Philippians
Committed to Christ and the Gospel
A Collection of Sermons
By Rob Ely
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Partnership in the Gospel
Philippians 1:1-11

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:
2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Imagine receiving a handwritten letter from the Apostle Paul! How exciting would it be to receive a piece of inspired writing from such a mighty figure in the history of the Christian church! That is exactly what the early believers in the church in Philippi must have felt when this letter was delivered to them. Only a small handful of churches ever received such a letter from Paul, and the Philippian church was privileged to be one of them.

And yet, in a broader sense, every true church in every generation has also been so privileged. Far more than just an ancient letter, this letter is intended by God to reach every church and every Christian in every generation. In this letter God Himself is still speaking to each of us today. It was meant for you and me just as much as it was for its first century audience.

I want us to begin our study by looking at the main idea or the overarching message of this letter which Paul was trying to say to the Philippian believers. I was really debating what to call this sermon series, actually, because I wanted it to clearly state the overall theme of this letter. First, I was thinking about the name “Partnership in the Gospel,” because this letter really is all about the partnership, or “fellowship” of the gospel, as it says in chapter 1, verse 5, between Paul and the church in Philippi. Just like in Tolkien’s epic story, “The Fellowship of the Ring,” this is a fellowship of compatriots bound together in a great cause, in this case, the cause of the gospel. And I really want to convey the gospel-focus of this letter which is shown in both Paul himself as well as in the Philippian believers.

However, this letter is also intensely Christ-centered throughout, and so I was thinking about naming the series, “To Live is Christ.” But since the gospel is all about Christ, and since I really wanted to convey both themes, I decided on the title “Committed to Christ and the Gospel.” Because that’s my prayer for us as we go through this letter, that God would help us to see Christ in a greater and clearer way than ever before. I pray that your hearts would be set on fire for the gospel of Jesus Christ as Paul’s was. And I pray that we would see that the gospel, and more specifically, Jesus Christ, whom the gospel is all about, is to be our highest priority and greatest

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1 Adapted from Steven Lawson, *Philippians for You* (The Good Book Company, 2017), 15.
passion in our lives. And that that passion would lead us as a church, to impact our world in a mighty way for Christ.

Let’s begin by taking a look at the background of this church and the situation which precipitated this letter.

1. The Background (vv. 1-2)

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:
2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In looking at the background of this letter, we’re going to look at three things here in verses 1-2. The servants, which is what Paul calls himself and Timothy in verse 1, the saints, which were the Philippian believers, and then the salutation in verse 2.

- The servants

First, in looking at the servants, we see that the letter says it is from Paul and Timothy. Paul wrote Philippians from a prison in Rome. He was arrested for the preaching of the gospel, and Timothy was with him at the time of this writing. He mentions Timothy because the Philippians, as we will see, would have known him because he was with Paul at the founding of this church.

Notice how Paul identifies himself and Timothy. He says, “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus.” The original Greek word here is doulos which actually means “slave” or “bond-servant.” This is significant because by far, the words most often used by Paul to identify himself in his other letters are “an apostle of Christ Jesus.” But here in Philippians he doesn’t feel the need to remind his readers of his apostolic authority which was given to him by Christ Himself. Rather, Paul speaks of himself in much more personal and humble terms.

In 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 Paul says, “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.” This is how Paul sees himself, as a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and a bond-servant leader to other bond-servants of Christ. A slave or bond-servant had been bought by his master as his possession. He had no rights of his own and his only concern was faithfully serving his master. Thus, Paul saw everything he did not as advancing his own agenda or owing to his own status in society, but rather as being faithful in his service to the will of his heavenly Master, Jesus Christ.

Of course, serving this Master, the Master who died for His bond-servants, is neither oppressive nor an imposition. To serve Christ is a privilege and a joy, for the great paradox is that slavery to this Master brings true freedom—freedom from fear, condemnation, and death. And so, the chief aim of Paul was to please the Lord Jesus Christ in all of his life.
This designation as humble bond-servants was not just reserved for Paul and Timothy, however, but for every believer in Christ. Elsewhere in the Scriptures we see that we are identified as joint-heirs and children of the King. But here we are reminded that at the same time we are also bond-servants, slaves of our great and loving Master, Jesus Christ, and we owe all that we are to Him and Him alone. We exist to serve Him and glorify Him. To be sure, our heavenly Master is a loving Master who freely provides our every need. But our Master He is.

Moving on to the second part of our look at the background of this letter, we want to take a look at…

- **The saints**

  Paul addresses his letter, *To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.*

Who are these people? Well, keep your place in Philippians 1 and turn with me over to Acts chapter 16 for a few minutes. Paul was preparing to set out on his second missionary journey with Barnabas to go back to the churches they started on their first missionary journey. It was then that Paul and Barnabas got into an argument over whether or not to take John Mark along, since he had abandoned them on the mission field before. This led to Paul and Barnabas going their own separate ways. So, Paul chose Silas as his partner and set out on his journey.

As we read at the beginning of Acts chapter 16, Paul and Silas came to the small Jewish community of Lystra, and it is there that he met up with Timothy and brought him along on their journey. As I mentioned, Paul’s plan was to retrace his steps of his first missionary journey and strengthen the churches. However, we read that the Holy Spirit prevented Paul from going into Asia, which would include the church in Ephesus, among others. He also wanted to take the gospel North into Bithynia, but again the Spirit prevented him from going at that time. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were effectively funneled Westward to Troas. It was there that we read in verses 9-10 that Paul received a vision of a man of Macedonia who was urging him to come over to Macedonia to help them. Concluding that God had called them to Macedonia, Paul decided to preach the gospel there. It was then that they came to the city of Philippi.

Now, I want you to understand why this was so significant. As soon as Paul and his team came to Macedonia and into Philippi, this was the first time that the gospel had come to the continent of Europe. And, even more, Philippi was a Roman colony and so it was the first time that the gospel had come to the Roman Empire.

Now, it was Paul’s custom, whenever he came to a city, to first look for a Jewish synagogue and begin introducing the gospel to the Jews, then move on to the Gentiles. The thing about Philippi was, there were so few Jews in the city that the necessary number of ten men to form a synagogue didn’t exist. Instead, Paul heard about a small group of Jewish women who were having a prayer meeting just outside the city by the riverside. It was there, as it says in verses
13 and 14, that they met Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

Notice God’s work in opening Lydia’s heart to receive the gospel. This is what must happen for people to come to faith in Christ. God must open their hearts. That’s why both prayer and the preaching of the gospel are so important. So, Lydia then, became the very first convert on the continent of Europe in the city of Philippi. She was then baptized, as well as her whole household, who also believed.

Next, it says, starting in verse 16, that Paul and his team were met by a demon-possessed slave girl who brought her owners much financial gain through fortune telling. She began following Paul and his team around, loudly mocking them, until Paul turned to her and cast the demon out of her. Now, while the Bible doesn’t say so specifically, I think it’s safe to assume that this girl became a follower of Christ and was thus added to the number of believers there in Philippi.

Needless to say, the girl’s owners weren’t too happy, now that she could no longer tell fortunes, which meant their source of financial gain was gone. So, they dragged Paul and Silas to the magistrates of the city, who then proceeded to beat Paul and Silas and to throw them into prison, with their feet fastened in the stocks.

Now I want you to see something here, because it has much to do with one of the major themes in Philippians. Paul and Silas had been beaten within an inch of their lives. And the very next thing it says, starting in verse 25, is that about midnight, sitting there in prison with their bruises and open wounds, they began singing hymns to God. And it says the other prisoners were listening to them.

Folks, when our lives are grounded in Christ Jesus, not even beatings or being thrown in prison can squash your joy! And what ends up happening is, the people around you begin to take notice and say, “What is it about these people who seem to never lose their joy even among such suffering?”

Well, as they were singing, God sent an earthquake in the middle of the night and it says, “the foundations of the prison were shaken,” “all the doors were opened,” and everyone’s bonds fell off! All this led the jailer to panic to the point that he was just about to take his own life for fear of losing the prisoners when Paul spoke up and assured him they were all still there.

It then says starting in verse 29 that the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” 31 And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.
Now, I told you all this because these people – Lydia and her household, the slave girl who had the demon cast out, and the jailer and his household, became the beginning core of the Philippian church. And if you will go ahead and turn back to Philippians chapter 1 now, we will keep in mind that it was those people, plus any others that came to Christ from that time until Paul wrote this letter, whom Paul called “the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi.” And it was they to whom Paul was referring when he said in verses 3-5, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”

Paul ends his greeting with a salutation.

- **The Salutation** (v. 2)

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

This is the gospel in a nutshell. The world is in ruin because of sin. Sin is a plague that affects each and every person who has ever lived...you, me, everyone. The Bible says because of sin we are God’s enemies and His wrath remained on us and separates us from God forever. Grace and peace are what we all need, and they only come from God through Jesus Christ. Listen to how Paul says it in Ephesians 2:1-9:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

If you’re here this morning and you have never seen your need of salvation, that your sins stand between you and God and you don’t know for sure where you will spend eternity, I pray that God would open your eyes this morning to the truth of His grace. That you would come to see that it is through Jesus Christ that we are saved - through his finished work on the cross when He took our sins and our punishment upon Himself, and that He died on that cross in our place, and then rose to life again victoriously over sin and death. And that by faith, forsaking your old life of sin, and trusting in Christ, you will be made new!

This is the gospel that both Paul and the Philippian believers were so passionate about. And that brings us to the second thing we need to see concerning this letter, and that’s the whole idea of their…

2. **Partnership in the Gospel** (vv. 3-8)
I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Notice Paul’s great affections for the believers in Philippi, and the fondness with which he speaks. Every remembrance of them brought Paul great joy and filled his heart with thanksgiving. Why? It says, “because of your partnership in the gospel.” What did this partnership look like?

The “partnership in the gospel” referred generally to their financial support that the Philippian church provided for Paul. We’re told in chapter 4, verse 15, “And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel,” that is, when the gospel first came to them, “when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.” This letter to the Philippian church was delivered to them by Epaphroditus, who was one of their own members, perhaps even a leader in the Philippian church. Epaphroditus was sent to Paul with a financial gift and to offer his service to Paul while he was in prison. This letter, then, was written as a thank you to them, among other things, and sent back with Epaphroditus.

Paul says in verse 7, “for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.” It’s important for us to understand, though, that what meant the most to Paul was not their money, but their overall concern for him personally, as well as their concern for the success of Paul’s apostolic ministry in spreading the gospel. You can see two things coming through here in verse 7:

- First, you can see that the Philippian church was undeterred and unashamed of Paul’s situation of being in prison. This was a great comfort and encouragement to Paul, who, like any other human being on mission for the gospel and who was in harm’s way, would love having the prayers and moral support of friends who loved him. Often times, if you ask a missionary what they really need, their answer is, “just come and be with me for a little while.” Or, “Let me hear from you and your support of what I’m doing.” It can get really lonely out on the mission field, especially if they’re the only ones working for the gospel in that area. And it’s easy for them to get discouraged in their ministry, especially if they’ve been there a while and conversions are few and far between.
- Second, and maybe most significantly, you can see the Philippian church’s commitment to the gospel. They were totally on board with Paul and shared his vision and passion for the spread of the gospel. They had a love for Christ that drove their values, and they quite literally put their money where their mouth was. In short, their lives were completely invested in the spread of the gospel.

This provides the context for that well-known verse right smack dab in the middle of this section, verse 6: And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.
I want us to see this verse from Paul’s point of view. When Paul preached the gospel somewhere, his greatest desire was their salvation. Notice I didn’t just say their conversion. I said their salvation. In other words, Paul wanted above all other things to see the believers in the churches he planted to thrive and arrive – to thrive spiritually and then to arrive finally on that last day and be welcomed by Jesus into His heavenly presence. And so here was a successful church plant, with people who were showing the fruit of true salvation. The Philippian church is a success story of the power of the gospel and of Paul’s apostolic ministry. As we’ll see later, it wasn’t perfect. They had their issues just like any other congregation. But these people were the real deal. Paul recognized God’s faithful work in their lives. He knew full well that it is God who changes a person’s heart. And that salvation is God’s work from beginning to end. As we will see later, that’s not to say that we don’t have any role or human exertion in our journey to that final day. But as we will also see, even in that, it is God who is at work in us to be able to work. But for now, we see that Paul’s confidence was in the fact that if God began the work, He will certainly be faithful to finish His work in them and to bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

And so, Paul caps off his sentiments with a prayer for them in verses 9-11. A prayer that, knowing what we now know about Paul and his love for the Philippian church, makes all the more sense to us.

3. Paul's Prayer for the Philippians (vv. 9-11)

9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

In the next section we’ll be looking at this prayer much more closely here in verses 9-11. But, Community Bible Church, this is my prayer for you. Even before I came here, as soon as I heard that the elders had decided to extend the call for me to be your pastor, I began praying for you. I prayed and asked God to give me a love for you, and that you would have a love for me. And that God would give you a knowledge of Him, and that your love for Christ and His Word would abound more and more, and that this church would bear fruit as we fix our eyes steadily on Jesus Christ, and that we would bring glory and praise to Him in everything we do. And folks, that is still my prayer today.
Paul’s Prayer for the Church
Philippians 1:9-11

9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

In the last section we began our study of Philippians by looking at verses 1-11 and I took you through some of the background of the Philippian church, and we connected a lot of dots between the beginning of this church and this letter that Paul was writing to them. Two of the major things we saw regarding Paul and the church in Philippi are, first, Paul was filled with thanksgiving for their partnership in the gospel – their deep, shared commitment to Jesus Christ and their concern for the success of the gospel in his apostolic ministry. But second, we saw vividly Paul’s love and care for the Philippian believers, and we saw how Paul was not just interested in their conversion, but rather wanted his churches to thrive and arrive – to thrive spiritually and then arrive safely on that final day and be welcomed into the presence of Jesus. We saw how Paul’s heart truly longed for these things for them, and that he trusted in God’s continued work in their lives, that God would be faithful to complete what He started in them until the day of Christ Jesus. This, then, provides the context for the rest of this letter, but more immediately for this prayer that Paul prays for the Philippian believers in verses 9-11.

In this section we’re going to look more closely at that prayer that Paul prayed, because in it, we learn much about what exactly God wants for us as a church in order for us to thrive in our spiritual walk with Him and to arrive safely and confidently into His presence on the day of Christ Jesus.

Verses 9-11 of Philippians 1:
9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

In this prayer we see three components – the petition which we find in v. 9, the purpose of the petition in vv. 10-11a, and then finally the praise in v. 11b. And these will be the three points that we will focus on in this passage.

1. The Petition (v. 9)

Verse 9 begins, “And it is my prayer…” This reveals specifically how and what Paul prays for the Philippian believers. We need to pay close attention to what follows and allow it to shape our prayer life. Many Christians get in a rut in their prayer life where their prayers pretty much all consist of a laundry list of people’s needs, as well as our own needs. And while there certainly isn’t anything wrong with praying for people’s health or family issues, this should actually comprise a much smaller portion of our prayer time. Paul tells us here that there are things much more important for our prayer list than just our day-to-day needs.
My wife and I had a missionary couple over for lunch recently, and I remember one thing the wife said very clearly. She said, the church in the West is fixated on praying for comfort, when really, God never promises us that.

Now you have to understand the mindset that she was coming from in order to fully understand what she was saying, which, actually, is the same mindset that Paul has in this letter. As missionaries, their main concern is the spread of the gospel. And frankly, that should be our main concern as well.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:31-33. 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

So, let’s see just what it was Paul was most concerned about for the church in Philippi, and while we do, let us keep in mind that these are the things that God is most concerned about for us as well.

Verse 9 says, “And it is my prayer…”

That your love may abound more and more... (v. 9a)

Now we said that Paul dearly loved the church in Philippi, and they loved him. And this love for one another forms what Paul called koinonia, or “fellowship” in the gospel. The fact that the Philippian church was a loving church already is not in question. But Paul here is saying, “As loving a church as you already are, I’m praying that your love will abound and grow more and more.” He’s saying that our love doesn’t need to be static but should continue to grow as we mature in Christ.

It’s interesting to note right off the bat that Paul doesn’t mention any object of their love which he wants to grow. In cases like this, if there is any question as to what a passage in the Bible means, we first check the immediate context for clues, and then we look to see what the whole of Scripture has to say about the issue. In this case, we can tell that Paul primarily has in mind the fellowship of love that they share with one another. However, we also want to consider Jesus’ teaching on this matter.

In Matthew 22:26-40, Jesus was approached by a lawyer who asked him a very important question, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And [Jesus] said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”
And that’s exactly how our love for others works. It comes as an overflow of our love for God. As we love God more and more, we will naturally (or supernaturally!) love others more and more as an outflow of our love for God.

But that brings us to the next portion of this verse where Paul specifies two aspects of this love in verse 9, both of which speak of the importance of the precision of our love. The first, knowledge, is the positive aspect of that precision, while the second, discernment, speaks of the negative aspect.

He says, “That your love may abound more and more…

…with knowledge and all discernment… (v. 9b)

We can’t really love God unless we know Him. Many people may say they love God, and yet the way they live their lives exposes the fact that the idea of God that they have in their minds is not the God of the Bible. A.W. Tozer said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”\(^2\) If our knowledge of God is faulty, then our love for Him will of necessity be faulty as well.

But on the other hand, if we truly know Him more and more through His Word, our love for Him increases. The old adage is true in this case, to know Him is to love Him. And so the more we know God, the more there is that we will find to love about Him. Charles Spurgeon said it well, he said, “I can at this moment think of many reasons why I should love the Christ of Calvary, but I cannot think of one reason why I should not love him.”

The word for “knowledge” here is much more than just merely a head knowledge of God, but rather it is a personal knowledge. It is a kind of knowledge that is made possible only by God’s self-disclosure. By God revealing Himself to the person’s heart. It is an intimate knowing. You can have all kinds of head knowledge about theology and doctrine and be able to know all the right answers about God, but unless that theology translates into a personal, intimate knowledge of Christ, it does you no good!

That brings us to something that is absolutely vital for us to understand here. Christian love is never a matter of sentimentality. Christian love is a supernatural work in our hearts that comes from a work of the Holy Spirit bringing the revelation of Christ through the Word of God. In other words, the more the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to our hearts, the more our love for Him grows.

Back in verse 8 Paul says to them, “For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.” But before God did a supernatural work in Paul, Paul didn’t love Christians at all. He hated them! He despised them and persecuted them and murdered them. But on that road to Damascus, God arrested his heart. But what exactly happened on that road? He met Jesus! He met the living Word of God face to face! And Jesus took that murdering wretch and the love of God was shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit. And God turned him into a

man of God who truly loved God and loved His people. This affection that he had for the
Philippian believers was Jesus’ affection. It was supernatural.

And this is why Paul prayed for them. Because he loved them. And what does he pray for them?
That their love would grow with an intimate knowledge of God. He loves them and wants them
to know Christ more and more so that their love for Christ and for each other would continue to
get stronger and stronger. And that is my prayer for you as well. That you would know Him
more and more, and in knowing Him, that your love for Him would grow stronger and stronger!

