

Philippians 1:1-11: A Prayer for Paul's Partners

Introduction

Partnership is the theme of the opening paragraphs of Paul's letter to the Philippians. As he offers his thanksgiving to God and his prayer for the people of this church, he tells us about what it means to be *partners* in the gospel.

1) What does the word "partnership" mean to you? [discuss]

Observation

The outline of the first 11 verses is very simple:

Greeting, v1-2

Thanksgiving, v3-8 (Philippian's partnership w/Paul)

Prayer, v9-11 (Paul's partnership w/Philippians)

Greeting, v1-2

1) Characteristic of Paul's letters, 2) Not writing alone (w/Tim), 3) Addressed to *all* the saints in Philippi, not just the leaders, 4) familiar phrase "Grace to you and peace"

Grace to you and peace. Every single one of Paul's letters includes this greeting, or some slight variation on it. Did you ever wonder why? It was a neat variation on the standard opening for any letter from one individual to another, kind of like our "Dear Somebody," That normal opening was the word which translates as "Greetings." We still use it today. It is the word *cherein*, which translates literally as favor, and means "favor from me to you," "best wishes," or "blessings on you." That sort of thing.

Paul's variation on it is to use a word related to *greetings*, the word *charis*. Rather than favor from me to you, it is favor from God to you! In other words, it's not his favor he's passing along, but God's. An infinitely more meaningful and powerful greeting!

Thanksgiving, v3-8

Paul tells the Philippians how much they mean to him. First, whenever he thinks of them he thanks God for them (v3). Second, *every time* he thanks God for them he does so with joy (v4). And then he tells them why in v5. Why does Paul thank God for the Philippians? [for their participation (NASB), fellowship (KJV), partnership (NIV)]

The word translated "participation" is *koinonia*, a very familiar word to us, and the word which defines the fellowship between Christians. It is a joint participation, an intimate sharing in common interests and common standing. Although NAS likes participate, I think partnership gets closer to that shared bond, so I'm going to use partnership.

All partnerships are based on something held in common. What is it in this case (v5)? They are Paul's partners in the gospel. How did the Philippians demonstrate their partnership in the gospel (v7b)? [imprisonment, defense and confirmation of the gospel]

Imprisonment. They have shared in his imprisonment either literally or figuratively. If literally then they themselves have done jail time for the faith, just like Paul. That may well be true, but I don't think that is what Paul is getting at here. I think the figurative sense is more accurate. That the Philippians so stood by Paul in his imprisonment, coming to his aid, treating his imprisonment as their own, that it is as if they were with him in jail.

Defense and confirmation of the gospel. The Philippians shared not only in his chains but also in his defense and confirmation of the gospel. Again, this could well carry the literal meaning of being out there preaching and defending the faith, and that is a command repeated so often that none can dispute it. But I think Paul is referring more to the figurative sense again. That when Paul is out there on the front lines defending and confirming the gospel, the Philippians are sharing with him in it. It is as if they are with him as he preaches the gospel, even though they are separated by vast distances.

The Philippians demonstrated their partnership tangibly. Paul didn't have to take claims of Philippian support on faith - he knew it by sight: Look at 2:25 [esp. last phrase]. They sent Epaphroditus to minister to Paul's need. Sending Epaph. was quite a lot, but even that was not all, look at 4:14, 18. They sent a gift of money for Paul's needs. In a world where there was no social safety net, no credit cards, where "earning your living" meant exactly that, these were sacrificial gifts that truly reduced the Philippians' means.

How would we feel about sending Gary away to minister elsewhere for an indefinite period of time? Or one of the Elders? They truly gave of themselves in partnership with Paul! Paul's deep love (v7) and longing for them (v8) grew out of such sacrifices.

- Would their partnership exist without these things?
- What encourages the sense of partnership between Christians?
- Contrast simply praying for others (always good and right to do) with 1) praying for them, 2) letting them know it, and 3) sharing sacrificially to meet their needs!
- How can we share so that our partnership is more tangible to our partners?

Prayer, v9-11

And finally, Paul turns to his own partnership with the Philippians as he offers a written prayer for them. Before we look at what he prays, take note of this. Paul is praying out of thankfulness and joy here. There is no crisis that prompts his stopping to remember the Philippians. How often do we pray for other Christians merely out of joy? With no crisis or specific need brought up in a prayer request?

Paul sounds supremely confident, doesn't he? That confidence is based on something more concrete even than the Philippian's partnership. Look at v6 again. [read] Think about what Paul is saying here. Paul says that 1) God began a good work in you 2) That he will perfect or complete it. 3) And that he will go on perfecting it until Christ comes to us or we go to him. Nothing in this world or in heaven or in hell is going to prevent the perfection of the good work God has begun in you and in me!

That should be a truth that grabs hold of you every single day, especially recognizing what the good work is that Paul is talking about! Look at Romans 8:28-29. What is that good work (see the end of v29)? [transformed to his image] Or what about Col. 3:10 [renewed according to his image – literally *renovated!*] The good work is that God is making us more and more like his Son!

Whether you get pumped externally or not, it should pump you up *internally* to know that God began transforming you when you were saved and he continues to transform you. It is a work that is being perfected –not a static, one-time work - but an ongoing process. How long will it go on (v6, end)? Until “the day of Christ Jesus,” which is to say until he comes to us or we go to him. But as long as it takes, the work of transforming you from you to Christ *will* be completed.

What difference should that truth make to you?

