characteristics/gifting of the person ministering. Timothy genuinely cared for the Philippians and for looking after the interests of the Lord Jesus in the congregation. He learned the art of putting the interests of others before his own.

2:19—Paul is anticipating encouraging news regarding the Philippians. The term “cheered” (*eupsucho*) appears only here in the New Testament. It was frequently used as a sepulchral inscription with the sense of “farewell, may it be well with your soul.”

2:20-21—“No one like him” is literally “no one of equal soul (*isopsuchon*). One paraphrase rendered this “no one else who is heart and soul with me.” No one in Paul’s immediate circle shared so intimately his deep concern for the Philippians as Timothy. Concern (*merimnasei*) conveys the sense of concern of one among the group.

In a word, Timothy was a wonderful example of a servant leader. Mark Twain once remarked: “Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example.” Timothy was such an example. God grant us the grace and good sense to replace annoyance with respect and imitation. In a world of selfishness and prideful self-seeking, it is a rare thing to find a person like Timothy who is anxious to promote the welfare of other people and to give himself to a fatiguing journey to resolve personal quarrels in the church.

2:22-24—Timothy’s character was proven. He served as a bondservant for the extension of the gospel. The description of his filial devotion to Paul speaks of the bond that grown between the two men. Paul would be sending Timothy to them as soon as he had the verdict in his own case. As in 1:25, 2:24 reflects his confidence that he will be released.

B. Epaphroditus (2:25-30)—Epaphroditus was the bearer of this letter to the Philippians. He is mentioned in the Scripture only here and in 4:18. His name means “charming.” Paul speaks of him in glowing terms—his brother, fellow-worker, and fellow soldier. He was a sharer of spiritual life with the

apostle, a co-laborer in the Gospel, and a participant of the dangers involved in standing firm for the Lord Jesus in proclaiming the Gospel. Epaphroditus was the duly appointed delegate to carry the Philippians' gift to Paul. This use of *apostolos* is an example of the New Testament use of the term in a sense other than a reference to the foundational apostles of the Church.

Epaphroditus served as the Philippians' minister (*leitourgos*) to Paul's needs, functioning on the behalf in performing service for Paul. We get our word "liturgy" from *leitourgos*. The term appears several times in the New Testament (Rom. 13:6; 15:16; Phil. 2:17, 25, 30; Heb. 1:7; 8:2) with a priestly ministry in view. Epaphroditus' ministry has priestly overtones in that he was standing in the Philippians' stead in his service to Paul.

2:26-27—Epaphroditus' emotions were engaged. He is longing for (*epipothon*) the Philippians. Earlier in the letter, Paul used the word to express his desire to see the Philippians again. James uses the term for the Spirit's yearning for the total allegiance of a person's heart (Jas. 4:5) and Peter of a newborn's desire for milk (1 Pt. 2:2). Distressed (*ademonon*) conveys the sense of great mental and spiritual stress. It described the Lord's agony in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:37; Mk. 14:33). Were there rumors that Epaphroditus was more of a burden than a help to Paul? Paul goes on to attribute Epaphroditus' recovery to divine intervention. He was seriously ill. The report that had reached Philippi was no exaggeration.

2:28-30—Paul shows how believers should treat those misunderstood by others. The Philippians may have thought wrongly of Epaphroditus, that he had failed the Philippian congregation in being their emissary to Paul in his need. Paul defends Epaphroditus, points out the true circumstances, and urges the Philippians to honor their messenger. Easing the minds of his friends and imparting to them a gladness of heart meant more to him than any personal service Epaphroditus could perform. The Philippians were to welcome Epaphroditus because he had risked his life (*paraboleusamenos*) in service to the Lord Jesus and he tried to make up for the Philippians' absence from Paul during this trying time. Epaphroditus had staked his life on the service of Christ. Such a word brings a challenge and a rebuke to any easy-going Christianity which makes no stern demands.

V. Pursuing the Goal (3:1-4:1)—The stuff of life can easily encompass our field of vision. These things can be tangible amenities or luxuries of life or such intangible things as reputation, power, or control. Paul himself needed to abandon his self-righteousness to embrace Christ and follow God's high call in Christ Jesus. This chapter briefly summarizes Paul's perspective on his past (3:1-11), present (3:12-16), and future (3:17-4:1).

- 3:1-11—Paul deals with his own past from the point of view and terminology of an accountant. His new values are foremost in view.
- 3:12-16—This section addresses his present situation, borrowing terms from the athletic field and conveying vigor and determination.
- 3:17-4:1—This portion probes Paul's future. He writes from the standpoint of an alien passing through this world, looking for and eagerly awaiting Christ's return.

A. No Confidence in the Flesh [No Stuff to Strut] (3:1-11)—When we speak of the flesh, we usually mean low-brow flesh. Blatant power grabs, sleazy sex, malicious gossip, overtly harmful acts are easy and clear calls. Relying on achievements, status, position, wealth, and similar factors for a sense of worth and appropriateness can be difficult to identify and accurately assess. In this passage,

Paul speaks of—

- A new confidence (3:1-6).
- A new sense of gain (3:7-9).
- A new knowledge (3:10-11).

1. A new confidence (3:1-6)—The flesh here is the pride of physical descent cherished by the Jews. Paul was a Jewish blueblood. Glorifying in one's ethnic, religious, and cultural grouping was natural for the Jews of the day. Paul speaks of a confidence that is derivative, born of the work of God in Christ. The self-satisfied narcissistic parade is long gone, replaced by an intense devotion to the Lord Jesus.

3:1—Finally (*to loipon*) has occasioned considerable scholarly attention. Almost half the book follows this phrase. Scholars have suggested that Philippians is really two letters put together. To say “finally” and not conclude the matter is a scholarly no-no. But eh, Paul's preaching! To the preacher, “finally” simply means that he or she is on the descent and had better start figuring out how to land this baby. For a preacher to say “finally” and then go on for a while is something with which audiences are familiar. Scripture records that Paul had very long-winded moments (see Acts 20:7-12).