So that’s the positive aspect. But Paul also says to his readers, that he wants their love to abound
more and more with all discernment. The NIV says “and depth of insight.” The word here means
“perception.” There is a real danger of allowing lesser things in to be mixed with our devotion to
Christ or even taking the place of our love for Him and we need to have spiritual perception and
the ability to discern when things aren’t right.

In 2 Cor. 11:3-4 Paul says, ³ But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning,
your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.⁴ For if someone
comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different
spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted,
you put up with it readily enough.

Satan’s MO usually involves dressing things up to look like it’s from God, using just enough of
the right language to fool unsuspecting people. 2 Cor. 11:14-15 says, “for even Satan disguises
himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves
as servants of righteousness.” But as 2 Cor. 2:11 says, let us not be ignorant of Satan’s schemes.

One of Satan’s specific schemes is to set before a person a good goal, maybe even an outcome
that God has promises us, but offering to achieve that end by some other means other than God’s
way as revealed in Scripture. The serpent came to Eve in the garden and said to her, in effect, “If
you do it my way, you will be like God.”

Matthew 4 gives the account of when Jesus was being tempted by Satan in the wilderness. And
in verses 8-10 it says, ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the
kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will
fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written,
“You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”

The thing is, Jesus knew that the Father had promised Him all the kingdoms of this world. The
Word of God said so in places such as Psalm 2:7-8, The Lord said to me, “You are my Son;
today I have begotten you. ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of
the earth your possession. Satan wasn’t offering Jesus something bad or evil. He was offering
Jesus something that God said He would receive. But Satan wanted Jesus to get it by another
means than what His Father had prescribed. Jesus knew, though, that receiving what His Father
promised Him meant trusting Him, and that He would bring it about in His own way and time.
There are many things in this world that hold out the promise of things God wants us to have - peace, love, joy, even helping you get closer to God, while never speaking of Christ and the cross or the authority of God’s Word. I call this Hallmark Channel spirituality, or Oprah Winfrey spirituality. Then you hear of other things that had their origination in the world or even other religions and they try to baptize it by dressing it up with Christian names or having something Christian added to it. They promise that Christians can use this method or that method to generate patience, strength, and deeper worship. But folks, method matters to God! Because it has everything to do with where our love and trust lies. Do we trust God to give us His best in His own way and in His own timing, or do we think we need the help of other things in order to get what God promises?

I spent about seven years of my life in banking. All day every day I dealt with money. I worked with it constantly. Well, every now and then, a counterfeit bill of some sort would appear in someone’s deposit. And let me tell you, people have gotten really sophisticated in making counterfeit bills these days. Nevertheless, I got really good at spotting counterfeit bills to the point that I could spot them almost immediately every single time. Do you know why? Because when you spend so much time with the real thing day in and day out, when a counterfeit comes through, you are able to spot it like that!

Likewise, the only way to be able to spot Satan’s counterfeit schemes is to be so focused and so saturated with the truth of God’s Word that whenever anything comes your way that isn’t quite right, you can catch it immediately. If we will allow the way in which we think to be so influenced by God’s Word, what happens is we begin to know Him more, and love Him more, and trust Him more, and the more we know Him and love Him and trust Him, the more we begin to think like Him and to see things as He sees them.

So, Paul goes on to tell us the purpose of his petition.

2. The Purpose
   …so that you may approve what is excellent… (v. 10a)

In other words, that we may choose what is best. Our question shouldn’t be, “Can I be a Christian and still do this?” If you have to ask that question, you probably shouldn’t do it. If you find yourself asking, “How close to that line can I get without going over,” run the other way! Because what happens is, our flesh gets in the way, and we get our minds fixated on something, and before you know it, we’re compromising with the good and sacrificing the excellent.

Based on a growing, knowledgeable, and discerning love, Paul prays for the Philippians to choose the things that are best in their lives and in their relationships. He prays for them to have discernment, not just in order to properly distinguish between right and wrong, but between the good and the best.

We can live our lives and not necessarily be doing things that are wrong or bad. But are we living our lives for what’s best?
In chapter 3, Paul speaks of “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Paul says that he counts all his human accomplishments as garbage compared to knowing Christ. In knowing Christ, one finds that which is truly excellent and best and superior. And it’s in our knowing Him and making Him known that we find a life that truly matters.

Here are a few questions you can ask yourself:

- Am I pursuing knowledge of Christ with passion?
- Do I value knowing Christ above everything else?
- According to a Christ-centered, gospel-focused point of view, am I doing what is best in my life with my time, with my money, with my mind, with my children, with my relationships?
- Am I doing good things or gospel things with my life?

And so, Paul’s purpose in praying that their love may abound more and more in knowledge and in all discernment is so that they may approve the things that are excellent, and it says…

…and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ… (v. 10b)

Ah, now we get to the real meat of what Paul is asking God for here. Keep in mind, Paul’s heart for the Philippians is that they thrive and arrive. See, Paul knew something that we need to keep in mind. Everything we do, the choices we make, the words we speak, the things we allow into our mind and our heart, all have consequence beyond just this life that we live now. We tend to get caught up in the here and now.

But Paul had his sights set on “that day.” You see, Paul knows that he and the believers in his churches along with you and me and everyone else will one day stand before the throne and have to give an account for what we have done. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says,

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

And it’s in that moment…standing before Jesus on that last day…that we will know, “This is the day that everything was leading to.” And we’ll look back at all those days in the past when we were so caught up in the moment or worried about this or that, wasting our time with lesser things. 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 tells us,

11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

And so, Paul’s desire is that they would approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. That word “pure” means “unmixed.” In other words, that our love would not be divided between God and other things. And blameless means “without offense.” If our
love for God is divided with other things, it will always lead to offense. Just like the Israelites in the wilderness, God said to them, “Don’t have anything to do with the ways of the nations around you.” Why? Because inevitably you will be pulled into idolatry. And that’s exactly what happened. They didn’t quit worshipping Yahweh, they simply began by adding other things to it, and before you know it they had slid into full-on apostacy.

Paul then reminds us, lest we get any ideas that we have the capacity to produce these things on our own, he says, I pray that you would be pure and blameless…

...filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ… (v. 11a)

Later in chapter 2 we’ll see that Jesus obeyed the Father perfectly to the point of death, even death on a cross. Christ has fulfilled all righteousness in his perfect, sinless life and His atoning death, fulfilling as our representative what we could never do ourselves because of sin. And when we place our faith in the Person of Jesus Christ, His righteousness is counted to us.

And as we, by God’s grace, walk in obedience to Him, as we fix our eyes upon Him, as we continuously choose Him above all things, our lives will begin to produce fruit…the fruit of His righteousness. And so, He will make sure that we will be pure and blameless at the day of Christ Jesus.

And so, our lives will be lived…

3. The Praise
…to the glory and praise of God. (v. 11b)

We run the risk here of these words becoming common and meaningless. Just something safe to say at the end of a prayer or a sermon. It’s like saying, “In Jesus’ name, amen,” when we have no idea what those words really mean when we say them. But these words are far from being meaningless words. For they mean everything in the world!

Everything Paul has said and prayed is summed up in this. That our ultimate goal is for our lives to be lived entirely to the glory and praise of God. And that can only happen through Jesus Christ.

Jesus commands us in Matthew 5:16, “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

And Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

Are you living your life to the glory and praise of God? Trust in Christ. Is your life filled with the fruit of righteousness? Cling to Christ. Is your love for God abounding more and more? Look to Christ and receive from Him all that you need.
To Live is Christ, To Die is Gain  
Philippians 1:12-23

12 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. 14 And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

15 Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. 16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I will rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 20 as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

When an earthquake hits, the center location of the quake is called the epicenter. However, depending on its magnitude, the effects of the quake can be felt for hundreds, sometimes even thousands of miles. For instance, the Great Alaskan Earthquake of 1964, sometimes also known as the Good Friday Earthquake, was a magnitude 9.2 megathrust earthquake that caused tsunamis which affected people and property in Washington, Oregon, California, and as far away as Hawaii and Japan. And evidence of motion directly related to the earthquake was also reported as far away as Florida and Texas.

Well, turning to Philippians chapter 1, we find that the epicenter of Paul’s teaching is located right in the middle of the chapter in verse 21, yet the effects of this verse are so significant that they can be felt as far back as verse 12, and as far forward as verse 30 at the end of the chapter. Indeed, the aftershocks may even be felt throughout the rest of the letter.

Philippians chapter 1, verse 21 reads as follows:

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

What does it mean when Paul says, “For to me to live is Christ?” And why would dying be gain to him? In order to get the full understanding of what Paul is saying here, we need to give a little bit more background.

The spiritual and social climate for Christians in the first century was not friendly. Christianity was considered by the Romans as kind of a sect of Judaism, and by the Jews as apostacy. So especially in a place like Philippi, being a Christian often meant persecution, sometimes severe, and the Philippian believers certainly lived with the constant reality of that threat.
As we said in the last section, Paul himself wrote this letter from prison. Philippians is one of Paul’s prison letters, along with Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. In Philippians 1:13 Paul says that he was imprisoned “for Christ.” And in verse 16 he says that he was put there “for the defense of the gospel.” He was imprisoned in Rome for two years, probably between the years A.D. 60-62. He most likely wrote Philippians toward the end or at least the latter half of that time.

Looking at the days leading up to his imprisonment, we see passages such as Acts 20:17-24 – speaking to the Ephesian elders, Paul says in v. 22 that he is going to Jerusalem “constrained by the Spirit.” The NIV says “compelled by the Spirit,” while the NASB uses the word “bound.” The idea here has to do with what I talked about two weeks ago, that Paul sees himself as a bondservant of Jesus Christ. He does all that he does in obedience to and for the glory of Christ his Lord. As a matter of fact, that word “constrained” in the original language carries the connotation of “placing someone under obligation.” We see this in Paul’s thoughts in Romans 1:14-16, “I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. 15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” He says something very similar a few verses later in Acts 20, concerning going to Jerusalem, he says, “not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

In Acts 21:10-14, a prophet named Agabus once again tells Paul that he will be arrested and bound by the Jews. When the brothers urged him not to go, Paul answered, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

What we have to understand here is that Paul KNEW that he was about to be arrested and face persecution and maybe even death for the cause of Christ. Yet he was compelled by the Spirit to move forward because God had ordained for the gospel to be preached in Rome. It’s interesting to see that the Spirit even told Paul several times through various people that he would be arrested. Which teaches us a very important lesson. Just because the Holy Spirit showed Paul that he would face persecution, it didn’t mean he wasn’t supposed to go. God was graciously preparing Paul for what was to come yet giving him the grace to move forward with his God-given assignment for the cause of the gospel.

And so, we see in Acts 21:27-31, that sure enough, when Paul went to Jerusalem, he was arrested by the Jews on false charges because of envy, much the same as with Jesus. The Jews were concerned that Paul was “teaching everywhere against the people and the law” and the temple, and that he was defiling the temple by bringing Greeks into it (Acts 21:28). After a drawn-out trial process, Paul ended up appealing to Caesar, which gave him a one-way ticket to Rome, bound by chains to a Roman soldier.
But what I want to focus on this morning is Paul’s attitude, that which drove him, the overall motivation for all he did. Regardless of the circumstances, Paul’s focus, like a laser beam, was the advance of the gospel and the glory of Christ. THIS is what Paul meant when he said in verse 21, “To live is Christ.” So, in this section I want us to look at two specific things that the phrase “to live is Christ” means from this passage.

1. **To live is Christ means that the advance of the gospel is most important through all circumstances. (1:12-18a)**

Under this point we see two areas in verses 12-18 that show how the advance of the gospel was the number 1 priority to Paul. The first, the advance of the gospel was most important even through persecution. (vv. 12-14)

> 12 Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, 13 so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, 14 and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

At the very end of Acts, in chapter 28, we see the account of Paul being imprisoned under house arrest while he awaited his trial before Caesar. Verse 16 says, “16 And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.” And verses 30-31 say, “30 He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, 31 proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.”

Now, this imprisonment wasn’t the final imprisonment when Paul found himself in a dark dungeon awaiting his death as in the letter of 2 Timothy. Although he certainly wasn’t free to come and go as he chose, God gave him favor with the Roman guards to be able to still have visitors and be able to continue preaching the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, Paul was chained night and day to a Roman soldier. He had no privacy when he ate, when he slept, when he wrote, when he prayed, or when he preached or taught or visited with friends. Yet for two whole years, God used this lack of privacy to make it impossible for the Roman soldiers guarding him to avoid hearing the gospel and witnessing Paul’s Christlikeness. And as these first two verses suggest, this apparently led to “the greater progress of the gospel” in which some of those soldiers trusted Christ, and in verse 14 it led to other believers being emboldened to speak the word of God without fear.

The famous Puritan John Bunyan’s preaching was so popular and powerful, and so unacceptable to leaders in the seventeenth-century Church of England, that he was jailed in order to silence him. Refusing to be silent, he began to preach in the jail courtyard. He not only had a large audience of prisoners, but also hundreds of citizens of Bedford and the surrounding area would come to the prison daily to stand outside to hear him expound Scripture. In order to silence him further, he was placed deep inside the jail and forbidden to preach at all. Yet in that silence, it was during that time that he wrote *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the great Christian classic that has
ministered the gospel to tens of millions throughout the world. For several centuries it was the most widely read and translated book in the world after the Bible. Far from stopping Bunyan’s impact for the gospel, his opponents’ persecution only provided opportunity for it be extended from a little jail cell to the ends of the earth.3

But what’s truly amazing is the underlying story in both Bunyan’s and Paul’s accounts which is the sovereign and providential work of God. I can’t help but seeing a parallel to the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis. You will recall that Joseph’s brothers, out of jealousy and envy, wickedly sold Joseph to slave traders, and Joseph found himself as a slave to Potiphar in Egypt, where he suffered greatly for years, including being falsely accused and thrown into prison. But under God’s sovereign hand, Joseph was eventually elevated to second in command over all Egypt, and God used him to save his family and all Egypt from certain death from famine.

Now here’s the thing. Two key sections in this account allow us to see what God’s purpose was in allowing Joseph to go through what he did. The first is found in Genesis 45 when Joseph revealed who he was to his brothers. And he said to them, starting in verse 4, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve...for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.”

Then he says something very similar in chapter 50, verse 20, he says to them, “20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

I suggest to you that that’s what’s going on with Paul’s imprisonment here. He says in Philippians 1:12, “what’s happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.” And that’s how Paul saw his situation. Like Joseph, who went through severe, unjust trial and suffering, Paul endured unjust trial and suffering as well, but in both cases, it was ultimately God at work to bring about the advancement of His kingdom! And so, Paul rejoices, even in his persecution and trouble, because the gospel has been advanced.

So, Paul rejoiced that the gospel progressed even through his persecution. But in verses 15-18 we also see that the advancement of the gospel is most important even…

- **Through others’ goodwill or ill will. (vv. 15-18a)**

15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from goodwill; 16 the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; 17 the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice.

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I can’t spend a lot of time on this, but the main thing to see here is that Paul feels no rivalry, nor does he feel personal slight when other evangelists maligned his name or received the credit, so long as Christ was being preached.

We aren’t told exactly what was being said about Paul that was meant to hurt him or ruin his reputation. What we do know is that these were not false teachers or heretics, but people who truly preached the gospel. Maybe they were envious preachers in Rome who, like Job’s friends, may have claimed that Paul’s imprisonment was the Lord’s punishment for some secret sin, or maybe they felt that Paul had been presumptuous in going to Jerusalem and his imprisonment was a result of his foolishness. Whatever the case, it says they were preaching Christ “out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.” Yet for Paul, there was no added affliction. Christ was being proclaimed and that’s all that mattered.

Many of us know very well the feeling of jealousy when someone comes in and starts to do what you were doing in the church instead of you. However, over the years I have come to appreciate, even love, having others do the work I have been doing, because then it meant that it didn’t all depend on me to get the job done. For the important thing was that the work of the Lord was being done.

We must come to the place where we don’t need the credit or the limelight. God will not share His glory anyway. Is the gospel being proclaimed? Rejoice! Are people being ministered to? Praise God! Is God receiving the glory? That is what matters above all.

Moving on to the next section, we see the second meaning of “to live is Christ.”

2. To live is Christ means Christ being honored in all situations. (1:18b-26)

In this we see both a vertical application as well as a horizontal. In this section we’ll look at the vertical. In the next section we’ll cover the horizontal.

So first we need to understand that Paul’s heart was to see…

- Christ glorified in life or death (1:18b-23)

Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

Here we are at the very epicenter of this great earthquake!

Paul expresses indestructible joy here. It’s indestructible because its source is not rooted in anything in this life, but only in the eternal glory of Christ.

Notice he says, “for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.” The question is, is Paul talking about being delivered from the jail cell, or final salvation when he faces death?
Well, in looking at the verses that follow, it actually sounds like he’s referring to both! Because either way, he will be delivered. See, Paul’s whole concept of life and death are fully and completely wrapped up in Christ and moving forward toward that final day, the day his faith finally becomes sight and he sees his Lord and Savior face to face.

Paul is truly grateful for the prayers of the saints there in Philippi and fully trusts the Holy Spirit for His help. This refers back to verse 6 again, which says, “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Before he was placing his trust in God’s sovereignty and faithfulness to see to it that the Philippian believers arrive home safely on that final day. But now Paul is applying it to himself.

By the way…we learn something here that although God has ordained the eternal security of those whom He saves and that they will persevere until that final day, He also ordains the means through which He accomplishes that – through continued, earnest prayer and the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. Paul faced sometimes unthinkable hardships in his gospel ministry, including the suffering and persecution he was currently enduring. And he put no confidence in his own strength. He knew that only by God’s grace could he persevere through it all to the end.

And yet because of God’s faithfulness and the grace he received from the Holy Spirit, he was confident. He says, “as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed.” That’s undoubtedly in reference to that final day. The “hope” he’s talking about here is not some unknown kind of hope, such as, “I hope everything is going to be OK in the end.” No! The hope Christians have is a rock-solid surety because it is based on God’s strength and God’s faithfulness, not our own! Paul knows that when that day comes, he will not be ashamed, and he says, “but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.”

In other words, no matter what happened to him in this life, he had one goal and that was to honor Christ! And that meant whether honoring Christ came by life or by death. If God saw fit to deliver him from prison and let him live a little longer, he would go on honoring Christ with his life. He says in verse 22, “If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.” But if God saw fit not to deliver him physically, then he would honor Christ even in his dying breath.

Why? Because for him, to live is Christ and to die is gain! It didn’t matter to him whether he was abandoned or acclaimed by others, there was only one aim in his heart and that’s the glory of Christ’s name. It didn’t matter whether he faced the fires of persecution, prison, torture, or death. Why? Because for him to live is Christ and to die is gain! To go on living meant living completely for Christ and His mission for the gospel. And THAT is what he, by the grace of God and the help of His Spirit, would be faithful to do, even if it meant suffering or death.

Folks, I don’t want to sugar coat anything. Living completely for Christ and on mission with Him will unleash the hordes of hell against you at times. Paul knew that all too well! But he also knew that those hordes could do their best to him, and if he died, it only meant he would be immediately in the presence of Christ, which he says, is far better. And THAT is our hope in the midst of the darkness of this life. And only with that knowledge...knowing that dying is actually
gain…can we truly have the courage to live fully for Christ and face whatever trouble comes our way in life because of it!