Is there any place for lack of confidence? [self, sure. Ultimately, no way]

How can Paul know that such a thing is true? His confidence is not based on the Philippians and how good they are and how loving and participative, even though all those things are true. His confidence is based on 3 things:

1) God’s nature and power. If he has begun a work, who can turn him aside? 2) The nature of God’s grace. His work is based on his grace. If he stopped his work, he would have to withdraw his grace. If grace ever stopped being grace, it never would have been grace at all, just temporary favor! 3) He can see the results of God’s good work in the Philippians by their partnership in the gospel.

Paul’s confidence results in an overflowing heart even as he writes. It is summed up in this deep request for them in v9-11. He prays that their:

Love abounds in real knowledge and all discernment (v9)

so that

They approve what is right (v10a)

in order

To be sincere and blameless until the day (V10b)

by being

Filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ

To the ultimate goal of God’s glory and praise (v11b)

Love is the starting point, but the goal of Paul’s prayer is that the Philippian’s very lives would result in God’s glory and praise. Paul doesn’t merely pray for love here, he prays for the heart *and* the head, for love which overflows in discernment. How can we approve (and the implied *do*) what is right if we don’t know right from wrong? This whole chain requires both love *and* knowledge.

The reason is found in 1 Cor. 8:1 (knowledge makes arrogant (puffs up), but love edifies). Love keeps knowledge from “puffing up,” from empty, arrogant, head knowledge. Discernment prevents love from degrading to mushy, fuzzy-headed acceptance of anything & everything in the name of love. Both are critical!

There is rhyme and reason to every link of this chain. Sincere and blameless (v10) is not within our grasp, but God expects it of us (“Be holy, as I am holy.” The good news is that it isn’t our righteousness but Christ’s (v11) I would certainly be lost otherwise! Praise God for his provision!

1. Christian partnership is based on the good work God is perfecting in every believer to transform him into the image of his son.
2. Christian partnership is a *sharing*. It shares in the gospel, in difficulties, and sacrificially.
3. Christian partnership holds one another up in prayer that is not driven merely by crisis but by ongoing love and concern and desire for the believer’s best and God’s glory.

In other words, Christian partnership acts. God wants each of us to be active in Christian partnership. Where would he have you to act?

Philippians 1:12-26: Joy in the Jailhouse

Review

Last week we opened this study of Philippians by talking about the partnership Paul enjoyed with these people. This partnership was based on the gospel (v5) and was made tangible to Paul by the Philippians sacrificial sharing of themselves in his imprisonment and in his preaching of the gospel (v7). Paul’s partnership was made tangible to the Philippians in his leadership, especially shown by his love and prayers for them (v9-11). Finally, this partnership grew out of the good work God has begun and will perfect in every believer, the work of transforming us into Christ’s image (v6).

Introduction

Last week’s study was focused on the theme of “partnership.” Our word for this week is “circumstances.” Circumstances are defined as “conditions or influences surrounding and affecting us; or a set of events or occurrences.” We are all in different circumstances, and our circumstances change over time, perhaps quite frequently or quite dramatically. They are very personal – there is little chance that I would sum up your circumstances the same way you would, or that I could truly understand whatever it is you are going through in your circumstances. Things may look just fine on the outside but to you be black as night.

As you sit here this morning listening to me drone on, envision your circumstances. What are the things that define your condition in life these days? Your circumstances encompass all of your life – family, job, spiritual life, friends, home, health, everything. How important are these things to you? How much bearing do they have on your day-to-day outlook? Safe to say, they are critical to our outlook. Most all of us are driven by our circumstances.

Paul no less so. The wonderful thing about Paul, and perhaps about any truly godly man or woman, is that we see how he uses his circumstances rather than they using him. He turns them to best advantage, finding reason to rejoice where most would find despair.

As we look at v12-26 of Philippians we are going to see what flows out of Paul's circumstances. We are going to see three things: Paul's Rejoicing, Paul's Realization, and Paul's Resolve.

Paul's Rejoicing – v12-20

Read v12-13. Paul's circumstances are not good! He is in prison in Rome. Roman prisons ranged from the worst you can imagine to a relatively upscale house arrest. Except that in house arrest you were still chained to a soldier night and day (no electronic sensors to tell if you'd skipped out), and you were required to foot the bill for your expenses and those of the men guarding you! While Paul was not free to move among the synagogues and people, house arrest gave Paul much freedom in receiving visitors. Let's look at Acts 28:16, 30-31.

Certainly better than a stinking dungeon, but not without its problems, especially being chained to someone 24 hours a day for 2 years. How much privacy would Paul have had? How much exercise could he take? Maybe some of the guards were cruel and offensive. Did he ever get any fresh air?

Turn back to Philippians. How does Paul feel about his imprisonment? (v18) He rejoices! Why? Has his case been settled? Are all the charges dropped? Is he to be a free man? No, it's in v12 - his circumstances, prison, have "turned out for the greater progress of the gospel"! Here is a man with a set of priorities most of us could only admire from afar. No complaints from Paul regarding his jail term, only joy that the gospel is spreading faster because of them.

Now think about that! Who would expect that throwing God's man into prison, limiting greatly his movement among the churches, would cause the gospel to spread? Yet spread it does. How?

It is both an inside job and an outside job. The inside job is seen in v13. Paul says his imprisonment for Christ is known throughout the whole Praetorian guard. Who do you suppose told them he was in jail for Christ? Picture the guard's lives. In shifts, they were with Paul night and day. They were there when Paul ate, when he slept. They would have heard the gospel as Paul taught and preached to those who visited him in prison. They were there when he prayed, when he dictated his letters. Finally, there would have been personal conversations as Paul certainly would have asked them to consider the claims of Christ. I think the results can be seen in 4:22 – even in Caesar's household!