“[T]he same things” is an enigmatic phrase. Some suggestions as to its referent include—

- the exhortation to rejoice.
- the apostle's repeated warning against dissension.
- the warning that he is getting to concerning false teachers (3:2) and enemies of the cross (3:18). This strikes me as the most natural way to take the phrase.

3:2—Paul warns the Philippians of a group of false teachers who tried to mix law and grace. These “Judaizers” placed their trust in self-acquired merit though religious and moral practices. The apostle sternly condemned them in the books of Romans and Galatians. He uses three disparaging terms to describe them:

- *Dogs (kunas)*—denotes strays, the vicious and homeless animals that roamed the streets and would attack passersby. Used figuratively, it was always a term of reproach. Note a serious proviso. This word's import is distinguished from its diminutive form *kunarion*, which denoted a house dog, distinct from a dog of the streets. When Jesus referred to a Gentile woman as a dog, the term he used was *kunarion*, a term of affection, not contempt (see Mt. 15:26-27; Mk. 7:27-28).
- *Evil workers (kakous ergatos)*—These people seemed to have been very energetic folk who concentrated on the deeds of the law rather than the grace of God. Ephesians 2:8-10 and Titus 3:3-7 are key texts making it clear that no one can be saved by their own efforts.
- *Concision (katatomen)*—This word is translated as “mutilators of the flesh” by the NIV. It is a play on the word for circumcision (*peritome*) used in 3:3. Paul deliberately parodies the Judaizers' insistence on circumcision by sarcastically calling it mutilation.

Who are the Judaizers of our day? Who are those who would seek to justify themselves before God by what they do? Determine that any sense of righteousness you may develop will always be emphatically derivative. Bible knowledge, baptism, church membership, service, or position, ordination, or whatever else pulls your chain are dung if relied on for righteousness' sake.

3:3—Christians are called the circumcision (*peritome*), elsewhere described as the circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:29), not performed by human hands but by Christ himself (Col. 2:11). Over against Jewish formalism, Paul sets forth three affirmations of Christian privilege:

- We worship (*latreuontes*) by the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit energizes true spiritual worship, not human traditions. In saying this, Paul is not criticizing liturgical worship but noting worship's true dynamic.
- We glory or exalt (*kauchomai*) in Jesus Christ.
- We put no confidence (*pepoithotes*) in the flesh. This is Paul's way of describing the innate tendency of religious people, and really of everyone, to secure a standing before God by our own efforts. Beware of putting any confidence in your flesh! Pray over your abilities, because their exercise can be occasions for the flesh to strut its stuff.

3:4-6—The Judaizers were the kind of people who could strut sitting down! They wore their religion on their sleeves and had elaborate pecking orders of hierarchy and solemn propriety. Paul engages in self-commendation. This is appropriate if one is defending oneself or using oneself as a genuine model for others. In this text, Paul argues much the way he does in 2 Corinthians 11:21-12:12. He's telling the Philippians that if they want religious pedigree, he is the real deal. There is no doubt that Paul was a Jewish thoroughbred. In case they had forgotten, he reviews his credentials here. He does this to emphasize that placing trust in lineage, or relying on any physical characteristic, is misguided.

Paul lists seven advantages he used to have in the flesh in 3:5-6 that he now counted as loss for the sake of gaining Christ. These fall into two categories. The first are those which the apostle received by birth apart from his own choice (circumcision, Israelite ancestry, tribal descent, and Hebrew parentage and training). The second are those he chose (being a Pharisee, persecuting the church of Christ, and having a flawless external record of legal righteousness).

3:5—"Circumcised on the eighth day" proves Paul's parents conformed to the letter of the Law (see Lev. 12:3). "[O]f the people of Israel" describes his heritage. Both his parents were Jews. "[O]f the tribe of Benjamin." Benjamin was the tribe of Israel's first king (1 Sam. 9:1-2) who was Paul's original namesake. "[A] Hebrew of Hebrews" informs us that he was raised in a rigorous Jewish setting and learned thoroughly the customs and ancestral language of his people.

"[I]n regard to the law, a Pharisee" conveys that Paul was a member of the strictest sect among his people. While today we use the word "Pharisee" as the equivalent of "hypocrite," that was not the case in Paul's day. The Pharisees were regarded as having reached the summit of religious experience.

3:6—"[A]s for zeal, persecuting the church". "Persecuting" (*diokon*) translates the same word translated "press on" in 3:12, 14 to describe the vigor of Paul's response to the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. The experience of having persecuted the church haunted Paul (see 1 Cor. 15:9) and drove him repeatedly to the grace of God (see 1 Cor. 15:10). What a lesson! In whatever way we may fail the Lord, and fail him we will, his wondrous grace is sufficient to wash us anew and give us fresh legs for service.

"[A]s for legalistic righteousness" Paul was faultless. Jewish rabbis falsely held out the possibility of blamelessness through the strict observance of the Law. Paul seems to claim that he qualified by that standard.

2. A new sense of gain (3:7-9)—Paul has a new ledger, a new profit and loss statement, which computes gain and loss in a radically different way from the world at large. The key term in this text is “count” or “consider” (*egeomai*). The idea is to evaluate or assess. Few people think seriously about the values that control their decisions and determine the direction they take. Many allow the bric-a-brac of life to steal their Christian momentum and joy.

This passage is Jesus-centered and Messiah-focused. There is the matter of status—God regards all Christians as being “in Christ,” part of his new creation. There is the matter of personal knowledge—knowing Jesus is not less than knowing about him, but it is so much more than just knowing about him. There is the matter of conformity of life—believers are to be committed to patterns of behavior and living that characterize the Lord Jesus.