Paul had one resolve. If he lived…Christ! But if living for Christ required his death…GAIN! Either way it would mean Christ!
A Life Worthy of the Gospel
Philippians 1:24-30

24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. 29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

In the last section we looked at verse 21, and we saw how the phrase “To live is Christ” had a vertical application, which meant that it was Paul’s continual desire and commitment that Christ would be honored in all situations in his life, that even if that meant dying for the cause of the gospel, it would only be gain to him because he would be with Christ. We saw how his only desire was that Christ’s name be honored and the gospel advanced. But we also said that there was a horizontal application. This week we turn our focus to that horizontal application and upon what the phrase “to live is Christ” meant for the Philippian believers in the first century, as well as for us today.

What we will see is that Paul becomes for us an example which calls us to live with the same heart and mind that he did, because, as we will remember from the very first message, Paul and the Philippian believers had a partnership in the gospel together, and Paul was encouraging them to continue in their mutual desire for Christ to be honored and the gospel to be advanced, even through the threat of persecution which they faced.

That brings us to verse 27, and…

1. The Call to Live as Worthy Citizens (v. 27a)

   • Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ

In this we see two things Paul is trying to convey to them. The first is that they should live out their lives as…

   • Citizens of heaven

Now, one of the things I like to do in studying the Bible is to cross-reference the different translations, as well as to check out what the original language says. One thing we find here in verse 27 is that the phrase “Let your manner of life,” as it says in the ESV, is actually under-translated.

The NASB says – “conduct yourselves” – but the Greek carries the basic meaning of being a citizen. By implication, it means being a good citizen of your homeland, one whose conduct brings honor to the homeland to whom one belongs.
Two other translations actually pick up on this very well, and I think give us a much better picture of what Paul is saying here…

> Just one thing: As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ. - CSB

> Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. – NLT

If you recall, Philippi was a Roman colony, a status that the Philippians were actually quite proud of. As Roman citizens, they were to live as Romans, obey Roman laws and the lordship of the Roman emperor. Roman citizenship was highly coveted because they enjoyed the Roman protection and all the benefits of being Roman citizens. But Paul was calling the Philippian believers to a much higher calling. He called them to remember that, although they were Roman citizens in the earthly sense, they were first and foremost citizens of heaven above all. And as such, they lived under the Lordship of another King, Jesus Christ, who reigned in their true heavenly homeland.

The picture here is that of an ambassador of one land going to live in a foreign country. As an ambassador, they are to live according to the laws and values of the country of which they are representing and working for the interests of that home country in the land in which he finds himself.

Paul was calling the Philippian believers to live out their lives in a way which was consistent with their true citizenship, their blood-bought, heavenly citizenship, in the midst of their earthly Roman context. But as we said, this letter is just as applicable to us today. When we become to faith in Jesus Christ, our eternal address changes and we become citizens of heaven. As we live here in our earthly homeland of America, are we living as the true citizens of heaven that we are? And what exactly would that look like? Well, as we read on, we see that the evidence of living well as citizens of heaven is a life…

- **Worthy of the gospel** – to live a life consistent with God’s revealed Word. To live your life, as Paul did, for the gospel of Jesus Christ, with the single aim of making Christ known and bringing Him honor.

Later on, in this same letter, Paul says in chapter 3, verse 17-20,

> Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. »For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. »Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. »But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ

In other words, Paul is putting himself forward as the ultimate example of someone who lives a life worthy of the gospel. Everything that we looked at the last time, Paul’s ultimate desire to honor Christ and advance the gospel, which was the sole focus and motivation of his heart, was to be in them…and is to be in us, as well.

But then we see, point number 2 this morning, Paul goes on to give his readers some of…

**2. The Distinctives of Worthy Citizenship (27b-28)**
“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

The Philippian believers’ commitment to Jesus Christ was a threat to the patriotic Romans who ran Philippi. For them, the church’s allegiance to another Lord other than Caesar bordered on treason as it challenged the political establishment. Ironically, the Christians were often branded as “atheists” because they did not believe in nor worship any of the Roman pantheon of gods. Also, at every public assembly, every Roman citizen customarily gave honor and even worship to the emperor, and the church’s loyalty to Christ challenged the divinity of Caesar. The church was constantly being pressured to conform to these customs. What’s more, Christians who had the guts to declare with Paul that their citizenship was in heaven were thought to be “un-Roman” and thus enemies of public order.

Because of this there was widespread persecution in Philippi and throughout the other churches in Macedonia. Some examples of this persecution from other passages include:

- 2 Corinthians 8:2 – “a severe test of affliction…severe poverty”
- 1 Thessalonians 1:6 – “in much affliction”
- 2 Thessalonians 1:4 – “your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring”

The bottom line is, heavenly citizenship worthy of the gospel was costly and demanding.

Looking at this passage we see that the first distinction of worthy citizens of heaven, then, involves the call to…

- **Standing firm** – notice that Paul admonishes them to stand firm “in one spirit.” Paul may be referring here to having one mind and one purpose for the gospel, but I think more likely he’s referring to standing firm in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Philippians’ ability to stand firm through such persecutions and afflictions was supernaturally based on the Holy Spirit’s work in giving them the grace to persevere. They were called to stand firm against the attacks on the gospel as they drew upon the inner work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Consider this quote from R. Kent Hughes:

  “There is nothing here of bootstrap resolve. The Philippians were not asked to reach down into their inner person and will to pull themselves together. Their “No!” to Roman culture’s demands to compromise the gospel rested in what God had accomplished in their lives.”

This brings us to the second distinction of living as worthy citizens of heaven, Paul called them to stand firm…

- **In Christian Unity** – it says, “with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.” This is the language of soldiers and athletes, and it speaks of the importance of coming together for a mutual cause and fighting side by side as a team. But unlike striving for an athletic prize or even for the good of an earthly kingdom, the stakes were far higher, as they were called to strive side by side “for the faith of the gospel.” This is the banner under which all of them fought together.
Then finally, Paul says that living as worthy citizens is a call to live a life that is…

- **Courageous in the face of opposition** – Paul says, “and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”

The Philippian believers were facing horrendous situations of affliction. Certainly, they had good reason, and it is very natural, to fear. But Paul tells the Philippians not to be “frightened in anything by your opponents.” Then right after that, what Paul does is offer them eternal perspective. He says, “This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”

What he is doing here is reminding them that what they are facing in their earthly lives is temporal, as our whole lives on this earth are temporal. But one day their opponents will face their reckoning before the Lord, and the Philippian believers will be vindicated.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 says,

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

And yet Paul wasn’t pretending that the Philippian believers weren’t going through severe affliction, nor was he asking them to. However, he also wanted to remind them of one very important thing, which is our third point this morning, that they weren’t being called on to muster up living as a worthy citizen of heaven, but God Himself would give them the grace to do so. So point number three, we see…

**3. The Grace of Worthy Citizenship (vv. 29-30)**

“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

The verb “granted” can be literally rendered “graced” because it means “to give freely or graciously as a favor.” We see this grace was given by God in three areas:

- **Grace to believe** – We know that the stipulation to receiving the free gift of salvation is that we must believe. But folks, we must understand that even our believing is a gift to us by God’s grace. This is why we have no reason to boast in ourselves.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” When it says, “and this is not your own doing, the “this” is referring back to that whole phrase, “you have been saved by faith.”

We see this idea so clearly in John 1:12-13, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

But second, God gives us the…
• **Grace to suffer** – The suffering that the Philippian believers were experiencing was not a sign of God’s abandonment, but rather a proof that grace was at work in their lives. As Paul would tell Timothy later in 2 Tim. 3:12, “*Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted;*” And in Acts 5:41, after the apostles were beaten in the presence of the council of Israel, it says, “*Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.*”

And finally, Paul encourages them to live worthy of the gospel because God gives them…

• **Grace to fight the good fight of faith** – Paul says, “*engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*”

This is again in reference to “the fellowship” or “partnership of the gospel” which Paul and the Philippian believers were engaged in together. This conflict that they were engaged in was a fight for the advancement of the gospel amid extreme resistance. But they knew that if they didn’t fight, people were going to hell. And they knew that the proclamation of the gospel was the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believed, and so it was their greatest weapon in the battle.

But in even this battle, God was giving them the grace to fight. The soldier for Christ is never alone on the battlefield to fight the enemy by himself nor is he ever left to fight in his own strength. Jesus promised us when He gave us the Great Commission, “*and I am with you always, to the end of the age.*” And that is why we have been given the Holy Spirit, and why it is so necessary for us to pray for and depend upon the power of the Spirit.

This is what it means to be worthy citizens of the gospel. Standing together—striving side by side—always receiving grace from God for salvation and suffering, all for the cause of honoring Christ and the advancement of the gospel.
Christ’s Mission of Humility and Obedience
Philippians 2:1-11

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The room was quiet and tense. The Twelve just sat around the table looking sheepishly at each other. Just a few days before, James and John had been rebuked when they got their mother to ask Jesus for an exalted position for them in His kingdom. It was embarrassing, and the other disciples were indignant at them. Harsh words and angry gestures were exchanged among the twelve. Tempers flared! So Jesus called them together and said:

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 26 It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, 28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

But now here they sat, around the table, all with filthy, unwashed feet, and yet nobody moved. Peter and John had secured a room for Passover, but they had forgotten to make arrangements for foot-washing. The awkward silence was palpable. No one wanted to condescend to perform the humble task.

But then, as shocking as it was unexpected, Jesus arose, removed His outer garment, tied a towel around His waist, grabbed a pitcher of water and a bowl, and began to do what only a slave would do: Moving around the circle he began washing his disciples’ outstretched feet, wiping them with the towel with which he was wrapped. The incarnate Son, God Himself, had dressed like a servant and washed the feet of His prideful, arrogant creatures.

Turning our attention now back to Paul’s letter to the Philippians, we saw that in chapter 1, Paul had exhorted the church to be united together in the spiritual battle against the enemies of the gospel. But now Paul addresses a different kind of threat against the church – not an external one, but an internal one.

The first thing we see in this passage comes to us in verses 1-4 and that is…

1. The Call to Humbly Serve One Another (vv. 1-4)

Apparently, the Philippian church faced the danger of discord and division from personal conflict. Paul’s purpose in this section is to exhort the Philippian believers to dwell together in a
state of unity and oneness, not allowing petty differences to divide them, but, as it stated a few
verses earlier, that they would be of “one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”
Listen to his words here in chapter 2, beginning in verse 1…

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit,
any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love,
being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but
in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his
own interests, but also to the interests of others.

A group of people is never more united than when they each have their eyes set on one common
goal, each one deferring to one other in the mission. Conversely, pride and selfishness divides. If
everyone is vying for rank, or only concerned about their own interests, then all you have are
people who are all looking out for themselves, and you can’t be more divided than that.

But the Christian life is a counter-cultural life. While our culture teaches us that we need to get
ahead, look out for number one, advance yourself at all costs, don’t take no for an answer, the
Christian life is the opposite. We must die to self if we would live for Christ. We must admit our
spiritual poverty if we are to be rich. We must mourn if we would be happy. We must hunger
and thirst if we are to be satisfied. And we must lose our life if we would save it, but if we try to
save our life we will lose it.

But perhaps the greatest opposite in the kingdom of God is what we find here in this section of
Scripture. We must humble ourselves if we are to be exalted.

Humility is one of the central tenets of the Christian faith. It means “to think or to judge
ourselves with a proper, God-ordained point of view.” The idea is expressed wonderfully in
Romans 12:3, for someone “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to
think with sober judgment.” It is sometimes said that humility is one of those things that if you
think you have it, you don’t. But this must go hand in hand with putting others before ourselves.
As it says in verses 3-4 of our text, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but
in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his
own interests, but also to the interests of others.” The idea is not necessarily to think less of
ourselves, but to think of ourselves less.

Steven Lawson says it this way:

“For a believer, humility is the most foundational of all Christian virtues. No one struts through
the narrow gate that leads to the kingdom. No one high-steps their way down the narrow path.
We are sheep, not peacocks; servants, not sovereigns. If Christ is to increase, we must
decrease.”

But the world views this kind of thinking as utter foolishness. The Greeks didn’t even have a
word for this kind of humility, because it was considered such a low value. The concept was
entirely foreign to them and utterly abhorrent to the Romans. Thus, the word for Christian
humility was coined when the church was birthed. Some even speculate that the word was even
invented by Paul himself in writing these verses.

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4 Lawson, 89.
So, what does one do when you don’t have a known word to communicate an idea? Well, the best thing to do is to point to a perfect example of what it means. And Paul could think of none greater than Christ himself, and His condescension in fulfilling God’s plan of redemption.

2. The Humility of Christ (vv. 5-8)

‘Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The passage begins, “Have this mind among yourselves…” What we’re dealing with here is an analogy of Christ as our example to follow in the area of humble service. I actually like the CSB’s rendering much better. It says, “Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus.” Again, we think back to the upper room when Christ said to his disciples in John 13, “When Jesus had washed their feet and put on his outer clothing, he reclined again and said to them, “Do you know what I have done for you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are speaking rightly, since that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done for you.”

As kind of an important side note, what we have here is far more than just an example of humility. This passage here in Philippians 2 is one of the greatest theological passages in Scripture which informs our doctrine of Christ. In this passage we receive much instruction on how we are to think concerning who Christ is and what He has done. Paul points to three actions of Christ which displayed His humble service in bringing redemption to us, and also reveal to us a very rich Christology.

- His Renunciation (v. 6) – “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.” Or as the NIV states so well here, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;”

Right from the very start we see that Paul reveals Christ’s eternal, divine nature. It says explicitly that in His very nature He is God. He is the second Person of the Trinity.

And so, we see here that Jesus Christ has eternally preexisted as the second Person of the triune God. John chapter 1 verses 1-3 states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”

And in Colossians 1:15-19, Paul tells us again concerning Jesus Christ, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”

And Hebrews 1:3 says of Him, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.”
The list of Scripture passages that prove Christ’s deity are expansive and overwhelming. Too many to mention here but suffice it to say that it is more than evident that Jesus Christ was eternally existent as God the Son, robed in majesty and glory together with the Father and Holy Spirit.

And that’s what makes this passage so stark, so awe-inspiring. It says that He “did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.” Unlike the disciples who were jockeying for position, Jesus didn’t consider His glorious and majestic privileges as God as something to be used to his own advantage.

But He did something that is even more shocking. The next verse tells us that He “emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” This is what is known in theology as…

- **His Incarnation (v. 7)**

Now it’s very important that we understand the terminology here. Paul’s use of the terms “the form of” and “in the likeness of” do not mean that Christ merely appeared to become a servant or appeared to become a man, any more than saying he was “in the form of God” means that He only appeared to be God. Paul does not use the usual Greek word for “being” here. Instead, he uses another term that stresses the essence of a person’s nature—his continuous state or condition.

Neither does the term “emptied Himself” mean that He somehow ceased to be God. How we must properly articulate this, then, is that Jesus Christ is fully God, and He became fully man. He did not give up any of His deity or “God-ness” when He became man, but rather He “put on” full humanity. What the term “emptied Himself” means, then, is that Christ voluntarily yielded His divine privileges and the independent exercise of his divine attributes to the will of his heavenly Father and came to earth to become a man, while never ceasing to be God.

Now I know that’s a lot of thinking that I’m asking you to do. But what’s important for us to see here for this study is that while Jesus Christ is fully, 100% God, He also chose voluntarily to put on full, 100% humanity in order that He could become our perfect representative. And that leads us into the third action of Christ in His humility, which is…

- **His Obedience (v. 8)**

This is where we see the “why” of Christ’s renunciation and incarnation. This is what He came to do in God’s overall mission to redeem a people for Himself.

Understanding this requires us to quickly survey three other passages of Scripture, starting with Genesis 1-3.

In Genesis 1 we see that God created man in His image and gave them dominion over all of God’s earthly creation, to rule it as God’s vice-regent and ambassador. But in Genesis chapter 3, we see that man rebelled against God, and in doing so, caused all of creation to fall under the curse of sin, and every person who has been born afterward has been born with a sin nature. We became self-centered, everyone pursuing his own interests, and because of this, we were enemies of God and in discord with our fellow man.
Fast-forward to Romans chapter 5, verses 12-21 and we see ever clearer what Adam’s role and contribution was in this area.

Verse 12 tells us that “sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”

Then in verse 17 it tells us, “For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.”

But verses 18-19 are the crux of what I want you to see here. It says, “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. “For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.”

What does all this mean? It means that Adam was the first representative for the whole human race. His disobedience led to death and condemnation and the passing on of a sin nature for all humanity.

But as it says here, Jesus Christ became a new representative for mankind once again in order to do what mankind failed to do, which was to live perfectly righteous before God. This is why it was necessary for Him to be fully God and fully man – so that He could be a perfect representative for ALL humanity. As a matter of fact, 1 Corinthians 15:45 calls Jesus “the Last Adam.” Earlier in 1 Corinthians 15 it even states explicitly, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”

This perfect obedience of Christ is often called His active obedience. It is where He fulfilled the Law of God perfectly in our stead and gained for us perfect righteousness.

But the passage doesn’t stop there, because as wonderful as this is, we still had sins that needed to be forgiven and cleansed. That is why it says that He became “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Going to the cross was the ultimate act of obedience by Jesus Christ, as He willingly followed His Father’s plan to redeem a people for Himself. Through Jesus’ death on the cross our sins are forgiven, and through His shed blood we are made clean.

What a picture of perfect love and grace, what a picture of mercy! We who were rebels to God’s will and permanently stained by our sin and separated from God for eternity, now by faith enjoy full pardon and reconciliation through the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, because the almighty Creator of heaven and earth performed the greatest act of humility ever known, and became a servant in order that He might give His life as a ransom for many.

The result of Jesus’ humble act of sacrifice was peace and reconciliation: first with God, and then the promise of reconciliation with our fellow man. As it says earlier on in Romans 5, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ… For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. “More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”
But how can we be sure that Christ’s work actually accomplished all that? How can we be sure that the Father accepted His sacrifice?

Implied within these verses is what is found explicitly in countless other places throughout Scripture and that is the fact that after Jesus was crucified and died on the cross, three days later God raised Him from the dead. As it says in 1 Corinthians 15 once again, “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins… But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. »For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. »For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”

And that leads us to our final point this morning, and that is…

3. The Exaltation of Christ (vv. 9-11)

*Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

The first thing we see in this section is…

- **His Exalted Name (v. 9)**

Notice the order of events. Christ humbled Himself and became a servant, obedient to the will of His Father. Paul then says “therefore,” that is, because of Jesus’ voluntary humility and obedience, God has exalted Him and bestowed on Him a name that is above every name.

Jesus has many names in Scripture, all of which highlight some attribute or part of His Person or work. To highlight but a few, He is called Emmanuel, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, the Ancient of Days, the Door of the Sheep, the Good Shepherd, the Word of Life, the Light of the World, the Way and the Truth and the Life, the Lamb of God, the Bread of Life, the Rock, the Bridegroom, and the Alpha and Omega. So then, what is this name which is above all names that He has been given here in Philippians 2?