Has God "chained" you to someone in order to bring them into the kingdom? An office worker? Unsaved family member? Neighbor? Have you taken advantage of your circumstances when possible?

The outside job is seen in v14. How do other Christians respond to Paul's imprisonment? ["with far more courage"] Isn't that opposite of what you'd expect? The common expectation would be less enthusiasm, not more. Why more courage, not less?

As the Christians saw Paul use his circumstances as a pulpit, they gained in courage. They drew courage from Paul's example to "speak the word." What's neat here is that as the apostle is limited, the people pick up the slack. The gospel doesn't slow down because the big cheese is in jail. It's as if God is confirming that he wants all his people to be speaking the word, not just the Pauls!

So the gospel is preached inside and out. But notice, there are two "camps" preaching Christ outside. Read 15-17. Why does one "camp" preach? Why the other?

	<i>Camp One:</i>	<i>Camp Two</i>
Motivation:	Envy, strife, selfish ambition, impure motives (v15, 17)	Good will, love (vv15-16)
Goal:	Paul's distress (v17)	Paul's ministry (v16)

Whatever the motive, the end result is the same: Christ is proclaimed, and therefore, Paul rejoices (v18). Even though some preach Christ to hurt Paul, he is happy about it.

Turn to Gal. 1:6-9. Why is Paul mad at one group and not the other? [The people in Galatians were distorting the gospel] What implications does that have for the gospel being preached out of envy and strife in Philippians? Is it the real deal? Yes, the ones who are preaching Christ in order to hurt Paul are preaching the real gospel! I hope we all have a tough time imagining such a thing. I have heard of such strife between shepherds, but thank God I've never experienced it. We are all sinners saved by grace. Thank God for his unending mercy and his ongoing work of making us like Christ!

And so we see Paul's rejoicing in v18 because his circumstances have resulted in the greater progress of the gospel. There is a second reason for rejoicing, and that is in his expected deliverance.

Read v19-20. Paul says in v19 that his circumstances will ultimately result in his deliverance (salvation). Now does Paul know by the Spirit that he is going to walk out of Rome a free man? No – he doesn't know if he's going to live or die. The deliverance he's talking about is neither deliverance from jail nor his ultimate salvation with Jesus. It is instead just what he describes in v20.

What is Paul in Rome for in the first place? [testify before Caesar] What are the potential outcomes of that trial [acquittal, execution, exile]. Paul looks ahead to that trial with his mind set that through the prayers of the saints and the provision of the Spirit (v19) he will have sufficient courage, so that he has nothing to be ashamed of, so that Christ is exalted in him, whether he lives or dies. That is the deliverance he expects, and for which he rejoices ahead of time.

Why is that Paul so sure that Christ will be exalted in his life or death? What is rejoicing amid such dark circumstances founded on? That is point number two, Paul's Realization.

Paul's Realization – v21

Life was pretty simple for Paul. I suspect that if he had a life's verse this would have been it. If I live, Christ. If I die, gain. No big distinction, though one is clearly better (for him) than the other. To Paul, to live was Christ. What does that mean?

It means that Paul's life was wholly given over to serve Christ. You see it in his exhortations to the Philippians:

- 1:1 – serves Christ
- 1:27 – lives according to Christ's gospel
- 2:5 – mimics Christ's attitude
- 3:3 – glories in Christ
- 3:7-14 – counts all as loss for Christ
- 4:13 – does all in Christ's strength

Paul's realization, which he has long known by the time he pens this letter, is that Paul minus Christ equals nothing. To Paul, to live is Christ. Is it possible for a Christian to not have that attitude? Sadly, obviously, yes.

We've seen Paul's rejoicing in v12-20, Paul's realization in v21, and now finally, Paul's resolve in v22-26.

Paul's Resolve – v22-26

Read. These verses almost read as though Paul has a choice to make between living and dying. Some liberal types have even postulated that in these verses Paul is contemplating suicide! Is it Paul's choice? Can he decide to end his life and be with Jesus? Although the clear force of the Greek here is an absolute choice, such an interpretation is at odds with everything else we know about Paul. I believe it is best to think of Paul's preference here. What would he prefer, life in ministry to his beloved Philippians or going home to Jesus? He is torn.

To die is gain (v21). It is very much better (v23). Better for Paul, not the Philippians! Christ will be exalted if Paul dies, by his witness and manner of death on Christ's behalf. But how will Christ be exalted if Paul lives? (v22, 24-25 - by his fruitful labor on behalf of the Philippians and other believers)

Who needs you for their own progress and joy in the faith (v25)? Who has God called you to stand alongside of, when your heart may really be saying that all in all, you'd rather be elsewhere? Be attentive to your ministry, and let God take care of your heart.

So then, convinced of the greater benefit of ministry on behalf of others, Paul is resolved to continue ministering to the Philippians for their progress and joy in the faith. As a result, who will they have ultimate confidence in when they see Paul walking in the city gates? Christ Jesus (v26).

So in spite of his circumstances, Paul rejoices. He knows that life is Christ, death is gain, and he will continue to minister for the Philippians. Now back to your circumstances. What are they? Bad, good, in between? Whatever they are, can God use them to his benefit? What should you

attitude be in them, even if they are the darkest you have ever faced? Realize however, that Paul's attitude of rejoicing and resolve doesn't come without his realization that to live is Christ.

Don't look for ways to be happy, make sure that for you, to live is Christ.

Philippians 1:27-2:4: We Strive Together

Phil. 1:27 begins a unit of thought that stretches all the way to 2:18. We won't cover it all today, but we will read it all today to establish some continuity. Read 1:27-2:18.