On the debit side of Paul’s new ledger is what human nature might brag about. On the credit side is the Lord Jesus. Paul did not regard the privileges he had (3:4-5) as something of which to take advantage. In laying these aside and putting on the Lord Jesus, he had realized an infinite gain.

3:7—Paul contrasts gain (*kerde*) from the perspective of Christ. Consider (*kegemai*) is a perfect passive denoting action in past time which is effective into the present. It refers to Paul’s conversion and reminds us that the transformation of Paul’s life did not come about gradually. It was a distinct event on the Damascus Road which ushered in a radically different life agenda for the apostle.

3:8—Paul lost a life when he converted but gained Christ, an infinitely greater treasure. Consider (*kegomai*) is the present tense here, an interesting change from the perfect passive in 3:7. Paul continues to consider whatever he set aside as rubbish (*skubala*) for the sake of gaining Christ. *Skubala* was used of human or animal excrement, of scraps after a meal, or of general refuse at a dump. In the exchange, he gained a new knowledge (3:8), a new righteousness (3:9), a new power (3:10), a new goal (3:13-14), and a new hope (3:20-21).

Quote—Jim Eliot: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

3:9—Paul’s righteousness and ours is purely derivative. Hang on to this when the enemy is rocking your boat over all that is wrong with you. “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). This is faith based righteousness. I love Pascal’s description of faith in the *Pensees*—faith is God perceived by the heart.

3. A new knowledge (3:10-11)—This is not one of striving for power over people and things, but of straining to know Christ in the power of his Resurrection and in the sharing of his sufferings.

3:10—Paul wants to know (*gnomai*) the power of Christ’s resurrection, that is, the power of the resurrected Christ now operative in his life. Associated with this experience of power is the “fellowship of his sufferings.” This is not referring to Christ’s propitiatory sufferings on our behalf (Rom. 3:24-26), for no one can share those. But each believer, in identifying with Christ, incurs and will incur a measure of Christ’s afflictions (Col. 1:24).

The words “becoming like him” translates *summorphizomenos*, Paul is stating his desire to duplicate in

his experience the essence of Christ's life and death in an ever-increasing way.

Hank Beebe's song *To Know Thee* reflects Paul's sentiment and thought:

To know Thee is the goal my heart has set, to know Thee is its greatest prize,
To know Thee, though I feel that we have met on dark roads where sadness lies,
To know Thee when the storms of life increase, and I see no sheltered landing.
To know Thee in a time of quiet peace that passes my understanding,
To know Thee is to come to know the truth, the truth that will set me free;

I know not where my growing faith will lead, or how I may react in word and deed;
I do know that I have a crying need to know Thee.

To know Thee is to know how I should pray, to know Thee is a prayer complete.
To know Thee is to finally find my way with Thy bright lamp unto my feet.
To know Thee is at first to know Thy name, and speak it as one confessing,
And finding that the mention of Thy name re-echoes as a blessing.
To know Thee is to know my deepest self, to know Thee uncovers me.
I know of fame and fortune far and wide, I know of the rewards that they provide,
I know that I would cast them all aside to know Thee.

3:11—Attain (*katanteso*) poses interpretative problems. Is Paul doubtful of his own future resurrection? It is best to regard the clause as expressing expectation rather than doubt. Resurrection (*exanastasin*) translates a word used only here in the New Testament. Is this term merely a stylistic variation from the normal word for resurrection (*anastasis*) or is it meant to differentiate this resurrection from the general one? Premillennialists think that *exanastasin* is a reference to a partial “resurrection out from among” other dead ones (i.e. the Rapture as they understand it). Others (Reformed scholars are in this group) insist that it is not clear that *exanastasin* means anything other than resurrection in a general sense.

B. Pressing On to Win the Prize [But One Thing] (3:12-16)—This passage is a highlight for proper spiritual ambition. We must bring our common day-to-day lives up to the standard revealed to us in those special times in our spiritual walk. Determine to live in the gray day by the vision received on the mount.

Paul's “but one thing” is to finish his life and ministry well, forgetting what was behind, straining every nerve to go after what is ahead, and striving to the finish line. He presents Christian maturity as consciously knowing that you have not arrived and that you must keep pressing to the goal. A seasoned athlete knows that the race is not won or lost until the finish line has been reached.

The Five Ds of Spiritual Drive—There are five essentials to pressing on to the high call of God in Christ Jesus:

- *Dissatisfaction (3:12)*—We need a sanctified dissatisfaction with our present state. Hunger for more than you have attained. With the poet we affirm—
Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
or what 's a heaven for
Sometimes God helps us in cultivating a godly dissatisfaction:

Illustration—Bree in the *Horse and His Boy*—Bree was a war stallion who found himself carrying a young lad on a journey toward Narnia. He was very high-minded about himself and quite put out with the indignity of his situation. While in complaint mode, his pace was not even close to what he was capable of. Suddenly, Aslan emerged out of the woods and took a swipe with his claws at the stallion's flanks. Bree ran like the wind mile after mile. A wonderful illustration of what God does in exhorting us at times.

- *Devotion (3:13)*—Focused concentration is the secret of power. This one thing I do, not these eighty things I dabble in. This confronts a dilemma of modern life—diversion from purposeful living.

Illustration—The Mississippi River runs strong and deep in the north, a waterway of majesty and power that until recently stayed within its channels. However, down south the great river dissipates into large stagnant bayou areas, much like our lives when we lack clear focus and dedication.

- *Direction (3:13b)*—A future orientation. What is past is past, and we can only break the power of the past by living into the future.
- *Determination (3:14)*—This is not a lifting of yourself up by your bootstraps, God has called us, is working in us, and will perfect that work and bring it to completion (see 1:6). But our partnership in this endeavor must be a whole-hearted one (see 1 Cor. 9:24-27).