We find out in verse 11…it is none other than God’s own name, Yahweh, Lord of Heaven and Earth. Only God’s name could ever be designated the name which is above every name!

Does that mean that Jesus somehow gained something in His essence in His resurrection and exaltation that He didn’t have before? Absolutely not. He could never be more God than He already was. What this must be referring to, then, is a position of recognizable superiority over all creation and that Jesus’ resurrection and ascension to the Father’s right hand make His superiority more fully evident to the creation over which He rules.

The passage goes on to talk about…

- **The Lordship of Jesus (vv. 10-11)**

Paul says, “*that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.*” There is coming a day when, regardless of your spiritual state, every knee will bow to Jesus Christ. The term “every knee…in heaven and on earth and under the earth” is all-inclusive and refers to every rational being in the universe. “In heaven” refers to angelic beings. “On earth” signifies earthly human beings. And “under the earth” refers to dead human beings and fallen spirits. No knee in the universe will be
excluded, be it human, angelic, or demonic. This means that some will bow willfully in joyful submission, while others will bow begrudgingly in mourning and shame. But either way, every knee will bow! The certainty of this is sealed. The only question left for us now is, when will you bow your knee? How much better to do it now!

Along with every knee bowing it says that “every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” The word “Lord” here is understood to represent the divine name Yahweh, which is a public declaration of His sovereignty. As it says in Isaiah 45:5, “I am the Lord, and there is no other, beside me there is no God.”

This confession, “Jesus Christ is Lord,” is what we confess today when we gather together for worship. It is the confession of everyone who has repented and turned to Christ in faith. This anticipates that which is to come when all of creation will make such a confession, again, either willingly in joy, or begrudgingly in shame. Every believing heart will join with the angels in confessing Jesus’ Lordship for all eternity in everlasting joy and worship.

But every unbelieving heart will confess it, too, in submission and despair. Even Satan will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. All the legions of demons will bow their knees and confess Jesus’ Lordship. Caiaphas will do it. Herod will do it. Pilate will do it. Nero will even confess Jesus Christ as Lord. Hitler will do it. Stalin will do it. Muhammad will do it. Every soul from every age will bow their knee and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

And this confession of Jesus’ Lordship will be “to the glory of God the Father.” We will all look upon that day and see in an instant what Scripture reveals now, that redemption was God’s plan from the beginning. That He sent His Son to earth to take the punishment for our sins so that He would be exalted above all creation. Jesus’ Lordship reveals God’s glory as eternal Father, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

The question now remains. What will you do with Jesus? The Bible says, “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. “For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. “For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame,” and “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

And so we end this message where we began, talking about being united with each other. Paul is saying, “Stay focused on the mission. Don’t let your petty differences which arise from selfishness distract you from the mission of the gospel. But look to the ultimate example…as it says in Hebrews 12… “fixing your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
Shining as Lights in the World
Philippians 2:12-18

12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. 17 Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

In the last section we looked at Paul’s exhortation to the Philippian church to not be selfishly motivated, but to be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. He admonished them not to think only of their own interests, but the interests of others, humbly serving one another in love. And then he pointed to the greatest example of this kind of humility and servant’s heart, the example of Christ, “who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage,” but rather humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

What we see is that there is a direct link from the last section to this one. Paul uses his very famous word, “Therefore…” In other words, in light of what was just said, here is what that means for you and what you should do about it.

So, I want to look at the next step in this thought process, and I want us to consider the issue of sanctification. Sanctification is just a fancy word that means “growing and maturing in our walk with Christ toward becoming more and more Christ-like.” That is, when we first come to faith in Christ, we are a baby in regard to our spiritual maturity. Often times we carry over our fleshly, selfish attitudes that marked our sinful nature, and as we saw last week, those selfish attitudes can cause divisions in the church. Paul addresses this same issue in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4, “But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? 4 For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human?” (Pause) Paul was saying that the reason there were divisions in the church was because the Corinthians were still immature spiritually and needed to grow up into greater Christ-likeness.

Well, Paul was also addressing divisions within the Philippian church which were obviously caused by selfish, conceited attitudes in some of the Philippian believers, and which threatened the advancement of the gospel. And so now he moves on to address this issue very specifically. Paul’s main point in this section of Scripture is to say to the Philippians, “I want you to work hard at growing in your spiritual maturity toward Christ-likeness so that your lives may be shining examples to the rest of the world of how a Christ-centered, gospel-focused life should look.”
So, turning to our text we see the first thing Paul says in his exhortation is that God gives…

1. Grace for Obedience (vv. 12-13)

“So, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, “for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Probably the greatest sign of true Christian life in someone is the willingness to obey God’s Word. There has been an actual change in their heart from being bent toward disobedience to now having the desire to be obedient to God. And this is something that was overall true of the Philippian believers. Even though they had their issues to work out, they were overall people who were committed to living obediently toward God and toward Paul’s teaching and Paul recognized this authentic Christian life in them.

So, the first thing Paul does is give them a…

- **Commendation – pastoral encouragement** (v. 12a) – he says to them, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed…” Paul is very wise in his discipleship of the Philippians and begins by recognizing what they do well already.

I received a very valuable reminder from my own daughter this past week. Her job is to train new employees at her work, and she said to me, “One thing we always want to do is to recognize and reward good behavior. Acknowledge when they do something right.” Well, this is very good advice for discipling new Christians as well. People respond positively to encouragement, recognizing and praising the things they already do well, and it motivates them to continue that behavior.

In very similar fashion, Paul tells the Thessalonian believers in...

1 Thess. 4:9-10 - Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, “for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more.

That’s what Paul is saying to the Philippians. “I recognize that you already have a heart for obedience. Keep that up and do so more and more!” That’s how I see this church. I recognize so many outstanding qualities in you all. Your love for the Word, your passion for missions and the lost…many things that are already good in you. I want to encourage you in the Lord, continue those things! Press on to love His Word more and more, to desire to reach the lost more and more! To want to obey His Word more and more!

But that’s only the first step. After Paul recognizes their strengths, he moves on to give them a command – an imperative. This is where we see that…

- **We are commanded to work – the imperative** (v. 12b)

so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling

As I said before, in this passage, Paul is concerned with their sanctification, that is, the life-long growth process of becoming more and more Christ-like and obedient to God. When Paul says to
them, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” he’s not advocating for works-based righteousness. Ephesians 2:8-10 reminds us that we can’t earn our own salvation, God has worked salvation for us by His sovereign grace alone. But neither is he saying, “You may be already saved, but now persevering to the end depends entirely on you.” We already saw in Philippians 1:6 that God, who began His good work in us, will be faithful to complete it.

So then, what does it mean to “work out” your own salvation in fear and trembling? Well, the long and short of it is, working out your own salvation means living out the new life in Christ that is inside every believer. It’s following the example of Christ and allowing the Holy Spirit to transform your thinking and your desires and your actions.

In verses 6-8, Jesus shows us what humble, others-focused, God-glorifying obedience looks like. THAT is the kind of life we’re called to live as believers. So, ask yourself this question: Does your life look like that? Are you praying and striving for growth in humility, personal holiness, selfless service, and sacrificial mission by the power of God’s Spirit?

Notice, the passage says “work.” It doesn’t say, “Just relax and let go and let God. The Spirit will carry you.” We are commanded to do something. We might wish we could just take a pill or snap our fingers to grow in Christ-likeness. Like looking at the athlete on a box of Wheaties and thinking that simply eating Wheaties will turn you into that athlete. When the fact is, just like there are no shortcuts to becoming a professional athlete, so there are no shortcuts for a Christian’s growth in Christ-likeness. It requires discipline and hard work every single day.

We live in a fast-paced, fast-food, instant gratification culture, with endless information right at our fingertips which can be accessed in seconds. But sanctification is a slow process. A consistent journey. God calls us to the day-in, day-out process of growing in Christ-likeness. To be faithful daily in prayer, calling out to God for His continual grace in making us like Christ. It means being diligent in Bible study, hungry to know Him. It means obediently applying God’s truth to your daily life. And it means being present in Sunday worship, keeping a humble, teachable spirit.

But notice that Paul says that we should work out our own salvation “in fear and trembling.” What does “fear and trembling” mean? Well, what it means is that as Christians we need to live in awe of God. It has to do with living in humility before God and in submission to His will. It means living our lives with a continual awareness of God’s presence which compels us to personal holiness.

I keep a sign pinned to the bulletin board in my office with the words “Coram Deo” written on it. Coram Deo is Latin for “before the face of God.” It’s a constant reminder that everything I do I am to do before the face of God, ever mindful of His presence. So, Paul is saying, “Let us work out our own salvation, always being mindful that we are in the presence of our great and holy God.” (Pause)

But immediately after this imperative, Paul comforts us with a wonderful truth that we aren’t called to work in our own power. He shows us that God is actually working in us, giving us the ability – the grace – to do what He calls us to do.
• God is working in us – the grace (v. 13)

work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, \( \text{for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.} \)

This is one of the great and mysterious doctrines in the Bible, which says that we are responsible to act, and yet God must act behind the scenes in order for us to be able to do what He calls us to do. What is it that will help us through those times of frustration when you just feel like you want to give up? It’s knowing that God is at work in us, giving us the ability and the grace to carry on.

But notice it says that God gives us grace not only to act, but “to will and to work for his good pleasure.” New Testament scholar D.A. Carson says this:

“God is not working merely to strengthen us in our willing and acting. Paul’s language is stronger than that. God himself is working in us both to will and to act: he works in us at the level of our wills and the level of our doing. But far from this being a disincentive to press on, Paul insists that this is an incentive. Assured as we are that God works in this way in his people, we should be all the more strongly resolved to will and to act in ways that please our Master.”

(Basics, 62)

In other words, God gives us grace even to be willing to do his good pleasure. Our natural man is never willing to do God’s will on its own. We MUST have God’s grace working in us.

We see this idea in several other places in the New Testament. For example, in Colossians 1:29, Paul writes, “For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.” And in 1 Corinthians 15:10, Paul says, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”

I want to take just a moment here to address a perennial issue that we see so often, especially here in America, although I saw it in Africa, too. It’s the teaching that you find in many self-help books, but even some so-called Christian books. It’s the cheerleader theology message. It’s the one that tells you that you have only to realize your own potential; to not listen to the negative vibes out there, but to reach down inside yourself, make up your mind to succeed, and tell the world to get out of your way. As I stated before, people respond positively to encouragement. But the problem with this sort of teaching is the kind of encouragement it gives. First, it places the focus on yourself and not on Christ and His kingdom. Jesus addresses this explicitly in Matthew 6:25-34. But the second problem is what it teaches you to depend on. Instead of helping you realize that we are bankrupt in ourselves and pointing us to Christ who is all-sufficient and promises to work mightily in us, which is the proper kind of encouragement, it tells you rather to pull yourself up and find the strength within yourself. This is nothing more than repackaged New Age philosophy. Jesus said in John 15, “Apart from me you can do nothing!” Folks, we have no strength within unless that strength is Christ!

Paul says here in chapter 2 that God is working in us for “His good purpose.” God fulfills His good purposes in us by His mighty power. That means we aren’t alone. If you are a follower of Christ, if you have been born again, then God is at work in you, and He is accomplishing His good purposes in and through you.
With Paul’s primary concern being the advance of the gospel, he admonishes the Philippians in a much more specific way next. He wants them to make sure their witness to the world around them is not hindered by division. Point #2, Paul wants them to…

2. Live as Lights in the World (vv. 14-16)

“Do all things without grumbling or disputing, “that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, “holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

So, the first thing Paul does is give them a warning to…

- Avoid grumbling and arguing (v. 14)

This immediately brings to mind the murmuring and grumbling of the Israelites in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses. Grumbling is a word that sounds like what it means. It refers to a muffled, under-the-breath murmuring and complaining. And “disputing” refers to the tendency to call everything into question. Both of these attitudes and actions anger God because doing these things show the opposite of faith and trust. They call into question God’s goodness and faithfulness. In essence, it’s acting as if there really is no God at all.

One way to quickly destroy a church is to have people with critical, complaining spirits. It’s like poison to a congregation. The thing is, such an attitude has pride and selfishness at its root. There is hardly anything that can destroy the health of a church quicker than grumbling and arguing.

Folks, we can rejoice that Community Bible Church is a very healthy church. Are we perfect? Certainly not. No church is. But praise God we don’t have grumbling and arguing tearing us apart. Let this passage be an encouragement to us to always be on our guard against such attitudes. If something goes on here that you don’t understand or don’t like, don’t turn and grumble about it to others. You will only bring damage to yourself, to your brothers and sisters, and ultimately to the gospel ministry. Grumbling and disputing are sure signs of spiritual immaturity. The key is to do what Paul says here and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, calling on God to give you the grace to do so. Seek to grow in spiritual maturity. My door is always open if you have a problem, especially if that problem is with me. A multitude of problems can be solved simply by talking it out.

The thing is, whether we like it or not, what we do and how we act is being displayed to a watching world. That’s why Paul encourages the Philippians to…

- Live as shining lights (v. 15)

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, “that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world

If the Philippians could get through their petty differences, they had the opportunity to be examples to the pagan culture around them, and to the world. The culture they lived in was certainly “crooked and twisted.” The worship of other gods, the worship of Caesar, culturally accepted sexual immorality…kind of sounds like our culture today, doesn’t it?
Yet in the midst of the darkness of that twisted culture, if the Philippians repented of their grumbling and disputing, they would be blameless and innocent toward God, and their conduct with one another as brothers and sisters would demonstrate that they were children of God to a crooked and twisted generation.

Folks, our conduct with each other is much more important than you might think. What we do and how we act will be seen by a watching world, and that watching world, whether they know it or not, is looking for something different. Something real. A solution to their chaos. And only Christ can offer them that.

In His sermon on the mount, Jesus taught,

“‘You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ‘Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ‘In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Thus when the world sees our good works of loving one another, living humbly with one another, considering others more important than ourselves, our light will shine brightly in this dark world, especially as we…

- **Hold fast to the Word of life (v. 16)**

…which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Word of God is our compass. It’s how we see Jesus and how we learn how to be more like Him.

But even more than that, the Word of God is the means through which God imparts the grace to us to be able to will and to work for His good pleasure. God’s Word is very much a means of grace to us, His people. And through His Word, God does His work in us and changes us to become more like Christ. His grace comes to us through His teachings and through His warnings, causing us to grow and giving us the ability to obey Him. That’s why it’s so important to read and study the Word faithfully and meditate on it continually.

As Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, “that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Finally, as Paul reflects on his pastoral care of the Philippian church, we see a wonderful picture of…

3. Joyful Gospel Sacrifice (vv. 17-18)

“Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. “Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

First, we see, in verse 17,

- **Paul’s joyful sacrifice (v. 17)**

We know that Paul had given his whole life to the advancement of the gospel. For him, to live was Christ, and to die was gain. Even if he was to be “poured out as a drink offering,” which refers to sacrificing his all, even unto death...he was willing. There was no sacrifice too great for
Paul if it meant that the gospel was preached and people were being saved and growing in Christ. And it was true, Paul, indeed, sacrificed greatly for the gospel. But ultimately, when he thought of those whose lives were changed and the glory that was brought to Christ, it wasn’t burdensome to him, but rather a joy.

But he wanted the Philippians to share in his joy. And so he gave them…

- **The command to rejoice (v. 18)**

  ...as well. He says to them, “Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.”

With one exception, up until now the joy that has been mentioned in this letter has been Paul’s joy. This time, however, Paul actually commands the Philippians to rejoice, a command that will happen three more times in the rest of this letter.

In talking about this shared joy, Paul is referencing the fellowship or partnership of the gospel that he mentioned in chapter 1. It is a fellowship that is made up of a shared bond between Paul, Christ, and the Philippians. And that bond, as you will recall, was centered on the commitment to the advancement of the gospel, and the honor of Jesus Christ whether by life and by death.

Once again, Paul is looking to Christ, who “for the joy set before Him, endured the cross.” Through all his sacrifices for the gospel ministry, Paul kept Christ’s sacrifice and joy in view. What Christ accomplished and everything He went through to accomplish it, all was done “for the joy set before Him.” The souls that would be saved and who would one day be able to stand confidently and safely before Jesus on that final day. Paul shared in that joy, and wanted the Philippians to share in it, too.

Our attitude should be that of Christ’s, being motivated by the joy of people being saved from eternal separation from God and becoming members of God’s family. We are called to give whatever sacrifice is necessary for the cause of the gospel, and for the honor of Christ. But if we do so with a sour-puss attitude, grumbling and complaining along the way, what will that say to the world? Therefore, let us work our own salvation with fear and trembling, growing in our spiritual maturity, remembering that it is God who works in us both to will and to work for His good pleasure. And let us do so with joyful hearts. And in so doing we will shine as lights in this dark world.
Faithful Men in the Gospel
Philippians 2:19-30

19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. 20 For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. 21 For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But you know Timothy’s proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. 23 I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, 24 and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

25 I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, 26 for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. 28 I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. 29 So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, 30 for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

Well, we’ve been through some exciting passages in our study of Philippians so far. By way of review, Paul begins this letter in chapter 1 by offering a thanksgiving and prayer for the Philippian believers, whom he considers partners in the gospel ministry because of their like-mindedness and because of their attention to his material needs as well. And we saw how he is trusting God that He who began a good work in them will be faithful to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.

He goes on to encourage them by pointing out that, although he was in prison for the preaching of the gospel, the gospel continued to advance nonetheless, and that is what was most important.

Then we heard Paul’s heart for the gospel and for the honor of Christ when he spoke those earth-shattering words that still reverberate in later passages, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Spring-boarding from his own example of someone who has a heart that is completely dedicated to the gospel, Paul instructs the Philippians beginning in 1:27, that “as citizens of heaven, let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.” And we saw how God gives us the grace to do that, as well as to suffer for the gospel’s sake.

He then goes on in chapter 2 to teach on specifically what living a life worthy of the gospel looks like. Specifically, Paul instructs them to not live selfishly, but in humility, count others more significant than yourselves, looking not only to your own interests, but to the interests of others. He then pointed to the ultimate example of such living, Christ himself.

In light of this, Paul went on to command them to work out their own salvation in fear and trembling, keeping in mind that God is actually at work in them to accomplish that…working in them both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Paul reminded them that they should do all of this with joy and not with a grumbling attitude, because the world around them is watching, and the Philippians had an opportunity to be shining lights in a dark world.
And then we come to verses 19-30 of chapter 2, and in many ways this passage might seem like a downer compared to the exciting passages we’ve seen so far, and the exciting passages that still lie ahead. As C.J. Mahaney quips, “No one’s favorite verses are found in this passage!” Because what we find here in these verses is...a travel itinerary! Seriously? And so, we are confronted with the very real question and temptation of whether we should just skip this passage altogether. After all, what could we possibly learn from a travel itinerary?

Ah, well, I’m glad you asked! Because to skip this passage would, first, be to skip something that God wants to say to us in His Word. But second, we will miss some very needful encouragement which we find when we simply slow down enough to mine the gems from this section of Scripture.

Having a travel itinerary is not unusual for Paul’s letters. What is unusual is the fact that we find this one right smack dab in the middle of the letter! But I believe God placed it here for a very specific reason, because what we find is that this passage focuses on two people who embody the very teaching that Paul has been giving so far, especially that of living lives worthy of the gospel and, in humility, looking not only to their own interests, but the interests of others.