We will cover 1:27-2:4 today. In this part of the letter Paul takes two of his main points from his first couple of paragraphs, the significance of Christian partnership and his joy in spite of his circumstances, and applies them to the Philippians. From the partnership between Paul and the Phil. to their partnership with one another. From his circumstances in jail to their circumstances in opposition. Overall, his message is that as a body we should be one, striving together.

Just as Paul is experiencing opposition in jail, the Philippians themselves are going through some opposition (v28-30). Paul doesn't spend the bulk of his time worrying about the opposition. Instead, he exhorts the Philippians to live so that the opposition loses its effectiveness. How does that happen? Let's see.

He starts out by telling them to conduct themselves worthily (v27). The word "conduct" is the Greek word *polis* from which we derive some words that have to do with citizenship – politics, polity. Literally, Paul says, "live as a citizen" of the gospel. He is telling them to live up to their citizenship, a concept that would have very concrete meaning to the Philippians.

Philippi was a Roman colony. To establish its colonies Rome purposely settled them with retired Army officers, veterans, and other officials. These settlers were given Roman citizenship and privileges to firmly tie the colony's loyalty to Rome. City government was modeled on Roman government, and the responsibilities of the citizens were taken very seriously.

What is your responsibility as a citizen of the USA? [obey the laws, vote, serve (jury duty, armed forces), etc.] Have you ever seen the oath that must be sworn to become a US citizen if you are not a native?

USA Oath of Citizenship: "I hereby declare, on oath,

1. that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen;
2. that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic;
3. that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same;
4. that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law;
5. that I will perform noncombatant service in the armed forces of the United States when required by the law;

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6. that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law;
7. and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God."

What happens if you break the oath? Do you cease to be a citizen? No, but you may pay a price! That is, they will throw you in jail for disobeying the laws of the land, but not necessarily for not bearing true faith and allegiance to the Constitution (depending on how you apply your lack of faith). Some of these responsibilities are greater than others.

What oath did you have to swear to become a citizen of the God's kingdom? It's not completely analogous. The Christian "oath" is recognition and agreement concerning your sin, acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice and willful surrender to him. Even so, we are still responsible to live in obedience to Jesus. If we disobey we don't cease to be a citizen of his kingdom, but we will pay a price.

What kind of conduct is worthy of the gospel? v27-30: 1) Standing firm 2) in one spirit; 3) one mind striving together for the gospel; 4) without fear (v28); 5) amid suffering (v29-30)

Note v27: "striving together for the faith of the gospel"

To strive means to contend or fight for something. To preserve, promote, and protect something, in this case, the faith of the gospel. Specifically we are to strive *together*. In other words, living as a citizen of God's kingdom means there is no such thing as a solo act. There is no room here for the rugged individualist, for the one who goes it alone. Paul is talking about sharing the faith, but not *just* sharing the faith. He is talking about striving together to live according to the entire revealed faith, to live faithful, obedient lives in the midst of persecution and pressure to conform.

What should be our attitude towards the opposition in v28? [without fear]

What does a lack of fear on our part portend for them? [destruction]

The world's opposition to Christ and his people stands judged already, and that judgment is made evident by our very lack of fear. In this I am reminded of a secretary I had a few years ago, an older woman who grew up just as country as country can be. One day we had some classical music on in the office, Beethoven's 9th to be exact. I remember it clearly because it was in the great last movement, the "Ode to Joy." With the orchestra playing, the chorus singing, the soloists soaring, she came in to my office to complain about the music, not the volume, but the choice. Her words were something to the effect that "That music is terrible, it's awful! How can you stand to listen to that noise?" And she wasn't kidding.

Now, she may have thought she was condemning Beethoven, but she was really condemning herself. Beethoven's genius was not marred one whit by her opposition. In fact, she said far more about herself than she did about Beethoven. In the same way, the world may think Christians pathetic and stupid, but Christ and the faith of the gospel are not marred one whit by their opposition. Therefore, we should be without fear, knowing that suffering for Christ is inevitable, and knowing that we suffer for him (v28-30).

So, we live as citizens, conducting ourselves worthily of the gospel. Paul keeps on that theme as we cross the chapter border into c2. If 1:27-30 tells us what worthy behavior is (standing firm, one spirit, one mind, striving together, without fear), 2:1-18 tells us what worthy behavior does.

Worthy behavior imitates Christ. That is the short version of chapter 2. We see some details beginning in 2:1-4. Paul urges us to live consistent with the blessings that are ours in Christ's body. What are those blessings? He gives a short list in v1: encouragement in Christ, consolation of love, fellowship of the Spirit, affection and compassion.

These 4 blessings are both objective and subjective. They are objective in that they are ours in Christ no matter what. They are subjective in that we may be aware of them and experience them in varying degrees. But when Paul says, "If . . ." he is assuming the condition to be true. They should characterize our fellowship with each other.

If these blessings characterize our fellowship, then it will be characterized by true unity, laid out in v2: same mind, love, spirit (united in), purpose (intent on one).

There is encouragement, consolation, fellowship, and affection in Christ, therefore there must be . . . among Christians. To the extent that we manifest encouragement, consolation, fellowship, and affection, that will be the extent to which unity is manifested. If these blessings are real, then we will have the same mind, love, spirit, and purpose.