Illustration—In the movie *Chariots of Fire*, Eric Liddell falls early in a footrace, and gets up not only to continue to run, but to win the race. The movie vividly portrays his determination, capturing his grit in slow motion as the race concludes. Ours needs to be a determined effort to glorify God with all that we are!

- *Discipline (3:15-16)*—Choose to live up. We will make this choice many times during our lives, so do not sweat regrets. By the grace of God, let us embrace discipline, knowing that discipline of itself is not the key. Its sole purpose is to guide us into the realm of the Spirit for further refinement. God makes the changes, not our schedules, activities, or willpower. However, he has chosen to work in tandem with us, on us, So, by the grace of God, let us take ourselves in hand. Determine that we will live up to what we have attained, not live down to whatever is minimally acceptable or convenient.

3:12—Paul is emphatically denying that he has arrived. Rather, with the enthusiasm and persistence of a runner in the Greek games or a charioteer in the arena, he pursues Christlikeness with fervor. The perfect tense verb *teleleiomai* conveys the sense of bringing something to its intended completion or fulfillment. Final perfection will not come in this life; there will always be room for progress while we remain pilgrims in this sphere. This pursuit is vigorously expressed. Press on (*dioko*) here and in 3:14 is a strong word for active and earnest endeavor. The word is translated “pursue” or even “persecute” (as in 3:6) in other contexts.

3:13—“One thing I do” is literally “But one thing”. Paul expresses his devotion in pungent and dramatic prose. Forgetting (*epilanthanomenos*) does not mean obliterating the memory of the past. Paul had just recalled his past (3:5-7). It entails the conscious refusal to let the past absorb your attention and

impede your progress. Paul never allowed his heritage (3:5-7) or his religious attainments (3:9-11) to obstruct his pursuit of the prize of the high call of God in Christ. Past regrets must not shackle us. We do not run the race set before us by looking backward. Good or bad, let us learn from the past, savor the memory of friends from the past, and push on for what God has for us now.

Straining forward (*epekteinomenos*) is a picture of a runner who strains every effort to reach the finish line. Everything is on the line.

3:14—“I press on” (*dioko*) was a word used to describe a hunter stalking prey. One does not become a winning athlete by listening to lectures, watching movies, reading books, or cheering at games. One becomes a winning athlete by getting into the game and determining to win. The same zeal that Paul employed in persecuting the church (3:6), he deployed in serving Christ.

Quote—C.S. Lewis said it poignantly: “Aim at heaven and you’ll get earth thrown in. Aim at earth, and you’ll get neither.”

3:15 There was an ongoing discussion on Christian perfection in the Philippian congregation. Was there a spirit of pride based on extravagant claims to advanced spirituality? Were the symptoms of this spirit apparent in dissension and quarrelsomeness? Perhaps I am inferring too much. Mature (*teleioi*) does not mean sinless perfection. It conveys a movement toward a point of completion, to a certain level of spiritual growth and stability in contrast to infants.

Think (*phronomen*) reveals more than an intellectual difference on a miscellaneous point. It entails a different outlook or mindset that affects conduct. Paul is content to rely on God to change this difference of outlook if that be God's intention.

3:16—Live up! It is so easy to indulge yourself. The culture and this world will tell you how you need a break today, how you need to pander to your desire for creature comforts, and on and on. God knows your needs and will meet them. Only determine to be what the Spirit wants you to be as you best understand that.

C. Standing Firm While Waiting (3:17-4:1)—A popular existential novel, *Waiting for Godot*, portrays the human condition as one of waiting for a supernatural being (Godot is a thinly veiled reference to God) who never shows up. The point of the novel is that people must stop waiting for something to happen and make something happen. People must stop waiting for God to take charge and take charge themselves. Christians resist such a message, not because it encourages active engagement with the affairs of the world, but because it assumes that God is either non-existent or aloof from our concerns. It also treads the dangerous path of human autonomy and seems blithely unaware of, or purposefully ignoring, the reality of our fallen human nature. A God who never shows up is simply not the witness of the Bible. We are to work while we wait, confident that God will work out a marvelous restoration in the end.

Octavian and Antony’s victory over Crassus and Brutus in 42 BC is in the background in this text. Rome settled the veterans of that battle near Philippi, essentially turning it into a colony. The task of Roman citizen-settlers in areas like Philippi was to bring Roman culture and rule to the region and to expand Roman influence there. Paul speaks of believers in this light. This section is an extended

metaphor about being citizens of heaven. We are to be colonies of heaven, if you will, bringing the light and rule of heaven to the places we reside. We are to behave this way, not like people in the world conditioned by their senses (3:18-19). We are to give allegiance to the Lord Jesus in all respects, honoring him with our lips and our lives.

Paul makes three points in counseling the Philippians to stand firm while waiting:

- They were to follow godly, rather than worldly, examples (3:17-19).
- They were to eagerly await a Savior from Heaven (3:20).
- They were to expect a glorious transformation (3:21).

1. Follow Godly, Rather Than Worldly, Examples (3:17-19)

3:17—Paul invites the Philippians to join with others in following his example. The theme of imitation is a frequent one in the New Testament (see 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Gal 4:12; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7, 9). People have a right to look at our lives and see something of the Lord Jesus. “Join with others in following my example” (*summimetai*) is an objective genitive. Paul is not promoting himself. What he is doing is putting himself on the line. He wants them to imitate him, even as he imitates Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

3:18-19—The apostle proceeds to describe the enemies of the cross in this text. These enemies are described as a group of sensualists who indulge various physical appetites without restraint. A fourfold condemnation ensues:

- Their end is destruction—They had cut themselves off from the only hope of salvation. They had no prospect except for the doom that awaits all people who scorn the Lord.
- Their god was their stomach (their carnal appetites)—This more naturally describes an indulgence in fleshly appetites than a legalistic insistence on kosher food.
- Whose glory is their shame—What should have shamed the sensualists became a point of boasting (see Eph. 5:12).
- Their mind (*phronountes*) was on earthly things. Their attention was on satisfying themselves.