But what we also see here which will greatly encourage us, are two people who are simply living out the gospel life in their everyday, ordinary lives. We tend to be drawn to the dramatic and sensational stories of people who do outstanding things for God and for the good of humanity. People who end up with books written about them whom God uses to touch countless lives and maybe even end up giving their lives for the cause.

But as a result of our draw to sensationalism, we tend to get bored easily. We seldom tend to pay attention to those people who simply remain faithful in serving God quietly, day in and day out, working out their own salvation with fear and trembling, all the while, almost unrecognized by anyone, making a difference for God’s kingdom by their faithful service.

That’s the story of Timothy and Epaphroditus, to whom we now turn in our study. These are men whose example we would do well to follow, as we will see, they are men who are worthy of honor because they have been steadily faithful in the gospel ministry.

I want to remind us of something, though. Although it is Paul who was the human author of this letter, let us keep in mind that it is God who is the ultimate author of these words. And that means what we’re reading is God’s comments about these two men.

1. The Example of Timothy (vv. 19-24)

“I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy’s proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

A. Timothy’s Trustworthiness (v. 19)

Paul tells the church that he’s not sending Timothy right away. Maybe they expected him to come soon. But it seems from the text that Timothy might be waiting until Paul’s trial is concluded and they see what the verdict will be. If the verdict is favorable and Paul is released,
Paul plans on sending Timothy ahead of him and then coming himself afterward. If you recall, this is not Paul’s final imprisonment which we see in 2 Timothy where he knows for certain that his life is definitely coming to an end. At this point, Paul isn’t certain what is going to happen to him, and even though he is hopeful that he will be able to be released and come to them himself, he knows that everything is subject to God’s will, as indicated by the phrase, “I hope in the Lord Jesus…”

But this shows us how much Paul counts on his trusted young protégé Timothy, especially in times of uncertainty. Whether he lived or died, guess who he was counting on to continue the work of the ministry? Timothy!

We learn a lot about Paul’s confidence in Timothy from reading the letter of 2 Timothy. As I said, that was at the end of Paul’s life, and Paul’s main concern, as always, was the purity and success of the gospel. The whole letter of 2 Timothy was a letter preparing young Timothy to pick up where Paul left off and continue the ministry of the gospel. It was a crucial time, when many false teachers were deceiving the church, and many young churches needed strengthening. The gospel of Jesus Christ was still very much in its early stages.

Paul says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:10-11:

"You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—

Timothy shared Paul’s heart for the gospel, his “aim in life,” and he learned Christ-likeness from Paul as well, such things as “faith, patience, love, and steadfastness in persecutions. Paul knew he could trust Timothy with his greatest treasure: the message of the gospel which was entrusted to him.

Part of what made Timothy so trustworthy is seen in verses 20-21, which is…

**B. Timothy’s Selfless Concern (vv. 20-21)**

Paul says, “For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.”

Paul says, “For I have no one like him.” The CSB says, “For I have no one else like-minded who will genuinely care about your interests;” Paul could trust Timothy because he was like-minded with Paul in his concern for the churches. Don’t miss this! We could easily look past this and miss the great importance of this trait. The fact that he had someone who shared the same mind and heart for the welfare of the churches was absolutely HUGE to Paul!

There were other Christians in Rome where he was, but he says of them, “No one is genuinely concerned about your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.”

Paul had just finished instructing the Philippians concerning the attitude they need to have in the gospel ministry, and he says specifically, “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also the interests of others.” This is what he had in young Timothy. A selfless, trusted comrade who would give the church the same kind of care that Paul himself would give. Timothy was the only one left in Rome who was free enough from his own self-interests to devote himself to the welfare of others.
To have someone who was like-minded and shared his concern for the churches and was equally committed to helping them...well, there is just no price tag you could put on that. To Paul it was everything! And that really shown a bright light on what we see in verse 22, and that is…

C. Timothy' Proven Worth (v. 22)

Like his selfless concern, this also goes hand in hand with why Timothy could be considered so trustworthy. Paul says, “But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.”

Go through Paul’s letters and see how many times he mentions Timothy. I guarantee it will be an eye-opener! Timothy was always either right there with Paul, writing what Paul dictated, tending to Paul’s needs, or else he was sent out by Paul to deliver a message or to strengthen one of the churches for Paul. He was just always there! Timothy had served as Paul’s envoy to Macedonia a decade earlier. Paul sent him to the troubled church in Corinth on several occasions, which was certainly no small task! He was also sent to Ephesus and was entrusted as their overseer. Needless to say, Timothy was proven and dependable, and such trusted service was greater than all the gold in the world to Paul!

But this highlights one last thing about Timothy, and that’s…

D. Timothy’s Devotion (vv. 23-24)

Paul writes, “I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.”

As I said before, Timothy was just always there for Paul. And what we see in later letters is that Timothy remains with Paul to the very end. He was devoted to Paul, but even more importantly, he was devoted to the gospel ministry, which is why Paul saw him as so faithful. It’s one thing to be devoted to someone, it’s quite another to be devoted to that which that someone is most committed to. As it implies of Timothy in verse 21, he was concerned about the interests of Jesus Christ.

Timothy’s heart was fully in the mission. He was completely committed to the very end. He stayed with Paul through all his imprisonments and suffering and was faithful to get the job done each and every time.

But most of all, in Timothy’s serving with Paul in the gospel, Timothy followed the servant’s example of Jesus, who “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant.” Timothy had followed the model of Christ. Paul wanted the Philippians to observe, when Timothy came, a selfless, prime example of one who lives a life “worthy of the gospel of Christ.” Timothy stood firm in one spirit with Paul and the Philippians, fearlessly striving side by side for the gospel. He had set aside rivalry and conceit and counted others more significant than himself, while looking to the interests of others. He had put on the mind of Christ. He had devoted his life to the ministry of the gospel, shining as a light in a dark world, and doing so with genuine joy!

Well, next we see that in verses 25-30, Paul gives to us…

2. The Example of Epaphroditus (vv. 25-30)

"I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for
you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. «Indeed he was ill, near to
death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow
upon sorrow. «I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him
again, and that I may be less anxious. »So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such
men, »for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in
your service to me.

Epaphroditus was more than likely a leader, or at the very least, a very trusted servant in the
church at Philippi. According to chapter 4 of this letter, he was sent by the church in Philippi to
deliver a financial gift to Paul while he was in prison in Rome. The prisons in Rome weren’t like
the ones we think of, where you get all your meals and clothes or even your room paid for by the
taxpayers. If you wanted any of those things, you had to pay for it yourself. Well, the fact that
the Philippians collected a substantial offering and sent Epaphroditus to him to minister to Paul’s
material needs further reveals the picture of the partnership in the gospel and the close
relationship between Paul and the Philippian believers. Let’s take a look at this man of God.

The first thing that Paul shows us in verse 25 is…

A. The kind of servant he was (v. 25)

Paul uses no less than 5 descriptors to describe what kind of person Epaphroditus was.

First, Paul called him “my brother.” This shows both the fact that they shared the same heavenly
Father in their common salvation, but it also speaks of Paul’s genuine love for Epaphroditus.
Paul called him “my brother.”

Second, Paul says that he is a “fellow worker.” Paul recognizes that Epaphroditus labored with
him in the same mission. And even though Paul was more “up front” or “high profile” and
Epaphroditus was more behind the scenes in more of a helps ministry, Paul didn’t treat him as an
underling or as someone whose contribution was less important. Paul recognized that they were
equals. They worked together for the cause of Christ.

Thirdly, Paul uses one of his favorite images of the Christian life in calling Epaphroditus a
“fellow soldier.” In the spirit of Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 6:10-20, Paul and Epaphroditus had
been through a spiritual war together. As before, Paul sees them as equals. On the same mission
and in the same battle together.

The fourth and fifth descriptor words Paul uses describe Epaphroditus’ faithfulness in carrying
out his assigned duty. He is the Philippians’ faithful messenger to Paul, carrying encouragement
to him of their well-being, and he is a messenger to them, carrying Paul’s letter back to the
church.

And finally, he is recognized as the one who has ministered to Paul’s needs. Epaphroditus was a
true servant who, like Timothy, did not seek his own interests, but the interests of others, and the
interests of Jesus Christ.

Next, in talking about Epaphroditus, Paul tells us of…

B. The kind of love he displayed (v. 26)

In verse 26, Paul points out Epaphroditus’ love and compassion for the Philippians. “for he has
been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.”
Now, I have to admit something here. I don’t get sick much, but when I do, I’m a pretty sad patient. And thoughts of the good of other people are not the first things in my mind. I’m pretty much in the frame of mind of wanting Jamie to take care of me and baby me.

But here we have someone whose sickness was much worse than the common flu, and yet he considered others more important than himself, even in his sickness!

It says he was even “distressed” because they had heard that he was ill. Most likely, Epaphroditus got sick on his way to see Paul in Rome. He was carrying a rather large sum of money, so chances are he wasn’t traveling alone, but with companions. What probably happened was one of his traveling companions went back to Philippi with word of Epaphroditus’ illness. But this was unsettling to Epaphroditus. He couldn’t bear the thought of causing them so much worry. That’s how others-focused he was! That word “distressed” is the same Greek word used of Jesus when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane. As Jesus loved his own and was obedient to death, Epaphroditus loved the Philippians and was obedient in his mission to the point of death. This is yet another way Epaphroditus points us to Jesus.

But that leads us to the next thing about him, which is…

C. The kind of obstacle he faced (vv. 27-28)

Epaphroditus became so ill, it says, that he nearly died fulfilling his service to Paul.

But it says, “But God had mercy on him.” We don’t know what exactly the sickness was, but it was severe enough that he almost died. And Epaphroditus was completely dependent upon God’s mercy in order to complete his mission.

Notice also Paul’s compassion and love. He says that God not only had mercy on Epaphroditus, “but on me also,” he said, “lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.” It’s true, for Paul to die is gain. And he knew that if Epaphroditus would have died he would have been in the presence of Jesus, which is far better. But that doesn’t mean that he wouldn’t have mourned his death. Paul said he would have had sorrow upon sorrow. But God had mercy on them both.

But Paul was also anxious about how the Philippians would worry about him. He goes on to say, “I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious.”

Finally, we see in Epaphroditus,

D. The kind of honor he deserved (vv. 29-30)

“So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, “for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

Paul looks back on the faithfulness of this servant of Christ, and especially the fondness of his service to Paul himself. Traveling such a long distance from Philippi to Rome, getting deathly ill on the way, yet whose heart was more anxious for his people whom he loved so dearly back home. This was a faithful man of God. One that Paul said deserved honor.

Paul saw Epaphroditus’ mission to bring aid to him as a needful, extremely important mission in the work of the gospel. He said that in carrying out this mission, Epaphroditus “nearly died for
the work of Christ, risking his life to complete” the mission he was sent on by the Philippian church.

He is the definition of an unsung hero. One who is faithfully yet quietly working in the background, but whose impact can be felt everywhere. These are the people who keep the ministry going. Without them, we wouldn’t have a ministry.

In my short time at my current church, I have met many unsung heroes. My family and I have faced several challenges with our home and other things. Broken water heater, leaky roof, overgrown backyard. Many have joyfully ministered to our needs. Not to mention all those who do the work around the church. Mowing the lawn, cleaning the inside of the church every Monday morning, making sure things are in good repair, paying the bills, serving food, working in the nursery week in and week out, teaching Sunday school, taking care of others in their need. These are the people that seem to always be there, ready to help. You know who you are. But most importantly, God knows who you are. And I want you to know I am grateful for your service. Church, our response to this…we need to honor such men and women. For they are no less important to the work of the gospel as those who are in the forefront. Indeed, they are an integral part of the partnership of the gospel. But also, we can look to such men as Timothy and Epaphroditus as models of how we can live our lives worthy of the gospel as well.
The Surpassing Worth of Knowing Christ
Philippians 3:1-11

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. 3 For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

This portion of Scripture and the one after it which we will cover in the next section is absolutely rich in content, in meaning, and in theology. We could surely spend a significant amount of time traveling down roads and exploring the sight, like being on vacation in Italy, soaking in the breath-taking scenery.

For instance, I could very much spend a whole sermon on verse 1 and Paul’s command to “rejoice in the Lord,” and one day I hope to do that. But what’s important for us to see today is that Paul begins by giving the Philippians a command. In essence he says…

1. Find Your Joy in the Lord (v. 1)

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

There’s much to be said here about the fact that we were created to seek joy. Many people might erroneously think that seeking joy is wrong and selfish. They think that to be a Christian you must be austere and solemn. But while faith in Christ and the advancement of the gospel is definitely a serious and grave matter which should never be taken lightly or treated as common or given anything less than top priority, the idea that Christianity should be joyless couldn’t be farther from the truth. In fact, we were created for joy…to find our joy and the fulfillment of our deepest longings in Christ. Notice Paul says to rejoice “in the Lord.” Charles Spurgeon said, “The Lord Jesus is a deep sea of joy: My soul shall dive in and shall be swallowed up in the delights of His company.” This is actually the opposite of sin. Sin in when we go looking to fulfill our need for joy in everything but Christ. But as John Piper famously says, “God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him.”
Paul says that being reminded of this keeps us safe. But this whole idea sets up the rest of this passage very well, for what we see here in these verses is a contrast between two sets of values—one which is empty and devoid of true worship, which we see in verses 2-6, and the other which is the essence of true worship and the wellspring of our joy, which we see in verses 7-11.

2. The Misplaced Confidence of Legalism (vv. 2-6)

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—Stop there...what we see here in verses 2-3 is that Paul makes...

A Striking Contrast (vv. 2-3)

Paul begins by giving them a warning about a certain group of people called Judaizers. Judaizers were devout Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah, but thought it was necessary to hold on to forms of Judaism. Specifically, they believed that Gentiles had to become Jews before becoming Christians. This involved the act of circumcision and taking on the law of Moses. We read about these Judaizers in Acts 15. They were saying, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Paul goes on to draw a contrast between the Judaizer false teachers and true believers. Paul’s use of the term “dogs” here in reference to the Judaizers is filled with irony. It’s the Jews who always prided themselves in being God’s chosen people and who called Gentiles “dogs.” Dogs back then weren’t cute, lovable house pets. They were filthy, mangy, coyote-like scavengers who fed on garbage and the rotting flesh of other animals.

Paul also called them “evildoers.” Paul may have called them this because of the evil of spreading a false gospel. But he may also have said this to highlight the fact that while they trusted in the law, they failed to see that they fell far short of that law. Indeed, he says in Galatians 5:2-4: “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.”

The term “mutilators of the flesh” shows just how useless Paul saw circumcision in regard to righteousness. It’s just the mutilation of the flesh and has no redeeming value if you don’t live perfectly according to the whole law. In Galatians 5:6 he says, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

In stark contrast to the way he describes the Judaizers, Paul goes on to state that true believers in Christ are actually “the circumcision.” He’s basically saying, “Those Judaizers place their trust in physical circumcision, but in all actuality, WE who place our trust in Christ are the true circumcision!” Paul was explicit about this in Romans 2:28-29 when he wrote, “For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.” So then the true circumcision are those who have faith in Christ.

True believers are also those who “worship by the Spirit of God.” When Paul uses the term “worship” here, he’s not talking about what we do in our Sunday morning service. He’s talking
about a life devoted to God in spiritual service. Paul uses this term in this manner in Romans 12:1: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

The distinguishing mark of a true Christian...what actually makes a Christian a Christian...is that he possesses the Holy Spirit. Paul said in Romans 8:9: “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” The importance of this truth cannot be overstated. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is what connects a believer to the Person of Christ, making it possible to truly know Him. Your whole life gets reoriented because you now possess the very life and power of God inside of you.

True believers are also those who “glory in Christ Jesus.” Our glory is in Christ alone! Again, we’re reminded of what Paul said in Galatians 6:14: “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” If you meet someone who claims to be a Christian but never makes much of Christ, you have to wonder about the genuineness of his claim. The Christian life is a Christ-exalting life. Churches can be known for all sorts of things. I want our church to be known as being a people who boast in Christ Jesus!

And finally, on the flip side of that same coin, he says true believers are those who “put no confidence in the flesh.” Everyone puts their confidence somewhere. Some put their confidence in their own ability. Some, like the Judaizers, put their confidence in outward rituals or the fact that they were born into a certain family. A true Christian, however, puts no confidence in anything for his righteousness but Christ and Christ alone.

But to make the contrast even sharper, and to illustrate the point he’s making even greater, Paul points to his own Jewish credentials.

- **Paul’s Jewish Credentials (vv. 4-6)**

  though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ‘circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ‘as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Basically, Paul is humoring the Judaizers and beating them at their own game. They appealed to their impressive Jewish credentials, and so Paul, in pointing out the uselessness of what the Judaizers place their trust in, holds up his own credentials and says, “If ANYONE would have reason to have confidence in human credentials, it’s me!”

He says to the Judaizers, “You wanna talk about credentials? Get a load of this:

- Circumcised the eighth day like a good Jew had to be?…check!
- Of the people of Israel?...check! Paul was no Gentile convert, but the original cookie!
- Of the tribe of Benjamin…check! Paul was from a respected Jewish tribe, not one that had a history of apostacy.
- A Hebrew of Hebrews…check! While Paul knew Greek, he had been thoroughly immersed in his Hebrew culture.
• As to the law, a Pharisee…check! The name “Pharisee” came from the Aramaic term for “separated ones.” They were the elite rule-followers! And Paul had been one.
• As to zeal, a persecutor of the church…check! Paul was not only a true-blooded Hebrew Pharisee, but he was the top of his class. He surpassed all his peers in his zeal for the Law, and showed it through his relentless persecution of the church.
• And speaking of the law, as to righteousness under the law…blameless…check! While Paul wasn’t claiming sinless perfection here, he was saying that his life was exemplary when it came to observing the Old Testament law.

But in the same breath that he used to name off these credentials, he goes on to qualify everything he just said by naming the one thing that made all of those credentials meaningless, which is point number three…

3. The Surpassing Worth of Knowing Christ (vv. 7-11)

>But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

What we have here is the why of Paul’s devotion to Christ. Why was it the case that, for Paul, to live was Christ? Why was it that to die was gain? After all, he had obtained elite status in life. He had worked his way up to the elite ranks in being a Pharisee. His future couldn’t have been brighter.

But somewhere just outside the town of Damascus one day on his way to persecute Christians, Paul met the living Christ! Indeed, a lot more happened to Paul that day than just getting knocked off his horse and being blinded by a great light. When someone meets Jesus, something happens inside of them…it’s something that far surpasses simple head knowledge or the learning of correct facts.

All at once you meet the One whom your soul was created for. There is a “knowing.” Your spirit comes alive and all of a sudden, your life is awakened to a love that you never could have known before. The old hymn by George Robinson describes it very well…

Loved with everlasting love,
Led by grace that love to know;
Gracious Spirit from above,
Thou hast taught me it is so!
Oh, this full and perfect peace!
Oh, this transport all divine!
In a love which cannot cease,
I am His, and He is mine;
In a love which cannot cease,
I am His, and He is mine.