How can we do better here? How much room is there for disagreement? What is the difference between unity and uniformity? Contrast disagreement with disharmony. What do you call a church where all have the same opinions and tastes? [a cult]

In v3-4, Paul says to do nothing out of selfishness or conceit. That is the total opposite of what a church should be. The opposite of such behavior is humility that regards one another as more important than yourself and puts the other's interests ahead of your own. Does that characterize you? If not, which side are you on? Do I live like the secretary who wanders into the office to condemn Beethoven?

As we "strive together for the faith" amid the world's opposition, our conduct should be worthy of citizens of the kingdom, with a unity and purpose that is a reflection of the encouragement, consolation, fellowship, and love of this body. But, boy, is that tough! We are hard people to love! We need an example of humility to follow and to make alive what Paul is describing. That example is Christ himself.

Philippians 2:5-18: Imitating Jesus

A large part of our time in Philippians today will be spent in one of the most familiar passages in the Bible. Philippians 2:5-11 is one of Scripture's preeminent statements about who Christ is and what he did. Let's review before we get there. [Review]

As we study though, we need to understand that Philippians 2:5-11 was not intended to stand apart from 1:27-2:18, our verses in context. However, because it is so rich in meaning and content, carries so much insight into God's heart, and is so uplifting in its nature, we read it alone more often than not. It is actually an illustration and example of Paul's exhortation of 1:27-2:1-4. To live as citizens of the gospel, united, humbly looking out for the interests of others.

Paul was not offering this teaching as something new, or as an amazing and unfamiliar teaching, but as a previously understood and agreed-upon set of facts. He is holding up the Lord Jesus as the best example of the humility he wrote of in 2:3-4, humility that puts other's interests ahead of self.

Read v5-8. Note the very first command: *Have this attitude*. Attitude here means more than just passing thought. It means a mental state, a habit of settled pattern of thinking. We should have a constant mental state that corresponds to Jesus' pattern of thinking.

Why *Christ Jesus* instead of *Jesus Christ*? I have never heard a good answer to this question, and if any of you have something to offer I'd like to hear it. My own guess is that Paul alone of the Apostles only knew Jesus as the risen Lord. He had no personal relationship with Jesus of Nazareth when he walked the earth. It may be that "Christ Jesus" is merely Paul's way of emphasizing the risen and glorified Messiah. Or not.

He existed in the form of God. This language --*existed in the form of God*-- seems odd, doesn't it? John said it more clearly in his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Is Paul saying something less about Christ? Was he God or did he "merely" have God's form? The particular word Paul uses here refers especially to inward characteristics, not merely outward appearance. He was God inside and out. He says it again another way in v6 just to be sure we are listening -- *equality with God*.

He had God's inward form and was equal to him. He possessed and expressed the very essence of the Godhead. He held in his hands as it were the essence, the power, the rights and privileges of God, yet he did not grasp at them, clutching at them, refusing to let them go.

Emptied himself. "Made himself nothing" in the NIV. The idea here is laying aside, divesting himself of something. But that something isn't named in the verse. Of what did he empty himself? The form of God? Did he make himself unequal to God? Did he lay aside his Godhood? Was he still God, or not? Check out these Scriptures:

- John 1:14 - God (the Word) made flesh
- John 5:18, 10:33 – understood to claim equality with God in the flesh
- Col. 1:19, 2:9 – all the fullness of the Deity dwells in him in bodily form
- Heb. 1:1-3 – full expression of God

If he didn't empty himself of his divine attributes, what did he empty himself of? How about his manner of existence and his rights and privileges as God? Yep, that'll do it. He was worthy of all praise, honor, and worship, but he laid it all aside, emptying himself of the right. But his example extends beyond laying down rights, it entails picking something up as well.

Taking the form of a bond-servant. Not only did he empty himself of the form of God, letting go of his rights and privileges, but he also took on the form of something else, a bond-servant. The bond-servant was originally the lowest form of servitude there was. It came to mean one who willingly gave himself up to another, and became the most common word for any servant. As in Matthew 20:28, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many”, so here did Christ come to serve, taking the lowest form of servitude there was.

Try to imagine for a moment how *infinite* that lowering was. God the Son divested himself of his rights and privileges as God, becoming a man. He bridged an infinite, unfathomable chasm that separates holy God from sinful man. But that is not all.

He didn’t become a man to be served, he didn’t come as a king or a ruler, or anyone with any power at all. He came as the lowest form of humanity – a bond-servant. But even that is not all.

He humbled himself . . . to the point of death. He humbled himself by becoming obedient, even to the point of suffering death. From infinite God to man to bond-servant to death. How does this kind of humbleness differ from feeling worthless or inadequate? This is humility by choice, by will, not by accident or desserts. But even that is not all.

Even death on a cross. The death he took was no ordinary death. Crucifixion was one of the most cruel and degrading forms of execution ever devised. The Romans had learned it from the Persians and had refined the practice until it was so cruel it was forbidden to execute citizens in this way. It was strictly reserved for slaves and foreigners. It was excruciating, and it was humiliating. We picture a discrete loincloth on Jesus as he hung there, but he would have been naked. The cross itself was a sign to the Jews of God’s curse (Gal. 3:13, quoting Dt. 21:23). As he was tortured to death vile men mocked and spit on him as their illustration of God’s judgment on him. And over all that, the holy Son who never knew sin took our sin on himself so that we could have his righteousness (2Cor. 5:21).

The entire thought and movement of this great picture of the servant humility of Christ has been down, down, down: God

Man

Bond-servant

Death

Cross

Now the movement reverses course, moving back up again. Read v9-11. *Therefore . . . exalted him.* The “therefore” is directly tied to Jesus’ emptying and humbling of himself. Because he humbled himself in obedience, God highly exalted him. How high? To the highest. Could translate *highly exalted* in v9 as superexalted. Jesus didn’t stay humbled. God raised him from the dead, he ascended to the Father, and he was glorified in heaven, sitting down at the right hand of God.