Ours is a hedonistic and materialist age. People mortgage their souls for the passing pleasures and things of this age. You pay interest on that debt for eternity.

2. Eagerly Await a Savior from Heaven (3:20)—Our true home is in heaven. Here on earth, we are a colony of heaven's citizens. As in 1:27, Paul employs a political metaphor. The Philippians were citizens of a far-off city (Rome) and they were proud of that status. On an immeasurably higher plane, believers belong to a “city ... whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10), the Jerusalem that is above” (Gal. 4:26), and are themselves “foreigners and strangers on the earth” (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pt. 2:11).

Eagerly await (*apekdechometha*) suggests a tiptoeing anticipation and longing. This word appears in Romans 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Corinthians 1:7; Galatians 5:5; and Hebrews 9:28. Our earnest expectation is for the Lord to return and to fully establish his rightful rule over the earth. We are aliens in this world—just passing through—and, although we are to be actively engaged in God's kingdom work in this sphere, we do not fully fit in here. Let us allow him to grow in us that desire to go and be with the one to whom we are being fitted.

3. Expecting a Glorious Transformation (3:21-4:1)—At Christ's coming, our earthly, transient appearance will be changed, and believers will receive glorified bodies that will more adequately display our essential character as children of God and sharers of the divine life in Christ. Lowly bodies (*to soma tes tapeinoseos*) are literally “the body of the humble state”. This is not meant as a disparagement of the human body as being inherently evil, but a realistic appraisal of our physical frailty and susceptibility to sin. Transformation is accomplished by the power that enables Christ to bring everything under his control. “Power” translates *energeia* and conveys the sense of power in effective action best demonstrated by the resurrection of Christ.

4:1— “Therefore” concludes the section. He says ce—

- we are not of this world (3:20),
- we are going home to heaven (3:20),
- we will be transformed by his power (3:21).

From this conclusion, Paul exhorts the Philippians are to stand firm in Christ (4:1; see 1:27). They were not to be intimidated by their opponents.

“Longed for” (*epipothetoi*) expresses Paul's ardent desire to see the Philippians again, echoing the sentiments of 1:8. “My joy and crown” are words of endearment reminiscent of Paul's tribute to the Thessalonians (see 1 Thess. 2:19-20). The crown (*stephanos*) denoted the festive garland worn as a sign of gladness or the wreath awarded to the victor at an athletic contest.

VI. Final Exhortations, Thanksgiving, and Greetings (4:2-23)—

A. Final Exhortations [For the Road] (4:2-9)—

4:2-3—While we stand firm, we are to help others do likewise. A trusted colleague is instructed to assist two women in the church in resolving their differences. “Euodia” means “progressive journey.” “Syntyche” means “pleasant acquaintance.” These names are common ones in ancient inscriptions and there is no warrant for allegorizing them to represent parties in the church. These women are exhorted to “agree in the Lord.” They are to have the same mindset (*phronein*). Paul enlists the help of a third party Syzygus (yokefellow in the NIV), whom he challenges to live up to his name by bringing these two women together. If indeed it is proper to understand this term as a proper name rather than a vague reference to a nameless helper, Paul's pun parallels the case of Onesimus (meaning useful or profitable) in Philemon 11.

4:4-9— Paul then goes on to instruct them to rejoice in the Lord. In the context of the culture of the day, this was more than just individual activity. It called for public celebration, but with a gentle and gracious presence, not a raucous one. Moral writers often strung together short, loosely related statements of moral advice. Paul is doing this in these verses as he continues to exhort the Philippians to positive Christian virtues:

- Rejoice in the Lord always (4:4).
- Be gentle to all (4:5).
- Be prayerful rather than anxious (4:6-7).

- Think of excellent things (4:8-9).

4:5—Gentleness (*epieikes*) can mean yielding, kind, and forbearing. The word conveys a willingness to yield one's personal rights in showing consideration to others. It is gracious forbearance. A fair-mindedness that is charitable towards the faults of others and merciful in one's judgment of their failings because it takes the whole situation into account. It is sweet reasonableness. Gentleness allows a person to go through difficulties without becoming vindictive or bitter. Christ's attitude becomes our gentle and forbearing spirit.

Illustration: Garrison Keillor of *Prairie Home Companion* fame has a monologue on eating fat. It begins with "I eat fat. Fat is comfortable. Fat is what allows two people to get close to one another without bruising each other." It seems to me that gentleness is spiritual fat. It is what makes it possible for Christians to live in community without bruising each other (or bruising each other unduly).

As encouragement, Paul reminds the Philippians that the Lord's return is near. His reference is to Christ's return (as in 3:20-21) and our glorious prospects in that joyful day. A similar connection between a patient, forbearing spirit and the Lord's return occurs in James 5:8.

4:6-9—Worry: Thief or Tutor—Paul provides the following guidance in overcoming worry:

- Right praying (4:6-7).
- Right thinking (4:8).
- Right living (4:9).

For other helpful texts on anxiety, see Isaiah 41:10; Matthew 6:25-34; and 1 Peter 5:6-7.

4:6—Paul's direction to anxious folks is to pray. Anxious (*merimnate*) appears approximately twenty times in the New Testament and only four times in a favorable sense (see 1 Cor. 7:32, 34; 12:25; Phil. 2:20).