And all at once you know that this is true salvation. To know Christ and to be known by Him. And then all the things in which you once trusted fall uselessly to the wayside. Do you know Christ? I don’t mean knowing true things about Him. It’s certainly important for us to have good doctrine. But do you know Him? Have you walked with Him and experienced His goodness and His faithfulness?
Knowing Christ is a journey. It’s a process of getting to know and experience Jesus, beginning with the very first work of God in our hearts and going on until that final day when we meet Him face to face. Paul outlines for us this process in verses 9-11. It all begins with…

- **Justification: Trusting Christ Alone as Your Righteousness (v. 9)**

> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

Now, just to be clear, justification is not a process. It is a once for all declaration by God that we are righteous based on the righteousness of Jesus Christ and it becomes ours through faith. But this is the beginning of the process of knowing Christ. And this is what the Judaizers were missing.

In Romans chapter 10, of the Jews Paul says, “For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

See, the problem is, only perfect righteousness will make us right with God. But as Paul also said in Romans, “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” We all begin our lives as enemies of God because of sin. And then he says plainly in that same chapter, “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”

That is why, as Martin Luther famously said, what we need is an “alien righteousness.” That is, a righteousness from outside ourselves. And that is what we find in Christ. And that is why justification can only come through Christ as a gift, because only Christ came to earth and lived a perfectly righteous life in our stead and went to the cross and died in order to reconcile us back to God. This reconciliation is the first step in knowing Christ.

But it doesn’t just stop at justification. Our problem is sin. And so, God begins the process of setting us apart from the effects of our sinful nature, a process which will be completed only on the final day when we see Christ face to face. And that is the process of…

- **Sanctification: Knowing Christ More and Becoming More Like Him (v. 10)**

> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

The beauty and greatness of knowing Christ compels us toward knowing Him even more, and it endues us with a longing in our heart to become more like Him, whatever the cost. What Paul is describing here is the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. A joy that our soul finds that surpasses all the inferior pleasures of this world. And even though we may still struggle with sin, we’re struggling because we know that there is a superior pleasure to be had. We’ve tasted it. It is a love that lives within the heart of all true Christians, even if sometimes it lies dormant and

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must be re-awakened. That’s my prayer today. That this love will be awakened in you and that you will make this your heart-cry also.

There’s an old song that was made popular by Steve Green many years ago that captures this heart-cry well…

Just the time I feel that I've been caught in the mire of self
Just the time I feel my mind's been bought by worldly wealth
That's when the breeze begins to blow; I know the Spirit's call
And all my worldly wanderings just melt into His love

Oh I want to know You more
Deep within my soul I want to know You
Oh I want to know You
To feel Your heart and know Your mind
Looking in Your eyes stirs up within me
Cries that say I want to know You
Oh I want to know You…

And I would give my final breath
To know You in Your death and resurrection
Oh I want to know You more

Paul says, that I “may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” This is what it means to take up our cross and follow Him! Through suffering we experience a knowledge of Him and a love for Him that cannot be experienced any other way. That’s because while we go through it, we become like him in his death because it causes us to die to self. And we learn to trust Him, and we experience His power and faithfulness in walking with us through it all.

But also, when we experience suffering in this life, it causes us to long for a day when such suffering will be finished and our cry to know Him will be finally and completely fulfilled. And that brings us to the final step in our journey to know Christ and that is…

- **Glorification: The believer’s future hope in Christ (v. 11)**

“that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

The heart-cry is such that it never ceases, but by grace will persevere through the suffering until the very end when at last we see Him face to face and the presence of sin has been vanquished and our lives are made completely new.

1 John 3:2 says, “Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”

And in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 Paul tells us that on that final day, “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the

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6 Excerpt from “Oh I Want to Know You More,” music and lyrics by Steve Fry.
trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. “For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.”

These are things that no legalism or empty rituals or ethnic credentials can get you. That is why Paul talks about, and that is why we sing about, the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.
Pressing On Toward the Goal – Part 1
Philippians 3:12-16

12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

In the movie Chariots of Fire, the makers of the movie included a scene that never took place in real life, but nonetheless serves as a great lesson for us. It was the race between Harold Abrams and Eric Liddel. At the end of the race, Liddel beats Abrams, who was absolutely obsessed with beating Liddel. The scene goes on to show Abrams after the race, sitting up in the stands, sulking, replaying over and over in his mind the horrible scene of him being beaten by Liddel. He’s visibly crushed. His lady friend comes up and sits beside him and says to him, “For goodness sake, snap out of it. You’re behaving like a child.” “I lost,” Abrams moaned. “If you can’t take a beating,” she said, “perhaps it’s for the best.” Abrams snapped back, “I don’t run to take beatings. I run to win. If I can’t win, I won’t run.” To which she replied, “If you don’t run, you can’t win.”

Maybe that’s how some of you have felt regarding what Paul has said so far. If you recall, last week we looked at a particularly lofty portion of Scripture in which Paul tells of his passion for knowing Christ. As Kent Hughes says, “There’s nothing in Scripture quite like this explosion of spiritual longing.” But maybe you look at Paul’s life and it feels like he’s just so far ahead that any chance of being like him—well, what’s the point?

Well, in today’s passage, it’s as if Paul zooms in on this spiritual journey. And he says to all of us, “never mind about your failures or your feelings of inadequacy. If you don’t run, you can’t win. Just keep your eyes on the prize and run and trust God to get you there!”

You can see Paul as your coach, if you will, who is training you to run better so that you can win. Paul gives us three challenges or exhortations for growing in spiritual maturity. In these passages Paul exhorts the church to pursue Christ and Christian maturity with humility, passion, and faithfulness.

The first thing Paul exhorts his readers to do is found in the first part of verse 12, and that is…

1. Cultivate a humble, holy dissatisfaction. (v. 12a)

Paul said in verses 10-11, “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, “that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

And now he continues his thought in verse 12…

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect,

One of the marks of spiritual maturity is a humble awareness that you haven’t arrived yet in your spiritual journey. Paul’s passion to know Christ rises out of a profound dissatisfaction with his
present spiritual state. Here’s Paul, the apostle, the spiritual giant, and yet he knows that there is more of Christ to know, and that there is a deeper walk with Him and a greater love for Him than what he is currently experiencing.

One of the greatest enemies of spiritual growth is satisfaction and complacency. Being satisfied in our current spiritual state. When allowed to continue it turns into spiritual smugness and your life begins to smell of the stench of stagnation and arrogance. Nothing says spiritual immaturity more than arrogance and a “higher and holier than thou” attitude.

If you recall in the description of his pre-conversion life, Paul said, “as to righteousness under the law, blameless.” As a self-righteous Pharisee he previously thought of himself as having arrived. But it was the gospel that humbled Paul. The gospel has a humbling effect on our lives. It reveals to us our utter unworthiness and continual need of God’s mercy.

So, the first step in growing in spiritual maturity is to cultivate a holy dissatisfaction with your current spiritual state. We need to stand in front of the mirror of God’s Word and recognize that we haven’t yet arrived.

Jesus said in Matthew 5, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” It’s recognizing your own spiritual poverty that is absolutely essential for coming into God’s kingdom. But this doesn’t end when a person first enters God’s kingdom. That person is yet a spiritual baby and has a lot of growing and maturing to do in his spiritual walk.

The key to understanding this is understanding the concept of “the now and the not yet.” It’s the difference between Jesus’ first coming and His second coming. In His first coming, Jesus brought salvation to the hearts of his people. We experience a resurrection and we become partakers of eternal life on the inside, yet on the outside we still struggle and wrestle with sinful flesh. Salvation is complete, and yet it’s incomplete. We get a sure down payment in this life, but that down payment looks ahead to the day when Christ will return and make all things new. And what was just a spiritual reality inside, will then be a completed reality on the outside as well. We will be made completely new, in our bodies as well as our spirits. It is then that our sanctification will be complete, and we shall be like Christ. But until then, in this life we are on a journey. As Paul says it in 2 Corinthians 3, we are “being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”

But what that means is that in the here and now we aren’t finished yet. In this life we still wrestle with this sinful body and a mind that needs to be continually renewed. Paul talks about this “now and not yet” in 2 Corinthians 4:16 – 5:8…

«So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

5 For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.»
‘So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Do you feel the dissatisfaction and the longing in these words? That things are not yet complete. If you are in Christ, you have the Holy Spirit living inside of you, and in your spirit all things have been made new. But yet, we are in no way finished. We still live in a physical body which still wrestles with many of the inclinations of our former sinful life. We’re living in this time of walking by faith. And one day we will be perfected, but now, in this age, we must continue being sanctified.

And so, we wrestle. And we’re dissatisfied with our spiritual state until that day comes. And it’s in this state of dissatisfaction that we experience the greatest growth in Christ-likeness.

Paul says, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already made perfect…”

But these words of Paul’s also bring hope to his readers as well because Paul is identifying with them as a fellow Christian. He doesn’t want them to think that he is somehow superhuman or superior. He has made some pretty remarkable statements in this letter, but Paul wants us to know that he is human and traveling down the same path and subject to the same temptations and needs to daily trust in the same Jesus as you and I do. So, don’t despair. Keep on running with Paul!

And that leads us to the second exhortation that Paul gives to us in how to grow in spiritual maturity, and that’s the challenge to…

2. Passionately Pursue a Greater Knowledge of Christ. (vv. 12-14)

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

- A passionate and focused pursuit (v. 12b)

When I was a kid I used to love watching the TV show “The Dukes of Hazzard.” One of the characters was Roscoe P. Coltrain, the bumbling sheriff who was forever trying to catch those Duke boys. Well, a car chase inevitably ensued each week and one of Roscoe’s famous lines was, “I’m in hot pursuit!”

That’s what we see in this passage with Paul. He says, “I press on to make it my own.” He’s in hot pursuit of knowing Christ and growing in his love for him and in spiritual maturity. This speaks of his attitude and his resolve. He’s dead set on becoming more like Christ no matter what! That doesn’t mean he doesn’t have setbacks. He said plainly, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect.” But he is passionate and focused in his pursuit of Christ-likeness.

The secret to this is in the last part of verse 12. It says, “I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” First, we realize that we would never have the desire or will to pursue Christ unless He did His work in us first. Christ first took hold of us long before we even thought about taking hold of Him! Remember what Paul said before in 2:12-13: As we are...
working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, “it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” We are striving, yet it is God who is working behind the scenes, giving us grace to strive.

What this does is it gives us the assurance that we will, indeed, win the race. If we were just running with our own strength, we would have no hope. I’m reminded of an old song by Larnelle Harris. “Were it not for grace I can tell you where I’d be; wandering down some pointless road to nowhere with my salvation up to me. And I know how that would go, the battles I would face; forever running, but losing the race, were it not for grace.” We can run this race with a passionate and focused pursuit of Christ, assured of reaching the prize because God is at work in us, giving us the grace to do it!

- **Forgetting and straining (vv. 13-14)**

A movie came out last year called, “Paul: Apostle of Jesus Christ.” Overall it did a fairly good job of depicting Paul’s life, especially as he was in his last days in prison. But one thing they did was really interesting. The movie depicted a very human Paul who was frequently haunted by memories of his past life, as if Satan was continually trying to hinder the work of the gospel through Paul by reminding him of the days when he persecuted the church, and when he ordered the murder of Christians. You saw him frequently wrestling with these thoughts, thoughts that he would then combat with the truth of Scripture, most of which he wrote himself through the Spirit.

Folks, maybe there are those here this morning who continually wrestle with the sins of your past. Maybe they’re sins you committed long ago, that still haunt you. John Newton, the writer of the hymn “Amazing Grace,” was a slave ship captain in his earlier life. Later in life, however, all those African slaves who died because of his business haunted him in his sleep and even while he was awake. He could see their faces, and they were a constant reminder of his unworthiness and his damning sin. Yet it was this same John Newton who said later, “My memory is almost gone, but I know two things very well; that I am a great sinner, and Christ is a great Savior.”

Paul says, “Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

First, we see that Paul says, “One thing I do…” If we’ve learned anything since we began our study of Philippians it is that Paul is a “one thing” guy! His mind, his heart, his passion, are all fixed on knowing Christ and making Him known. His life’s motto is “For me to live is Christ.” This wasn’t just a fancy for Paul. It wasn’t just his “thing.” Like a favorite sports team or a coin collection. No, this was his ONE thing! The thing for which he lived and breathed! Christ had captured His heart. As some of you know, I’m a big Red Sox fan. I also like music. But when it comes to my “one thing,” I don’t want it to be baseball, or music, or anything else. I want my “one thing,” the thing that makes my heart beat, the thing that I’m most passionate about, to be Christ and becoming like Him!

But that means we need to let go of whatever holds us back from that “one thing.” Paul says, “forgetting what lies behind…” Don’t let your past hinder your present pursuit of God. Don’t let your former sins hinder you from your current pursuit to know Christ. It’s not that we ever forget where we’ve come from. We never want to forget how much Christ has forgiven us and how far
he has brought us. Such remembering fuels our gratitude for what Christ has done for us. But let us never be held back by the guilt and shame of past sins which are already under the blood of Jesus!

There’s a big different between God revealing sins that yet need to be dealt with and Satan bringing condemnation for past sins that have already been dealt with. Satan will try and trip you up; to stall your spiritual growth by reminding you of your past or even your current sins that you’re struggling with. But when that happens, remember what Martin Luther said:

“So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: “I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is there I shall be also!”

But this forgetting the past could also refer to our past achievements. Paul said in verse 7, “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.” Not only did Paul not let his past sins keep him from growing in Christ, he didn’t let his past successes do so, either.

Paul says, “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, «I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” There’s the forgetting, but then there’s also the straining forward. And it is a strain much of the time, isn’t it? It feels kind of like we’re running into a headwind sometimes.

But again, while we are called to press in and press forward, God is giving you the grace to do so. We keep our eyes on the prize, what Paul calls “the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

What is this upward call? It is the time when our sanctification is complete, and we finally gain Christ, for whose sake we have counted everything else but loss. For Paul, the greatest prize was to know Christ fully and to experience perfect fellowship with Him.

I’m reminded again of a scene from the movie “Chariots of Fire.” Eric Liddel was running a race when all of sudden, as they were rounding a turn, one of the other runners purposely bumped him, causing Liddel to tumble to the ground. Now most of us would have been done. We would have stood up, maybe shook our fist at the guy, and then helplessly watched the rest of the race from the sideline. Not Liddel. He got up, not even thinking about what happened for a second, and he took off with the finish line in view and didn’t quit until he crossed that line. And he gave it all he had! And he won the race! But he wouldn’t have done so if he hadn’t kept his eyes on the prize.

And so, it is with our spiritual journey. We may have had times when we’ve tumbled to the ground. A crushing blow. A stinging setback. And yet we don’t have to stay there. Paul exhorts us to get up, put the past behind us, and by grace press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus! And if that has to happen a million times in our life…then you get back up a million and one!

So, we’ve talked about the finish line, the upward call of God. Keeping our eyes on the prize. But what do we do in the meantime while we’re still in the midst of running the race? What do you do while you’re in the midst of growing in spiritual maturity, yet you know you haven’t arrived yet and you still have a long way to go? Paul tells us in verses 15-16. Point number 3 this morning...
3. Be faithful in the spiritual progress you have made (vv. 15-16)

Paul begins to wrap up his exhortation on spiritual maturity with some gentle and wise pastoral advice. He says in verses 15 and 16:

«Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.» Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

As we have seen, spiritually mature people don’t think they are perfect or have arrived. Those who are mature refuse to look back at spiritual attainments or be tripped up by past sins. Instead, they pour themselves into the pursuit of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.

Paul says, “and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.” In saying this, Paul wasn’t making a smug assertion that, “well, if you don’t believe me, you’ll learn it the hard way eventually.” Paul knows that we’re all in different places in our spiritual journey. Some have been on the journey for many, many years and have learned a great deal about walking with Christ. Some are newer to the faith and are still getting used to their new Christian skin, so to speak.

So, Paul was saying that if any of his brothers and sisters in Philippi had some flaws or didn’t see things the same way a more mature Christian does, God would graciously correct it. In the same way as in chapter 1, verse 6, where Paul trusted the Holy Spirit with his readers that “he who began a good work in [them] will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ,” so he trusted the Spirit of God to give to those younger in the faith the knowledge of the truth that they need to learn as well.

By the way, this is the attitude we need to have toward each other as well. Instead of getting angry with one another and bickering, we need to keep in mind that we are all in different places in our spiritual journey. We need to give each other grace and pray for one another, trusting that God will reveal to them what He needs to reveal to them in His time.

Then in verse 16, we see clearly this whole idea of sanctification being a process whereby we learn, little by little, about walking with Christ. Paul says, “Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”

Now, in today’s time, this might be misinterpreted to mean, “whatever truth you subscribe to, just be true to that.” But Paul knows no such relativistic thinking. What he’s saying is directly linked to what he just finished saying that as our sanctification progresses, God will teach them the truth they need to know. In essence, he’s saying, “in your continued progress in your walk with Christ and in your sanctification, whatever God has taught you thus far, make sure you are faithful in that.” Paul was exhorting them not to depart from the progress they have made in their pursuit of Christ. God will be faithful to reveal more to you as you can handle it and as you passionately seek it. In the meantime, however, let us hold true and be faithful, Paul says, to what we have already attained.

Next week we will look at how we hold true to what we have attained. But I would like to end our time this morning with one thing that we can do in being faithful in this, and that’s prayer. I’d like to end with a prayer from the book “The Pursuit of God” by A.W. Tozer, and I’d like it to be our prayer this morning as we close:
O God, I have tasted Thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need of further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me Thy glory, I pray Thee, that so I may know Thee indeed. Begin in mercy a new work of love within me. Say to my soul, “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.” Then give me grace to rise and follow Thee up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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Pressing On Toward the Goal - part 2
Philippians 3:17-21

17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. 18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” So begins Charles Dickens’ classic, A Tale of Two Cities, which contrasts the social and political events taking place in Paris and London during (and prior to) the French Revolution in the mid-to-late eighteenth century. But as much as the novel was about the French Revolution, the story was just as much a contrast between two types of people whose attitudes and actions led to two very different ends. The two lead women in the story function to create a contrast: Lucie is loving and nurturing while Madame Defarge is hateful and bloodthirsty. Dickens then uses this contrast to show that these two opposing walks, or ways of living, actually lead to two very different ends. For example, while Lucie’s love and nurture lead to her father’s spiritual transformation and renewal, Madame Defarge’s vengefulness and hate only generate an infinite cycle of oppression.

In another classic novel, Les Miserables, which is set in France after the French Revolution, author Victor Hugo makes the proposition to his readers that people’s attitudes and actions are a direct result of where they came from and what conditions they were brought up in.

In this passage Paul also speaks of two different groups of people who walk two contrasting paths, both of which lead to two very different destinations. We all begin our lives with a sinful nature. We were part of this sinful world and we lived our lives with a mindset that reflected our earthly home. But Paul reminds us here that when we come to Christ, we are no longer defined by our sinful, earthly past. God has given us a faithful promise that His grace is strong enough to break us out of the patterns that the past has imprinted on our minds and hearts. As Dennis Johnson writes in his commentary on Philippians, “For those who trust in Jesus Christ, who we are is no longer determined by where we have come from, but instead by where we are going.”