He was given the name which is above all names. All he had laid aside was restored to him, waiting now only for the ultimate recognition of his place.

Who will recognize him? Everyone and everything. V10 is totally inclusive – angels, mankind, creation, and even hell and all its inhabitants.

Wow! What a statement about Jesus! What a hymn of praise! Had he not been obedient we would never have had salvation. But great as that is, is that all? Is there a “so what?” that we can consider here? What difference does this passage make to us practically speaking? How should we react?

What is our impression of Jesus? What will we do if we adopt this attitude?

- Empty ourselves – of what? Rights and privileges, respect, obedience?
- Humble ourselves by taking on tasks that are obviously and literally beneath us
- Reach out in love and forgiveness to any that have wronged you
- Give your time away to help others

Who did Jesus regard as more important – himself, or you and I? Whose interests did Jesus put first? Paul says we should adopt Jesus’ attitude as our own, which is exactly what Jesus told the 12 at the Last Supper (John 13:12-15 – “I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you”).

What is the point of this imitation as far as Paul is concerned? Why is he telling us to adopt this attitude? So that we would be one (v2 – same mind, same love, same spirit, same purpose). And do you remember from last week why that was important? Because that is how we live as citizens of the gospel, conducting ourselves worthily.

At the very least, we must imitate him, poor as our impression may be, so that we put other’s interests ahead of our own, united in mind, love, spirit, and purpose. When that occurs, will we ever have disagreements again? Yes! But how will we handle them when they surely do come? Well. We will handle them well.

Now in v12 Paul throws in another connecting clause which we must pay attention to. Read v12-13. “So then”. In other words, in view of or because of the great example of humility we have in Jesus, *work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*

Taken out of context, these 2 verses, especially v12, have caused a lot of people a lot of grief. But they need not. Paul couldn’t be clearer in the context that he is not talking about a salvation of works. Who purchased salvation? (Jesus, v5-11) Who empowers the working out of our salvation (God, v13)? Where is man’s work focused? Isn’t working for salvation, working to gain a salvation not already in hand, different from working out salvation, working to apply and live out a salvation you already possess? Of course.

Remember that the Philippians learned the gospel from Paul in the first place. They would have known what he meant. There would have been no confusion about it in their minds. I believe we have to understand v12 in the light of v13, and overall to keep this exhortation in the context of 1:27-2:18. What does God empower us to will and to do in v13? Two things: 1) to “will” or to

desire his good pleasure and 2) to “work for” or to do his good pleasure. God provides the necessary power in us for both of these things.

The book of Romans, written just months after his first visit to Philippi, contained the same truth hinted at here, that without God’s enabling we can do nothing (Romans 7:14-8:10). With God’s enabling, we are energized to a purposeful desire and walk that results in his good pleasure.

Philippians 2:12-16: Working it Out

Our passage this morning concludes the unit of thought Paul began in 1:27. The theme here has been the unity of the Philippian church as Paul exhorts them to live as citizens of the gospel, striving together as one (1:27-30); to be of the same mind, love, spirit and purpose, humbly looking out for one another’s interests (2:1-4); to adopt Jesus’ attitude, laying aside our rights and privileges and taking up the role of a bond-servant (2:5-11).

In v12-13, Paul now comes to his final point in this theme. Read v12-13. What is his final point? [That we are to “work out our salvation.”]

Taking these verses out of context or failing to interpret them correctly have caused many people much needless grief through the ages. It just seems that when people see the words “work” and “salvation” in the same sentence they freak out. But we won’t, right?

Let’s get right to Paul’s intent here before we dissect and apply what he is saying. In the first place, how does v12 start off? “So then . . .” “Therefore . . .” “Wherefore . . .” Wherefore what? What does it mean when we see those words? What do they tell us? They tell us that what is being said here relates directly to a previous command or statement. It is a clue to application of something Paul has been saying previously.

But what? There are several candidates:

- 2:5 (Have this attitude . . .)
- 2:3-4 (Do nothing . . . let each of you regard . . . do not look out . . .)
- 2:2 (make my joy complete . . .)
- 1:27 (conduct yourselves in a manner worthy . . .)

What is the point of all these commands? [the unity of the church.] If any one of them sticks out more than the rest, it would probably be the last one before 2:12, “Have this attitude” in 2:5.

We are to adopt Jesus’ mind-set, his habitual pattern of thinking as a servant, we are to imitate him as he laid aside his rights. Therefore, we must “work out” our salvation.

Here is where the rub comes in. The word translated “work” in v12 means just that. It means to *toil*, to perform. Is Paul telling us to work our salvation? To perform deeds that result in salvation?

The problem is we often interpret “working” to mean working or toiling *for* something, to accomplish something. But that isn’t the only way to think of “work.”

- How is working *out* our salvation different from working *for* it?
- According to our context (v6-11) how did we obtain the salvation Paul tells us to work?

The point is that interpreting v12 to mean we work for our salvation completely ignores the context of the passage and directly contradicts what Paul has just said. He couldn’t mean we are to earn our salvation, unless he was a hopeless schizo (and he wasn’t)! So we can dispense with the interpretations that ignore context and hint at a gospel of works.

Back to the “therefore.” What v12-13 is in other words is a command to further apply what Paul has been encouraging for the last 15 verses. It’s as if Paul were saying “Work your salvation out! Apply what I have told you to your own life. Do what I am telling you to do: imitate Jesus’ mind and example, loving one another in unity.”