Illustrations: Examples of anxiety abound as a concern to moderns. At one point, a columnist was receiving approximately 10,000 letters per month from individuals seeking assistance with their problems. When asked if any one problem predominated, her reply was that fear or anxiety soared above the rest. People were afraid of losing their health, their wealth, and their loved ones. They were afraid of personal tragedies, death, sickness, and even life itself.

A prominent Anglican bishop developed a severe fear of paralysis later in life. One evening while he sat at the head table of a denominational banquet, his fellow diners heard him muttering to himself: "It has finally happened. Total insensitivity in the left limb." A distinguished elderly woman sitting next to him leaned over and whispered in his ear: "Your Grace, you'll be pleased to know that it is my leg you're pinching."

Anxiety (*merimnate*) means "to be pulled in different directions". Our hopes pull us in one direction and our fears in the opposite direction. We are pulled apart. The English term "worry" originates from an ancient Anglo-Saxon word which means to choke or strangle. How well named the emotion is has been demonstrated repeatedly in people who have lost their effectiveness due to the stultifying effects of anxiety and apprehension.

Worry is a thief. It sweeps down on us like a bandit, robbing us of our energy, our enthusiasm, our time, and our sleep. It pilfers our effectiveness and our fellowship with those we love. It is not enough for us to tell ourselves to quit worrying because that will never capture the thief. Worry is an inside job—it takes more than good intentions to get the victory. The antidote to worry is a divine garrisoning of our hearts and minds.

Paul exhorts the Philippians to pray instead of worrying. Four words are used here to describe a believer's communion with God:

- Prayer (*proseuche*) describes a believer's approach to God. Reverence is true prayer's watchword.
- Petition (*dessei*) emphasizes our position of need and request (*aitemata*) specifically lists what we need.
- Thanksgiving (*eucharistias*) is an attitude of heart and mind that realizes that all we are and have is the result of God's rich grace. This attitude is the heart and soul of true prayer. Recalling God's goodness and mercy will save us from the many pitfalls which await the ungrateful soul—overconcern with current problems, forgetfulness of God's gracious dealings with us in the past, and disregard of the needs of others who are less fortunate than ourselves.
- We are to present (*gnorizestho*) these requests to God. This term conveys the sense of communicating our experience to God. Prayer is not the lingua franca of Stoic self-sufficiency.

4:7—When we give our hearts to Christ in salvation, we experience peace with God (Rom. 5:1). However, the peace of God is more than this. It does not mean the absence of trials on the outside, but quiet confidence within, regardless of circumstances, people, or things.

Guard (*phrouresei*) translates a military term which means “to protect or garrison”. It is the kind of guarding that prevents entrance or exit in addition to simple protection. The peace of God garrisons our hearts and minds, our emotions, and our thoughts. Heart (*kardias*) denotes the innermost part of a person, one's moral, volitional, intellectual, and spiritual center. Passes understanding (*huperechousa*) conveys the sense of absolute uniqueness, not just relative superiority.

Illustration: John Bunyan uses this picture of garrisoning in *Pilgrim's Progress*. Harmony, happiness, joy, and health attended Mansoul while Mr. God's-Peace maintained his office. However, when Prince Emmanuel left the town, Mr. God's-Peace laid down his commission and departed as well. We enjoy God's gift of peace only in Christ, in our obedience to him and our submission to his authority.

4:8—This command, to think of wonderful and lovely things, runs directly opposite to the habits instilled by modern media. Modern media seems hell-bent to focus on tragedy and ugliness wrought by human misfeasance. To think of excellent things is the engine of living well. The Navigator limerick is so true:

Sow a thought, reap an action.
Sow an action, reap a habit.
Sow a habit, reap a character.
Sow a character, reap a destiny!

However, we cannot think how we should in our own energy. Excellent thinking comes in reception

mode. We need to come to the Word of God, place ourselves in the arena of the Spirit, and let the Lord work on us. Philippians 4:8 succinctly captures the traits of excellent thinking:

- True (*alethe*) has the sense of valid, dependable, or honest. Assessing a situation for what it truly is bears directly on worry. One survey on worry indicated that only 8% of what people worried about was something over which they had control. More than 90% of what pulled people apart was either imaginary, possibility worrying, or over things which they had no control.
- Noble (*semna*) refers to what is dignified and worthy of respect (see 1 Tim. 3:8,11; Titus 2:2).
- Right (*dikaia*) refers to what conforms to God's standards and worthy of his approval.
- Pure (*hagna*) refers to what is wholesome, not mixed with moral impurities.
- Lovely (*prospile*) refers to what is pleasing, agreeable, or amicable. This quality promotes peace rather than conflict.
- Admirable (*euphema*) denotes what is praiseworthy, attractive, and rings true to the highest standards. This is high-honed thinking.
- Excellent (*arete*) deals with what is exceptional in any sphere of activity and the corresponding prestige that such behavior or thinking brings.

Think (*logizesthe*) means to dwell on or mull over something. It was a word used by the ancient Greeks for solving knotty math problems. It involves turning things over in your mind repeatedly. Practically speaking, this kind of mulling over things is to make the Word of God the umpire and substance of your thought.

4:9—The four verbs of this verse form two pairs. The first pair “learned” and “received,” describe the Philippians’ instruction by Paul. The next pair “heard” and “saw,” depicts their personal observation of the apostle, both his speech and his conduct. This is not egotism on Paul’s part, the self-satisfied assertion that his own conduct was the standard for others to follow. This statement reflects the spirit of 1 Corinthians 11:1, challenging people to be imitators of the apostle, even as he was of Christ.

B. Thanksgiving for the Philippians’ Gift (4:10-20)—Paul thanks the Philippians for their sacrificial gift to meet his needs. He reflects on being in need and on the spiritual benefit that comes to people who sacrificially meet the needs of others.