So then first, in verses 17-19, Paul talks about…

1. Two Groups of Guides and Two Ways of Walking (vv. 17-19)

From early in our childhood, we imitate those whom we see. It’s part of our human nature to do so. We even do so subconsciously. I challenge you to pay attention to the public’s response to certain trends or fads. A fashion trend will be set and before you know it, people are coming out in mass to buy that line of clothing. We have an innate need to fit in, to look like someone or be part of something we admire. To find our identity in following the lead of others.

And so, our society mindlessly follows each and every suggestion of the world. It’s what marketing specialists who make commercials count on. It’s the power of holding up an ideal and
then offering a product that is associated with that ideal. It's also why we buy sports team gear. Hats, t-shirts, jerseys, etc. We want to be identified with what we admire and so we imitate.

I remember it like it was yesterday. My two boys were still very young when my wife took them to see Star Wars 3 in the movie theater. I remember coming to pick them up, waiting for them to come out, when all of a sudden, the doors opened and out came my two boys, waving their arms around at each other, engaged in an imaginary light saber fight.

And while much of our imitation is fun and harmless like my boys' light saber fight, it is absolutely vital for us to become aware that we do these things and to discern what is worthy of imitation and what is not. We need to be very deliberate and purposeful in who we imitate.

This is the charge that Paul gives to his readers in verse 17. He says to them…

- **Follow faithful examples (v. 17)**

  "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us."

This exhortation is in two parts. First, Paul says to them, “Brothers, join in imitating me.” Now this may seem at first like Paul just threw all his humility out the window. As if he really does think he’s arrived and he’s the perfect model of Christ-likeness. But that’s not what he’s saying at all. This charge is attached to a context. In this case it’s referring back to everything he just said before. Specifically verses 12-14. He just got through admitting that he hasn’t arrived yet, and that he has more sanctification left, all the way up until he sees Jesus face to face. He then says, “One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” THIS is what Paul is exhorting them to imitate. Everything we talked about last Sunday, Paul says, “Now YOU follow me in having the same attitude and in doing the same thing.”

Paul is speaking as a loving father to his children here. He feels a great deal of parental care and responsibility toward them in their spiritual growth. Listen to his heart in 1 Corinthians 4:14-17:

>“I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. «For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. «I urge you, then, be imitators of me. »That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

Later in chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians, Paul says, “Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ.” Or as the NIV says it, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

But he doesn’t just hold himself up as an example. He goes on to say, “and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.”

If you recall, Timothy and Epaphroditus were singled out as two men who are faithful examples of the kind of people who embody the things Paul is teaching. But Paul undoubtedly is referring to more than just himself and Timothy and Epaphroditus. He’s telling the Philippians to keep their eyes on those in their own fellowship who are more mature in the faith, or as he says, “those who walk according to the example you have in us.” That word “walk” here in the Greek is a word picture which refers to maintaining a certain walk of life and conduct. Basically, Paul
is saying, “follow the faithful example of those who are living out what I have been teaching you.”

There’s something very powerful in following a faithful example. It’s one thing to receive instruction which is in the abstract. But it’s quite another to actually see someone living that out and to be able to follow the pattern that those who are faithful have set.

Parents, we should all take note. Your children are watching what you do and how you live. That’s why daughters will dress up like Mommy and sons will go out with their toy lawn mowers when Daddy mows the lawn and mow the lawn with him. But they will also pick up on how you respond to life, and how you obey God. Are we giving them a good example to follow?

But while Paul points out who we should imitate, he also turns around and points out the kind of people whose pattern of life we should avoid. In verses 18-19 he says to…

- **Avoid the pattern of earthly-minded people (vv. 18-19)**

“For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

First, to whom is Paul referring here? I don’t think he’s referring to the Judaizers. His feelings toward them were pretty hostile. Earlier in this letter he called them “dogs,” “evil-doers,” and “mutilators of the flesh.” Here in this passage we see a different reaction. He weeps over them. He says, “For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.” Evidently these people were at one time professing Christians, perhaps even members of the Philippian church. The intensity of Paul’s tearful grief indicates that their falling away from the faith had been a very personal loss for Paul. One can almost see the picture of Paul dictating or writing this letter with tears streaming down his face as he came to this part.

Notice again Paul’s use of the word “walk” here. Evidence that these former converts had become enemies of the cross of Christ is indicated by the way they lived their lives now. Their lifestyles showed that they rejected all that the cross stands for. Enemies of the cross don’t talk about boasting in the cross of Christ. They don’t want to have anything to do with taking up their cross or sharing in Christ’s suffering. Such things were all foolishness to them.

Paul also says that “their god is their belly,” meaning they serve their lustful appetites. Instead of living to glorify God in grateful worship, everything they do is to please self.

He goes on to say that, “they glory in their shame.” They openly show off and boast about things that they should be ashamed of. What an apt description of the mindset and attitudes of many in this world today. Today we see that things that used to be considered shameful are now being heralded in pride. And the world cheers them on as heroes who have courageously stood for what they think they really are.

Paul sums up his description of these people by saying that they are those “with minds set on earthly things.” Notice he says their minds are *set*. This is the same idea Paul was trying to teach the Philippians concerning having a passionate pursuit of Christ. He said, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Paul’s mind was *set* on the prize of Christ Jesus. But these people’s minds were set also. They were set on earthly things, and not
heavenly things. Their heart was captured by worldliness instead of Christ and His cross and resurrection.

Folks, this is exactly what you see with the prosperity gospel! They come to Scripture with an earthly, greedy mindset and make it say what they want it to say. Their minds are set on earthly things: financial prosperity, physical health, your best life NOW, and the key to worldly success.

With Paul I weep for those who have been ensnared and deceived by this hellish teaching because they aren’t being taught about the true riches that are available to them in Christ or the true prosperity of our soul when our hearts and minds are set on heavenly things, the things of Christ.

But the saddest part of all this, and what makes me weep the most, is when I think of all the hundreds of thousands of people in their congregations and who are watching them on TV, not to mention all the millions in Africa, all who are being taught to set their minds on earthly things, and I wonder to myself, “How many of those people will go through their lives only hearing this preaching on how they can have earthly riches, and end up spending an eternity in hell because they never heard the true gospel which is about heavenly riches?

And that’s what Paul talks about next. Paul draws a contrast not only between two guides and two walks, but also…

2. Two Cities and Two Destinies (vv. 19-21)

I’m joining John Bunyan here in talking about two “cities” which allegorically refer to two destinies. Which city becomes our destiny depends on where we have placed our faith in this life. First we see…

- **The city of destruction (v. 19a)**
  
  Paul says that he weeps for these people whose minds are set on earthly things, and one of the biggest reasons why, he says in verse 19, is because “their end is destruction.” Folks, there’s really no fun way to talk about this. But I’m your pastor and I MUST talk about hell, or else I will be held accountable for not telling you.

  Of all the mentions of hell in the Bible, the vast majority of them are from Jesus Himself. For instance, in Matthew 25, to those who never really knew Christ and never showed any fruit of salvation, Jesus will say, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

  Revelation 14:10-11 says that the ones who do not belong to Christ, “will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night…”

  And in 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 Paul tells of God’s righteous judgment at His second coming where those who don’t know Christ will never experience the joy of God’s presence, but rather “in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus; They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might…”
This is the inevitable end for those whose minds are set on earthly things. But those who truly belong to Christ...those who have been born anew by the Spirit of God...we have a different destiny, a heavenly city, which calls us to live our current lives according to...

- **Our heavenly citizenship (v. 20a)**

Paul says in verses 20-21:

”But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...”

Our life here on earth should be lived in light of our heavenly citizenship, but that also includes living in light of our eager expectation of Christ’s imminent return.

- **Our eager expectation (v. 20b)**

Paul says, “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...” Our life here on earth should be lived in light of our heavenly citizenship, but that also includes living in light of our eager expectation of Christ’s imminent return.

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1 John 2:28 says, “And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.” That’s exactly what Paul is saying to the Philippians. “Keep your focus passionately fixed on Christ, for we are awaiting His glorious return. If we do this, will not be ashamed when He comes.”

Notice the two titles that Paul uses for Jesus in Philippians 3:20. He says, “we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ…” He is both Savior and Lord.

First, Jesus Christ is our one and only Savior. Acts 4:12 states, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

But He is also Lord, as we saw in chapter 2 of this letter, when “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And finally, Paul tells us of…

- **Our glorious transformation (v. 21)**

  Paul says, “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

This is the glorious consummation of our salvation. In this life, God has given us His power which resides within all believers so that we are freed from the *power* of sin, and that makes us able to battle the sinful flesh. But there is coming a day when not only will we be free from *power* of sin, but even the *presence* of sin will be removed, and we will have a glorified, resurrected body, and all things will be made new!

Paul’s Magnum Opus on the resurrection is found in 1 Corinthians 15. In it he describes that because Jesus rose from the dead and was the first fruit of the new creation, we who are in Christ will also have a resurrected body like his. Paul says of that last day…

> “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

I would like to end with one of the stanzas from that great hymn by Charles Wesley, *Love Divine, All Loves Exceeding*, which perfectly sums up what we have been talking about. Verse 4 of the hymn says,

Finish, then, Thy new creation;  
Pure and spotless let us be;  
Let us see our great salvation  
Perfectly secured in Thee.  
Changed from glory into glory,  
Till in heav’n we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,  
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.
Standing Firm in Christ
Philippians 4:1-9

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

1 I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 2 Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

3 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 4 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 5 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 6 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

7 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 8 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

It’s easy to see this portion of the letter as sort of an isolated, disjointed, random portion filled with lone commands and instructions that kind of stand on their own. Chapter 4 itself is home to several coffee cup verses and Americans so often like to apply them randomly to our various needs in our lives, most of the time without regard to what Paul is really saying. But because of our tendency to see this section as just a bunch of stand-alone verses, seeing it in its proper context is all the more imperative. So, in this section and next I would like to attempt to put Humpty Dumpty back together again in an effort to see the overall picture and catch the overall message that Paul is saying here in these verses.

So, the first thing we see Paul saying in these verses is the charge to...

1. Stand firm in the Lord (v. 1)

Paul gives a charge in this first verse, he says “stand firm thus in the Lord,” or as the NIV says it, “stand firm in the Lord in this way…” In what way? Well, we remember the “therefore” at the beginning of the sentence and so he’s referring to what he described in chapter 3.

What we see, then, is that the previous section becomes the lens through which we interpret the current section. Paul just got through drawing a stark contrast between those who set their minds on earthly things, and those who, as citizens of heaven, must remember to set their minds on heavenly things.

All of the things Paul refers to from the previous chapter, and indeed, from everything he said so far in this letter, are summed up in the words “in the Lord.” Paul says, “Stand firm in the Lord.” Paul is yet again exhorting the Philippians to a focused and passionate pursuit of Christ and commitment to the gospel mission. The phrase “stand firm” has a note of military language. What we’re going to see is that something is threatening their resolve to stay passionately focused on Christ and the gospel, and Paul is calling them, exhorting them to militantly keep that focus. It’s like the battle around them is raging and the troops are at the brink of falling apart and
the commanding officer comes in and shouts, “Hold your ground! Hold your ground! Stay focused on the battle ahead!” Only in this case, Paul is saying, “Hold your ground! Hold your ground! Keep your eyes focused on Christ!

This seems to be what Paul addresses in verses 2-3 as we see right off the bat what the problem is that they’re facing. He says to them:

2. Stand firm in unity (vv. 2-3)

1I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 2Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Now right off the bat, let’s make a few observations. Paul has had to deal with lots of opposition to the gospel in his letters, and as we’ve seen, this letter is no exception. He’s dealt with the Judaizers and he’s dealt with enemies of the gospel. But what we have here are not enemies of the gospel. These two women, Euodia and Syntyche, were Christians. They were two women whose names are in the book of life.

Not much is said about these women except that they must have been prominent women in the church, perhaps even two of the founding core members of the church with Lydia and the group of women to whom Paul and Silas preached the gospel by the riverside when they first came to Philippi. I say they must have been prominent members because the disagreement they were having was threatening the unity of the whole church in Philippi and thus their partnership in the gospel. This isn’t the first time Paul has mentioned unity and standing firm. It must have been a major issue in this church because when we look back over everything that has been said thus far, this whole issue of unity and Paul calling them to keep their focus on Christ seems to be one of the main reasons for writing this letter.

If you recall back in the beginning of chapter 2, Paul said, “make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Paul says I entreat these two women to agree “in the Lord.” The significance of the phrase “in the Lord” should not be missed because it comes to bear on everything here. Euodia and Syntyche were “in the Lord” and so they had to remember that their lives were not their own, but the Lord’s. The fact is, they followed Jesus Christ who never insisted on His own way. He did nothing from selfishness. He did nothing for His own personal interests. If Jesus insisted on His own way there would be no cross, there would be no forgiveness, there would be no hope for salvation.

We’re reminded of chapter 1, verse 27. Paul said, “Just one thing: As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together for the faith of the gospel.”

Paul was pointing out that there is no division or disunity in heaven. So, to have division and disunity here in the church is completely incompatible with our heavenly citizenship. Those of
you here who are military men and women will know the necessity of the closing of the ranks, that everyone be together and focused on the goal ahead. If soldiers are contending with each other, they cannot effectively contend with the enemy.

And that’s exactly what he’s saying here. Euodia and Syntyche knew what it was to contend for the faith of the gospel. Paul said in verse 3 that they “labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers.” But their contention with each other was now superseding their focus on the gospel. And so he’s saying to these two women, “Since you are citizens of heaven, remember that we’re together on mission for the gospel here, ladies! Stop bickering and arguing. In humble deference to one another, keep your eyes focused on Christ! Stand firm in one spirit, in one accord. Remember we are contending together for the faith of the gospel!”

And that is the lens through which we should look at the rest of this passage as well. In the remaining verses, verses 4-9, Paul moves from addressing these two women specifically to giving instructions to the whole church in general which will help them stand firm through times of anxiety and avoid the dangers of disunity. A church cannot stand firm in the Lord while tolerating division and disharmony. And so, he gives very specific instructions on how to battle this internal enemy that is causing their attention to be diverted away from a focused and passionate pursuit of Christ. In essence, what we have in verses 4-9, then, is Paul’s instructions on how to be a healthy church, something that all churches would do well to pay attention to. And the main thrust of all these instructions that follow is, point number three…

3. Stand firm in focus (vv. 4-9)

As we said, we aren’t told what exactly the two women were disagreeing about. But we do know that the church was almost certainly going through a measure of persecution, or at least, facing the continual threat of persecution. Certainly, they all would have been faced with circumstances and decisions that would affect the comfort and stability of their lives. Persecution could bring financial hardship, social rejection, violent resistance, and friction in their relationships.

It’s very common when life becomes unstable for anxiety to grow and tensions to be high. One of the most common causes of arguments and tension in marriage is money issues. When circumstances cause life to be unstable, often times we take it out on each other.

Paul knew that the solution was for them to stand firm in the Lord, and what we find is that each one of these areas that Paul addresses has one common theme: the call to turn away from earthly worries and to focus on Christ and being Christ-like.

- Remember to find your joy in the Lord (v. 4)

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

Paul goes right to the heart of the issue right off the bat. He reminds them once again…find your joy in the Lord! Paul has already given this command in chapter 3, verse 1. But the way he words it here is like he’s emphasizing this point hard. He repeats it in the same verse and adds the word “always.” It’s like he’s saying, “I can’t emphasize this enough! Remember…don’t forget! ALWAYS find your joy in the Lord, no matter the circumstance!” He’s bringing their attention back to Christ. We as Christians need to rejoice in the Lord purposefully and consciously, because our joy is rooted in the faithfulness of the Lord who will never leave us or
forsake us. One thing is for sure, two people who are rejoicing in the Lord won’t be arguing with each other. And so, we are to rejoice in Him at all times and in all circumstances.

Habakkuk prophesied in a time of Judah’s history when circumstances were as bleak as they could be. And yet he found his joy in the faithfulness of the Lord and his prophecy closes with this song even in the midst of the most adverse circumstances:

Though the fig tree should not blossom,  
    nor fruit be on the vines,  
the produce of the olive fail  
    and the fields yield no food,  
the flock be cut off from the fold  
    and there be no herd in the stalls,  
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;  
    I will take joy in the God of my salvation. (Habakkuk 3:17-18)

It has everything to do with what we value. Where we find our joy. Author Tim Keller makes this statement about rejoicing:

“'Rejoicing’ in the Bible is much deeper than simply being happy about something…To rejoice is to treasure a thing, to assess its value to you, to reflect on its beauty and importance until your heart rests in it and tastes the sweetness of it. ‘Rejoicing’ is a way of praising God until the heart is sweetened and rested, and until it relaxes its grip on anything else it thinks it needs.”

- Respond with gentleness and patience (v. 5)

'Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;'

The word “reasonableness” here means “gentleness” or even “graciousness” or “forbearance.” The term refers to the calm and kind disposition that enables a person to offer a non-violent, even generous, response to someone else’s aggression. It is the willingness to forgo one’s rights according to the letter of the law. In Titus 3:3, Paul uses this word to teach that elders must not be quarrelsome, but gentle. Basically, Paul is calling them to a Christ-like response to one another, reminding them once again that Christ is the perfect example of this type of attitude.

He says to let this attitude “be known to everyone.” Again, Paul reminds them that the world is watching how we live and how we respond to one another. Our lives are different. We are citizens of heaven. Our lives should reflect our citizenship.

In the same way Paul pointed to the coming of the Lord as a reason to live as citizens of heaven at the end of chapter 3, likewise he adds here, “The Lord is at hand.”

- Replace worry with prayer (vv. 6-7)

'do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 'And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'

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Here Paul gives the Philippians a reminder that in times of great anxiety, we need to take our circumstances to God. Notice the contrasting words “anything” and “everything.” He says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything…pray!”

As I mentioned, the Philippians were facing serious persecution for their faith. They undoubtedly had much anxiety due to their circumstances, and such anxiety, as we saw, was threatening the unity of the entire church. But Paul is saying, “No! Even when you’re facing what seems to be the worst of circumstances…no food on the table…threats of violence against you…estrangement from society…DON’T BE ANXIOUS! Take your concerns to God!”

Now I know what many of you will say… “That’s easier said than done.” But I think it’s interesting that Paul said this in some of the worst of circumstances that we could face. But we must remember that whatever God commands us to do, He also gives the grace to do it!

But folks…when we take things to God in prayer…and I mean TRULY take it to Him and LEAVE it with Him…we experience what Paul says in verse 7: And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

I have a question for you: Between you and God, who is able to take care of your circumstances? Who really has the power to do something about it? So then why do we insist on holding on to it and worrying when God is the one who alone has the power to help?

We have this promise right here to hold on to and to trust in. Paul is echoing the promise we have from Jesus from Matthew 6:

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

It’s not that we’re not allowed to feel anything. The issue is whether or not we will allow God’s truth to govern our feelings and actions. The command to do not be anxious is a call to trust God rather than sit there in unbelief, fretting and fearing the fact that things are out of your hands.