But as we’ve said before, that’s a lot easier on paper than it is in real life. Being asked to lay aside our rights and serve one another in humility challenges us to the very core! When we begin to slip on the unity front, so that we don’t have the same mind, love, spirit, and purpose, we begin to disagree, to value our own perspectives and interests, to what different results. What happens when we begin to weary of serving one another? Look at v14-16. [read]

How do v14-16 help you understand what Paul means in v12-13? How we work out our salvation is important, not with grumbling and arguments, but blameless and innocent, holding forth the Word such that our salvation is obvious to all.

How many here can say of themselves “I do all things without grumbling and disputing”? How many are “blameless and innocent?” Show of hands, please? And yet, that’s exactly what Paul calls us to do and to be! How can we?

The answer is in v13. We have to understand both v12 and v14-16 in the light of v13. There are a couple of critically important words here. First, God is “at work” in you. This is a word that means to energize, to work effectively, to provide the necessary power. It is the same word used of us in the same sentence (to *work* for his good pleasure) as Paul calls us to an active response to God’s inworking.

The second word we need to understand is translated “will.” This word means to desire, or to intend something. It implies both choice and purpose. Here are a couple of restatements of v13 that may help us to understand its meaning further:

“God is at work in us, providing the necessary power to do two things: to desire his good pleasure, and to do his good pleasure.”

“God is energizing us to a purposeful desire and walk that result in his good pleasure.”

The word translated “work” in v13 is not the same word in the Greek as we saw in v12. That word had the generic meaning of *toil*, this word the meaning of *energizing*. The difference between the two is the difference between doing something (v12) and being empowered (v13).

There is not some magical difference in the Greek, rather it is the context which provides the difference.

So, because God is empowering us (v13) we are to work out our salvation. What does that mean in practice? Here are some Scriptures to help:

- Proverbs 3:5-6 – trust God, depend on him
- Romans 12:1-2 – present your body as a sacrifice, be transformed by a renewed mind
- Galatians 5:25 – walk by the Spirit
- Hebrews 12:1-2 – lay aside sin and focus on Jesus

In v12a, Paul is sure of the Philippian's obedience in spite of his absence. Can you picture him saying that to the church at Corinth? How about to the church at Signal Mountain?

Paul's point is probably both personal and corporate. The KJV emphasizes the personal aspect with their translation, "work out your *own* salvation." However, given the context of the unity and oneness of the body, the corporate application is equally viable and important. How can we work out our salvation as a body *corporately*?

By each individual helping the other grow spiritually. How do we do that? More Scripture:

- Galatians 6:1-5 – Bear one another's burdens
- Hebrews 3:12-13 – exhort one another regarding sin
- Hebrews 10:24-25 – encourage one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking fellowship
- James 5:16, 19-20 – confess your sins to one another, pray for one another

Key question: What is your predominate effect on the corporate spiritual health of this body? How can you encourage the spiritual growth of the body at SMBC?

Finally, v14-16. Read. We are to do everything without grumbling. This means murmuring, behind the back complaints, perhaps quietly offered in a small group. We are to do everything without disputing. This is arguing, also "litigation." This means disputes and arguments out in the open. What about silent resentment: Is that okay, so long as we don't grumble or argue? Nope - Matthew 5:23-24.

What reasons does Paul give for doing everything without complaining or arguing? That we may prove ourselves to be blameless, innocent, children of God, above reproach. By working out our salvation (being servants of one another) without complaint, we are blameless in this regard. As a result, we shine like stars in a perverse world.

What is the source of that light? (v16 - the Word of life). Just as the source of our work is not in ourselves (v13), so the source of the light that shines from Christ through his church is not in ourselves. Paul says we are to hold the word fast (firmly) or forth (out for all to see). But we hold it high. What does this tell you about how we should act? Boldly, in the open, for all to see. With pure, brilliant reflections of light.

The end result is that Paul's work will not be in vain. Read v17-18. In other words, that the Philippians church will be everything God designed it to be. And if his work is not in vain, then

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no matter what happens to him in his Roman jail, he can rejoice. Even if he is “poured out” in sacrifice for the Philippians’ faith, he can rejoice and encourage the Philippians to rejoice with him.

A true shepherd, Paul regards his own suffering as secondary not only to the progress of the gospel (1:12-18), but to the Philippians’ progress in the unity of the faith.

How about SMBC?

Philippians 2:19-30: With a Little Help from My Friends

Have you ever wondered what your friends say about you behind your back? Have you ever had the chance to overhear conversation about you? Have you ever carried a letter to someone else that you know talks about you? That’s the kind of stuff we’ll see in Philippians today.

Paul has finished his great exhortation to the Philippians to be one, humbly looking out for one another’s interests, working out their salvation without grumbling or arguing with one another.

Now he turns to what appears to be some administrative details as he tells the Philippians of Epaphroditus and Timothy. These two men serve as real-life examples of the kind of “working it out” Paul described in 2:12-13. His words about them drive home his point about the kind of servants that are most useful to further God’s purposes.

Paul had a number of men who were with him in Rome. Aside from the unnamed men and women of the church in Rome who supported and ministered to Paul in a general way as Christians, the Bible mentions several specific individuals. Turn to Col. 4:7-8, 10-14. Look how many are with Paul: Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus Justus, Epaphras, Luke, Demas. Timothy is there also, as Paul’s main man his greeting is all the way up in 1:1.

Paul had a lot of helpers, but to the Philippians, two were most important. They were men they knew personally, men who had served the church in Philippi. They were also men who shared the number one concern of the Philippians, the well-being of Paul.