4:10-13 Contentment [Is It Christ I Want or What He Gives]—These verses compose a classic passage on Christian contentment. The beginning of contentment in all circumstances comes from God’s sovereign control over all things and from the knowledge that this sovereign God loves me and promises good to me (Rom. 8:28-29). Contentment is not complacency, nor is it the false peace based on ignorance. Contentment is not an escape from the spiritual battle, but an abiding peace and confidence amid it.

The Stoics of the age extolled contentment. They developed the idea in terms of self-sufficiency. You needed to find resources within yourself to be able to smile at the fluctuating fortunes of life. Words from Rudyard Kipling’s poem “If” reflect their thought in a more modern vein:

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,

But make allowance for their doubting too;
 If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
 Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
 Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,
 And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;
 If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
 If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
 If you can meet with triumph and disaster
 And treat those two impostors just the same;
 If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
 Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
 Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
 And stoop and build them up with worn-out tools;
 If you can make one heap of all your winnings
 And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
 And lose, and start again at your beginnings
 And never breathe a word about your loss;
 If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
 To serve your turn long after they are gone,
 And so hold on when there is nothing in you
 Except the will which says to them: "Hold on";
 If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
 Or walk with kings—nor lose the common touch;
 If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
 If all men count with you, but none too much;
 If you can fill the unforgiving minute
 With sixty seconds' worth of distance run—
 Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
 And—which is more—you'll be a man, my son!

By this ethic, you should always keep your wits about them, never overreacting. You should learn to be confident without being vain, accept hardships without dwelling on them, and always behave with dignity. Living this way will make you a true man. This is a poem reflects idealized self-sufficient male virtue. Its worldview borrows heavily from Stoicism and plays into the stereotypical idea of the "stiff upper lip". But who can honestly live this way?

Paul's resources were vastly different—God strengthened him and indeed strengthens every believer. The Lord Jesus enabled him to face whatever circumstance came his way. We all need to be prepared to go to the same school and learn the same lesson.

The lack of contentment is evident in our culture. Indeed, contentment is viewed as a lack of proper ambition. True contentment revolves around the question: Do I want God, or do I want what he gives? Do I desire his presence or his presents? Can I take good fortune or bad, knowing his presence and care in both? If I have only asked God for things, not himself, I have never come to the point of abandoning myself to God and his purpose. The truth is I resist trusting God, so I hedge my bets. I hang on, acquire things, make deals with God. I find ways of hiding that manner of dealing with him. I will not know

contentment until I know abandonment.

Illustration: A pastor was visiting a member of his congregation who had been ill for months. This woman had been active in the church and her illness had drastically reduced her involvement. She asked the pastor to pray for her discouragement and her consternation with her inactivity.

The pastor asked what the Lord had meant to her in her illness. For two hours, with tears in her eyes, she spoke of the presence and tenderness of God with great affection, fervor, and detail. There was a long pause. Both were profoundly moved by the grace and kindness of God. In a soft whisper, the pastor asked again: “What precisely do you want me to pray for?”

4:10—There is a sense of uneasiness in this verse. Is there a conflict between Paul’s desire to express appreciation for the help given and a concern to show himself superior to the question of money? For many of us, being on the receiving end is much more difficult than being on the giving end.

“At last,” is not a rebuke, but an acknowledgment that communication had occurred again after a span of time. This was the result of a lack of known need, not tardiness due to fault. “Renewed (*anethalete*) your concern (*phronein*) for me” borrows a term from the horticultural practice of the day. *Anethalete* denoted plants and flowers. “Concern” translates our old friend *phronein* (see section F of the Introduction).

4:11—Paul had learned (*emathon*=learned by experience) the secret of deep peace based on detachment from his outward circumstances. His spiritual contentment was not something he had immediately after his conversion. His many challenges taught the lesson of contentment.

Content (*autarkes*) means self-sufficient. The Stoics used this word to mean human self-reliance and fortitude, a calm acceptance of life’s pressures. The term describes people whose resources are within them so that they do not have to depend on substitutes outside of themselves. Of course, Paul’s sufficiency was Christ, as he clarifies in 4:13. Christ was Paul’s secret of serenity.

4:12—Paul knows what it is to be in need (*tapeinousthai*). This word carries the thought of a voluntary acceptance of a lowly situation, even poverty, for Christ’s sake. This need was the mental and emotional side of his refusal to assert his right of maintenance from the churches (see 2 Cor. 11:7-9). Paul also knew how to abound (*perisseuein*). He was able to accept prosperity as well as poverty. Paul was able to live within his means, regardless of their extent.

I have learned the secret translates *memuremai*. In Greek mystery religions, this word was a technical term meaning “to initiate into the mysteries.” Paul uses it here to suggest a kind of initiation by experience into contentment regardless of circumstances. The power of Christ within him provided him with spiritual contentment.

4:13—This verse makes clear that Paul’s self-sufficiency and equanimity of soul in meeting life’s demands did not come from self-discipline or the fixed resolution of the Stoic. Stoic thinkers praised those who could be content with little or much because of their inner sense of self-sufficiency. Paul is content with little or much not due to his self-sufficiency but to God’s sufficiency on his behalf. He could do and endure all things because of an inner strength from God. Christ was his life (1:21), his

mindset (2:5), his goal (3:13-14), his strength (4:13), and his provision (4:19). Paul was a human being like any of us, but with boundless confidence in Christ's ability to meet every situation. And that ability was perfected in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

4:14-20 [Gratitude and the Grace of Giving]—The Philippians had responded to Paul's material needs several times. They did so sacrificially. This ongoing partnership in the gospel is why this letter has such a warm tone to it. There is a deep sense of trust and affection between the apostle and this congregation.