When we give in to worry, we are refusing to believe the promises of God in His Word. We’re basically telling God, I don’t really think You can or will handle my problems. Worry really is, then, an issue of trust and confidence in God’s ability and character.

Notice also that “thanksgiving” is to be included with our requests. Gratitude keeps our prayers from going sour with complaint or degenerating into a list of self-centered demands. Thanksgiving is the natural response to a generous gift which has been freely given.

What Paul is doing is re-focusing their attention back to Christ and the cross. Folks, no matter what we face here in this temporal life…no matter whether God gives us anything else that we ask for in this life…He has already given us infinitely more than we ever deserved when Jesus died for us on that cross! If you ever get to the place where you don’t know what to be thankful for, or if the circumstances of this life overwhelm you to the point where you can’t see anything God has done for you, just turn your focus back to the gospel. God doesn’t owe us anything, and yet He gave us everything! We deserved hell, and yet He graciously gave us heaven. You think you’re having a hard life now, just think of what an eternity in hell would be like.

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Folks…we ALWAYS have reason to be thankful to God!

But this leads us right into Paul’s next exhortation from verse 8…

- **Renew your mind with Godward thinking (v. 8)**

> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

When we’re going through a crisis, it’s easy to get fixated on our problems and not be able to think of anything else. Paul knows that the thoughts that occupy our minds and the images that capture our imaginations shape our characters and find expression in our behavior. So Paul calls on his readers to let our minds dwell on qualities that reflect the goodness and perfections of God.

But we must understand, Paul isn’t just saying here, “Think good thoughts.” He’s not saying anything about the “power of positive thinking” that you hear so much about in today’s new age and popular culture. The way that God has ordered things is that our thinking is supposed to be informed and shaped and governed by His Word, by what He has revealed about Himself and His purposes and will, so that in a very real sense we think God’s thoughts after Him. Then, it is our right thinking that is to inform our will and our feelings. So then as I learn to think correctly it is then that I bring my doing and feeling in line with God’s truth.

The problem today is, by and large, evangelical Christians don’t think. We largely go about our way controlled by our emotions and then we wonder why we’re an emotional wreck half the time. It’s because we’re not letting right thinking inform our feelings.

This is why, when we come here on Sunday mornings, we are careful to choose songs in worship that inform our minds of the truth of God’s Word because only then will our emotions rightly follow. We sing songs like, “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation. O my soul praise Him for He is thy health and salvation,” and later it says, “Ponder anew what the Almighty can do.” And we sing songs like, “When darkness seems to hide His face, I rest on His unchanging grace. In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil.” Well see now you have something rock solid to anchor your feelings on. And no matter what stormy gale you face in this life, your emotions and your will are grounded on the rock-solid truth of Christ!

That’s why Paul begins this list with “whatever is true.” Because this is first and foremost. And when we see the rest of the list: whatever is honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise – all these things have to be understood according to God’s standard, according to His truth!

Paul says, “think about these things.” The phrase “think about” refers to “taking into account” or assessing that which deserves approval according to God’s standard and then letting your mind dwell on it.

Finally, Paul moves from thinking to putting it into practice. We’re told in verse 9 to…

- **Replicate Paul’s pattern of life (v. 9)**

> What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.
Here we see the life-changing power of the gospel. “What you have learned and received” sums up the message that Paul and Silas brought to Philippi. It is the good news of Jesus Christ, and its subject is Christ Himself. Jesus Christ and His mission in the gospel were what Paul’s heart was fixed upon.

What they had “heard and seen” in Paul was the fruit of God’s grace in Christ-likeness. Again, not that he had already attained perfection, but Paul was a model for them of one whose heart was in pursuit of Christ-likeness.

But we also can’t discount Paul’s suffering and how he lives for Christ even in the midst of that suffering, and how this also was a model for the Philippians to imitate. They had seen how he suffered for the gospel when he was with them in Philippi, and now they have heard of how he was still suffering for the gospel, this time in prison. Yet he continued to live as a citizen of heaven, not getting bogged down with the cares of this world but keeping his focus forever and always on the things that are eternal, on Christ and the mission of the gospel.

I’d like to conclude by drawing your attention to the repeated mention of peace in these passages. The world seeks for peace through peace talks, meditation, medication, alcohol, and entertainment. But it is only through standing firm in Christ that we have true peace. As the hymn goes, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand.” Peace with God, peace with each other, and peace within our own hearts. It’s the “peace that surpasses all understanding” when we trust in Christ with our lives. For those of us who already know Christ, these verses call us to do something. To put these things into practice. That’s how you will have peace. The only question is, will you do it, or will you leave here and just go about your week like normal, not even giving it another thought? The grace of God is there to help you apply these things in your lives.
Gospel-Centered Giving and Receiving
Philippians 4:10-23

10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. 11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

14 Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 15 And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. 16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. 18 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. 19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

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

As we come to this final section of our study in Philippians, we encounter at least two more coffee-cup verses before we’re done. And so, I continue my quest to locate these verses and interpret them within the proper context in which they are found. And the context in which we find today’s passage happens to be that of giving and receiving.

The subject of giving and receiving is one of the touchiest subjects to talk about in church. You’d be hard-pressed to find anyone in America, and indeed the West, that doesn’t feel quite a bit of angst when preachers start talking about giving and receiving. That’s because we all feel the disgust in greedy television preachers whose main scheme is to bilk you out of your hard-earned money so that they can make the payments on their fancy car, their vacation mansion in Palm Springs, and their private jet.

I’ve heard them say that the Bible teaches that if you give a seed faith offering to them, God will be obligated then to multiply your gift back to you several-fold. I’ve also personally heard so-called ministers give “prophetic words” to people saying that God told them that the person should give such and such amount of money to their ministry.

Unfortunately, this is the lens through which we automatically see the subject of giving and receiving in the church. I say ‘unfortunately’ because the subject is truly in the Bible and a faithful pastor who is serious about the exposition of the Scriptures must talk about it when it comes up. Such is the situation that I find myself in now.
I’m not coming to you with any agenda to try to get you to give more. But I know that money is a very personal thing. It’s something that we keep private, and we don’t like talking about it. It’s the fruit of our hard labor, day in and day out. We need money in order to pay the bills and to feed our families, and so we spend the better part of our days at work trying to earn money in order to make a living. And for that reason, it is something that is very precious to us. And that is why it is also a matter of worship. Because it is so personal, so precious to us, what we do with our money truly does reveal where our hearts are. We will always put our outward treasure wherever our inward treasure lies. That was true for the Philippians, and it is still true for us today. And that is where my concern for you comes in, and what the main concern of this message is.

What we need to keep in mind as we cover this section is that the lens through which we need to see these verses is not the lens of personal gain, but rather the lens of partnership in the gospel. The mission of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ in order to see people saved. That was Paul’s concern…and that is my concern as well.

1. Grace-filled contentment (vv. 10-13)

By way of reminder, during the writing of this letter Paul was in prison in Rome for the preaching of the gospel. And as I pointed out before, being in a Roman prison isn’t the same as being in a prison here where your food and clothing and everything is paid for by taxpayer dollars. If you needed food, or warm clothes for the cold nights, or if you needed anything else for your personal well-being, it had to be provided from the outside. From a family member or friends who bring you those things or bring you money to afford those things. This is the background for this section, and the reason behind Paul’s joyful response in verse 10 where we see that…

- Paul praises God for the Philippians’ generosity (v. 10)

* I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.

It says Paul rejoiced in the Lord greatly! The reason for this explosion of joy is because of the Philippians’ renewed support for him. If you recall, the Philippian believers had been supporting Paul in their partnership in the gospel. Paul was the missionary, and the Philippians would often give him financial support in order to provide for his needs in accomplishing the mission of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sort of like how we support our missionaries today.

Well, it sounds like it had been a while since Paul had received any support from them. But Paul recognized that it wasn’t that the Philippians didn’t care about him anymore, but that they “had no opportunity.”

It could very well be the case that the Philippian church had to take quite a bit of time to even get enough support together to send to Paul. We get a hint of their circumstances from 2 Corinthians 8:1-5:

* We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the
favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—"and this, not as we expected, but they gave
themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

Paul describes the Philippians’ circumstances as being “a severe test of affliction” and “extreme
poverty.” And yet…they had “abundance of joy” which “overflowed in a wealth of generosity”
in which they gave “beyond their means.” And all this was “of their own accord,” that is,
willingly and joyfully.

It may have been that they were still in this condition and wanted to send Paul some financial
support sooner, but just couldn’t. Paul was human, and he certainly felt hunger and discomfort. It
may have been a while since he had eaten anything substantial. He had been locked in his cell,
hearing about others who were preaching Christ and intending to add to his afflictions. He was
longing to hear about his churches, waiting day after day to hear even a word of how they were
doing. And then Epaphroditus showed up one day with word from Philippi and a generous
financial gift and maybe some warm clothes! And it says Paul rejoiced “in the Lord.” I imagine
everyone within earshot knew of Paul’s joy that day!

But as thankful as he most certainly was to have the financial gift so that his personal needs
could be met, we must be careful to notice in this section that it wasn’t his physical needs he was
most concerned about. That’s because Paul had learned that…

- **Contentment is not dependent upon our circumstances (vv. 11-12)**

“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to
be content. “I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every
circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

It’s interesting to look back over what Paul had been through in his missionary journeys. Paul
had certainly known what it meant to be humiliated and suffer hunger and need.

In 2 Corinthians 11:24-27, Paul says, ““Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty
lashes less one. “Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was
shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; “on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers,
danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city,
danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; “in toil and hardship,
through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.”

But Paul surely would have enjoyed times of “plenty” and “abundance” as well. In Philippi
where this church was birthed, Paul may have enjoyed feasts in the home of Lydia, a prosperous
seller of purple textiles, and perhaps even in the home of the Philippian jailer. And certainly,
there would have been times in Ephesus and Corinth when those who were more well off in his
churches provided for him abundantly.

In many respects, though, it may have been even more of an accomplishment to be content in
plenty than in need. As John Calvin explained:

“‘He who knows how to use present abundance soberly and temperately with thanksgiving,
prepared to part with everything whenever it may please the Lord, giving also a share to his
brother according to his ability, and is also not puffed up, that man has learned to excel and to abound. This is an excellent and rare virtue, and much greater than the endurance of poverty.”

But notice he says, “I have learned…” Paul had learned in whatever situation he was to be content. And that means that God had a divine purpose for ordaining the things that Paul went through. God could have saved Paul from the anguish and suffering that he went through, but then Paul would have been shortchanged out of a learning experience which shaped not only his character and attitude, but also bolstered his trust in God’s faithfulness and gave him all the more reason for gratitude and rejoicing. And he came out on the other side with a passion that was focused like a laser beam on one thing: knowing Christ and making Him known.

Paul said, “I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.” What is that “secret” he spoke about? Well, before we see what that secret is, it’s interesting that one of the things the Philippians would have surely recognized right away when Paul said these things about the secret of contentment is the similarity of such language to that of the Stoics of their day.

The Stoics regarded contentment as the essence of all virtues. For them contentment described the mind-set of the person who had become independent of all things and all people. The stoic line was, “man should be sufficient unto himself for all things, and able, by the power of his will, to resist the force of circumstances.” Seneca put it this way: “The happy man is content with his present lot, no matter what it is, and is reconciled to his circumstances.”

So, what’s the difference between what the Stoics stood for and what Paul was teaching here in this passage? What is that “secret” he spoke about? The difference lies squarely in the source of sufficiency in each one’s ability to find contentment. The Stoics located their sufficiency in themselves and their own ability and the power of their own will. Their ideal was a kind of self-contained superman who could rise above it all in independent self-sufficiency and serenity. And that would mean that they would be forever chasing something that they could never fully attain because contentment is first and foremost a spiritual issue, not primarily an issue of the will. The secret to Paul’s contentment, however, was rooted in the power and grace of God through Jesus Christ. What Paul had was a…

- **Christ-centered sufficiency in all circumstances** (v. 13)

“I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. «I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

This is, without a doubt…not even close…both the most quoted Bible verse in the history of, well, history, as well as the verse that is most frequently used out of context. The pictures are endless. You have the weight lifter dude with this verse pasted on the ceiling above his bench press. You have the athlete who keeps this verse pasted in his locker and quotes this verse right before going into the big game. You have the student who quotes this verse as he gets ready to take a big test. And…my personal favorite…the man standing at the edge of a cliff who backs up

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10 Quoted from Hughes, 187-188.
11 Ibid., 185.
to get a running start, holds his arms out like wings, and then runs full steam ahead off the cliff while shouting, “I can do all thisiiiinnngs.”

What we see instead, when we put this verse safely back into the context from whence it came, is that Paul is speaking about the grace that God supplies in the midst of both trials and triumphs, both hunger and feasting, that helps us find our contentment in Christ and to not be swayed by our circumstances. I like how the updated NIV renders the verse, “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” Or, even better, as the Good New Translation says it, “I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me.”

It is here, in this verse, that we find the secret to Paul’s contentment, and ours. It isn’t strength of will, it isn’t anything that can be found in ourselves. It is the strength that comes from Christ alone. But this forces us to see and acknowledge two very important things here: First, the context is a life being lived for the gospel. Jesus doesn’t promise strength just to live our lives however we want to live them, but only as we live our life for His glory. It may be that an athlete could quote this verse before a big game. But what it will mean for him, in context, is not necessarily that God will give him the physical strength to win the game, but rather that, win or lose, he will be content simply in knowing Christ. And, in so doing, he will glorify God with His life. And that’s the second thing it means: If we, in our obedience to Him and the cause of the gospel, suffer hardship or persecution…or, if God so chooses to bless us materially and ordain that we live in a place that has relative ease for Christians…we will have the grace to bring glory to Him in the midst of whatever circumstance we find ourselves in. He will supply the grace, and we will find that the surpassing worth of knowing Christ is sufficient.

Moving on, we see that Paul moves from speaking about contentment back to talking about giving. But specifically, we see that he’s talking about…

2. Gospel-centered giving (vv. 14-20)

One thing that’s very important to see in this section is the relationship between…

- Financial support and gospel partnership (vv. 14-16)

>“Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. “And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. “Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.

As I said before, it may have been that the Philippians were still facing extreme poverty themselves and who knows what other conditions, and wanted to send Paul some financial support sooner, but just couldn’t. And yet they finally did. You can see so clearly their generosity and joy in giving to Paul. The mission of the gospel was foremost to them, and their love for Paul motivated them to give even beyond their means.

But what Paul is lauding here is not just their generous giving, but what that giving represents. It represents this church’s genuineness and authenticity in their partnership in the gospel. In other words, the Philippians literally put their money where their mouth was. It’s one thing for a congregation to talk about their commitment to the gospel, it’s quite another for them to actually show that commitment by their time, talents, and treasures.
This was Paul’s heart as well. He wanted them to know that his joy wasn’t in their cash, but in their concern for the gospel. That’s basically what he’s saying in verse 17 when he talks about…

- **The reward of gospel-fruitfulness (v. 17)**

> “Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

Paul begins, “Not that I seek the gift…” Would that the TV preachers would have Paul’s attitude. Again, he wants the Philippians to know that his joy in their giving isn’t because he wants their money. That’s not his motive. He says, rather, “I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.”

But what is the “fruit that increases to your credit” that Paul was talking about? There’s something about investing our money in the good soil of a true gospel ministry that brings eternal returns. I think we get an idea of what he meant from a song that came out many years ago by Ray Boltz that depicted a dream of a man who went to heaven and, one by one, he was greeted by people who were there because of the generosity he had shown in his life for the mission of the gospel.

Then another man stood before you, and said remember the time
A missionary came to your church, His pictures made you cry
You didn't have much money, but you gave it anyway
Jesus took the gift you gave and that's why I'm here today

Thank you for giving to the Lord
I am a life that was changed
Thank you for giving to the Lord
I am so glad you gave

One by one they came, as far as the eye could see
Each one somehow touched by your generosity
Little things that you had done, sacrifices made
Unnoticed on the earth, in heaven now proclaimed
And I know up in heaven you're not supposed to cry
But I was almost sure there were tears in your eyes
As Jesus took your hand and you stood before the Lord
And He said my child look around you, for great is your reward

I believe that is the “fruit that increases to your credit” that Paul was talking about. Our reward won’t be the corruptible things of this earth that will all one day pass away, but rather the souls that have been saved and transformed by your partnership in the gospel.

Paul goes on to talk about…

- **Sacrificial giving: An offering of worship (v. 18)**

> “I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.”

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The picture here of a “fragrant offering” is from the Old Testament burnt offering in which the priest was to prepare the animal precisely according to God’s instructions and then the offering was consumed by fire so that a fragrant aroma rose up to God as an acceptable and pleasing sacrifice. But as God made very clear in several places in the Old Testament, He isn’t impressed by people just going through the motions of the sacrifice. What really pleases God was not the aroma of the burnt offering, but the joyful, obedient heart and generous spirit of the people who offered the sacrifice.

And that should describe our giving as well. We shouldn’t give begrudgingly or simply out of duty. What you find in the New Testament is the call to joyful and generous giving as an act of worship which flows out of the abundance of how much we value God.

Here in verse 18, the words “acceptable and pleasing” emphasize that the Philippians’ sacrificial generosity to Paul and the gospel mission was really an offering of pure worship to God Himself.

But we shouldn’t forget, though. Their offering was, indeed, sacrificial. They were facing “a severe test of affliction” and “extreme poverty.” I’m sure they had to prioritize their giving with other things, cutting back in certain areas so that they could give to the work of the gospel. And so, Paul encourages them and gives them something sure to hold on to as he tells them about…

- **The promise of God’s provision (vv. 19-20)**

  “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

This, the last of our coffee cup verses which are so often taken out of context, might actually be the sweetest of them all. Because here God condescends to our frailty while encouraging our faithfulness by giving us a promise from the endless storehouse of His riches. Just as God used the Philippians to make sure that Paul was “well supplied,” so God will most certainly “supply every need” of theirs as well. Thus, we see that this promise of God’s supply is for those who are truly generous in their partnership in the gospel.

What must be noted here is that the Philippians had already sacrificially given before they received this promise. In other words, they weren’t giving in order to get. They gave purely, with the gospel and their love for Paul in mind.

This was intensely personal for Paul. He had seen God supply his needs time and time and time again. And now, he was assuring them that his God, the same God that faithfully provided all his needs, was their God, too, and would faithfully provide for their needs as well.

Basically, what this promise says is, we can be free to give generously to the gospel mission without fear that doing so will leave us impoverished. But we can give with full confidence that God will take care of us and make sure our needs are met.

3. **Final Greetings (vv. 21-23)**

  “Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

All the saints…especially those of Caesar’s household.
God used Paul’s suffering and persecution to bring about the salvation even of those in Caesar’s household. If Philippians is about nothing else, it is about the sovereign grace of God and how that grace enables us to live on mission for Christ and the gospel. Paul knew that even in our suffering, our sovereign and gracious God brings about His good purposes for the gospel and for His glory. And in that we can be confident and content. Confident in giving our time, talents, and yes, even our treasure for the advancement of His kingdom. And content knowing that Christ is our portion and strength, and that God will supply all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.
Bibliography