Paul shows his gratitude for the gift with some anxiety lest anyone think he is really in this gospel business for the money. In the ancient world, wandering teachers and philosophers peddled their ideas for money. He wants to say thanks and show his gratitude, while making it clear that what matters is the partnership in the gospel that the gift expresses. What really gladdens God's heart is the generous spirit that flows from love and trust.

Paul commends the Philippians for meeting his physical needs. The Bible frequently invokes generosity (see Prov. 3:17; 11:25; 1 Jn. 3:17) with several key passages on giving coming from the hand of Paul (see 2 Cor. 8:1-15; 9:6-15; Gal. 6:6-10). We will consider key principles in the excursus on 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

4:15-16—The Philippians had sacrificed to meet Paul's needs on three previous occasions, twice when the apostle was at Thessalonica (4:15-16) and once when he was at Corinth (2 Cor. 11:9). Their partnership in the Gospel involved them opening wide their wallets.

4:17—Paul's concern was not for himself but for the grace that was flowing to the Philippians. He wanted their ledger to be credited. The key words of this verse were current commercial terms—fruit (*karpon*), abound (*pleoazonta*), and account (*logon*). The interest accrued to their spiritual account.

4:18—The Philippians' gift provided for Paul and was an acceptable sacrifice to God. He calls their gift a fragrant offering, language reminiscent of the Old Testament sacrificial system (see Ex. 29:18; Lev. 1:9, 13, 17; Ezek. 20:41). The term appears in Ephesians 5:2, used of Christ's offering of himself on the Cross. All sincere Christian service not only promotes the cause of Christ and strengthens the hands of God's servants but is an act of worship in which God takes pleasure.

4:19-20—Paul promises God's rich supply of their needs as they sacrificially give to meet Paul's needs. This assurance implies that the Philippians had given so liberally that they themselves felt real need. Those who share generously with others are promised a divine supply of what they lack because of their generosity.

[Excursus on the Grace of Giving] (2 Cor. 9:6-15)—The German theologian Helmut Thielicke once remarked: "Our pocketbooks have more to do with heaven and hell than our hymnbooks." The way we use our financial resources provides a clearer window to our souls than our loudest praise. In Philippians 4:10-20, we see a teacher benefiting from lessons in giving well taught and well learned. Philippians 4 chronicles the Philippians understanding of the grace of giving. 2 Corinthians 9 outline the principles they comprehended. These include—

Giving is sowing (9:6)—The farmer does not look at seed as the end of the matter, but rather as the beginning. The farmer has a harvest mentality. He does not regret the expense of the seed because he expects fruit at harvest time. So too the giver. Understanding giving as sowing prevents covetousness from affecting it. We need to develop a ministry harvest mentality. Giving that is truly generous is always expectant; full of what God is going to do.

Giving is from the heart, before it's from the purse (9:7)—Giving should come from inner resolve. The question is where is my heart in this matter? God does not want us to be reluctant givers, giving out of sense of compulsion. He wants us to be cheerful (*hilaron*) givers. This Greek word is the root of our English word “hilarious.”

Quotes: Winston Churchill—“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” The Roman philosopher Seneca once remarked that giving with doubt and delay is almost worse than not giving at all.

Illustration: Thomas Carlyle, a 19th century Scottish essayist, describes how, when a young lad, a beggar came to the door of his home one day. He was home alone. On a boyish impulse he broke into his piggy bank and gave the beggar all he had. He said that he never knew such sheer happiness.

Giving enriches for further giving (9:8-11)—Note that the text does not say God will enrich but that he is able to make all grace abound to you so that the giver may abound in every good deed. Abound (*perisseusai*) is to enrich. Generous giving might seem risky, but it must be seen in light of God's own generosity. His pattern of dealing is to entrust more to those who have been good stewards of their resources. The focus is on stewardship rather than the amount received.

“All you need” (*pasan autarkeian*) is self-sufficiency. This is not the sufficiency of a person who possesses all things in abundance, but the state of one who has eliminated so-called needs rather than amassing possessions. The result of this attitude is independence and contentment.

Quote: Peter Marshall— “Let us give according to our incomes, lest God make our incomes match our gifts.”

Giving causes the recipients to glorify God (9:11-14)—Giving demonstrates that the giver is true to their confession of Christ. When giving is true, the recipients recognize the real source of provision.

9:12—Service (*leitourgias*) was a word used for public service rendered voluntarily by wealthy citizens in the Empire's cities. Thanksgiving (acknowledging the grace of God through the liberality of fellow believers) results from such sincere service.

9:14—Generosity results in reciprocity. This may or may not be material. In the instance recorded in Corinthians, the Jerusalem believers prayed fervently for their Gentile benefactors because of their benefactors' generosity. Giving enlarges our circle of friends.

Giving is always in the backdrop of God's giving (9:15)— While God's grace had been expressed to the Jerusalem believers through the generosity of their Gentile counterparts (9:14), the offering that Paul was collecting was not the indescribable gift. Paul's thought is leaping ahead to the fountainhead of

divine blessing, Christ himself. He willingly died on our behalf to set us free from sin and to make us heirs with him of an indescribable inheritance.

So why end the excursus like this? Our giving does not produce obligees. It comes from them. We give out of obligation, not to obligate others. Even if all through our lives we did all we could and more, that would only be what we should have done (see Lk. 17:7-10). We have received so freely from the hand of God and our giving ought to be in the same manner. The giving that comes with strings, is not biblical giving.

[End Excursus]

C. Concluding Greetings (4:21-23)— “All saints” is literally “every saint”. Paul considers each believer separately, not the church as a faceless mass. He means to greet individuals, not wave to the masses.

4:22—The reference to Caesar’s household may confirm the Roman captivity of the apostle as the background for this letter. However probable this literary background may be, it is not dispositive proof since this description (Caesar’s household) could apply to Ephesus. In that city, there is an inscriptional reference to Caesar’s house, a government building in the civil service of the emperor.

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