Timothy. Read 2:19-24. Timothy is named in the opening greeting (1:1), not so much as a co-author but as one who is a co-minister with Paul who adds his greeting. Timothy was no stranger to the Philippians. Turn to Acts 16 to see how he is introduced to that body.

Read Acts 16:1-5. This is on Paul’s 2nd Missionary Journey. He and Silas are revisiting the churches founded by Paul and Barnabas some years previous, and passing along the particulars of the recent Jerusalem Council which opened the way for Gentiles in the church. When Paul and Silas come to Derbe and Lystra (map) their meeting with a particular Christian family is recorded. What do these verses tell you about Timothy? [half-Jewish, half-Greek; well spoken of; a Christian and the son of a Christian; uncircumcised.]

To avoid a stumbling block to the Jews Paul has Timothy circumcised, after which he joins them on their swing thru Asia. Acts 16:6-10 tells of how God put a roadblock for ministry in Asia, but opened the door for ministry in Macedonia (map). Luke picks up the story in v11 (read v11-15). And so the Philippians church is born, and though Luke doesn't name Timothy in this passage, he was there. Until this time, Paul and Silas had been strengthening existing churches, so the ministry in Philippi was probably Timothy's first chance to work in a pagan, unbelieving city.

That's how Timothy was introduced to the Philippians, but that is not his only contact with them. This is the 3rd Journey and Paul is taking the Collection for the Jerusalem church, and he wants no surprises. Acts 19:21-22 tells of Timothy's return to Macedonia (and therefore Philippi) as an advance man for Paul, preparing the way for his arrival in the next chapter (20:1). Paul arrived in Macedonia and then headed south to Greece (20:2), and when a plot on his life prevented him sailing to Jerusalem from Greece, he travels north again to depart from Philippi (20:3-6). Through all this, Timothy was either traveling with Paul, or in advance of Paul, preparing his way. He would have been meeting with the churches, finding out what problems existed and how he and Paul could be of help.

The Philippians would have known Timothy well. As of the writing of this letter he has served with Paul for 10 years. And he was inextricably linked to Paul in their mind. When Timothy was there, Paul was there. Now, Paul can't be there but he is going to give them the next best thing, Timothy.

Back to Philippians, 2:19. Why is he going to send Timothy to Philippi? 1) so he could learn of their condition. 2) so he could be encouraged (which means he expected good a report!).

But if that were all Paul wanted to accomplish, couldn't he have sent anybody? Demas, Aristarchus, Epaphras? But v20-22 explains Paul's reasons for sending Timothy in particular, as well as a motive beyond his own encouragement.

Read v20-22. What does he say about Timothy in these three verses?

- ☞ of kindred spirit (v20a);
- ☞ genuinely concerned (v20b-21);
- ☞ proven worth (v22);
- ☞ served like a child his father (v22)

Kindred spirit (v20a). Kindred to whom? Possibly to Paul. Perhaps Paul means Timothy thinks like he does. But the translation here is probably better taken to mean "no one of like mind," meaning there is no one to compare Timothy to. Paul has no one like him. The NIV has that translation "no one else like him." Of all Paul's men, none were Timothy's equal. The reason for that is in the next point.

Genuinely concerned (v20b-21). As we read these verses notice what Paul is *not* saying. What is the indicator of a minister without equal among the elite crowd of Paul's company? A riveting speaker, who is both pointed and humorous, with lots of good practical application? A thorough teacher, who knows his languages, makes the underlying theology clear, teaching the flock well?

How about a forceful and engaging leader who is known in the community and good on TV and radio? Or a dynamite administrator who builds the church body by his effective leading?

How about *none* of these things? What is Timothy's chief qualification? His genuine concern, his heart, for the Philippians.

Paul has more in mind than simply his own encouragement. He wants to give the Philippians more than an update on his situation. He wants to minister to them, and that's why Timothy is the one he must send. The implication of v21 "they all seek their own interests" is that unlike some, Timothy does not seek after his own interests. Rather, he seeks someone else's - Christ's. Does this remind you of 2:3-4 (read). Timothy is living out Christ's example, and practicing the kind of humble serving Paul is calling the Philippians and SMBC to.

Who are "they" in v21? "They" could be those Christians in Rome who are seeking to hurt Paul even as they preach the gospel (1:14-17). "They" could also be some of Paul's own company. Paul doesn't cut a lot of slack, and it could be that even some of his devoted followers (Demas? Aristarchus?) were hesitant to lay aside their own interests to serve others unconditionally.

Proven worth (v22). Timothy's worth has been proven by his service to Paul. Over 10 years in the gospel ministry, serving Paul with the kind of obedience and love a father would want from his child. Imagine the kind of proving that was. Turn to 2 Cor. 11:23-27. (Read) When Paul goes through these things, who was there with him? Timothy.

Read v23-24. Paul clearly hoped to be sending Timothy right away, expecting some word about his legal case to come soon. If he was to be released, he hoped to see the Philippians face-to-face soon.

In fact, Timothy's usefulness to Paul is so clear from these verses that it should trigger a little exclamation point in our heads when Paul says in v23-24 "Therefore I hope to send him as soon as I can." It's as though Paul says "This man is so uniquely faithful, so useful to me for service, such a son to me, that I must send him away from me and to you, for your sake!" Paul himself lives the humble servant's life, doesn't he? It's a measure of his love for the Philippians and for the Lord that he lays aside his own interests to encourage the Philippians.

Epaphroditus. But the problem is, Paul can't be sure how long before he has word about his situation. It may be soon, but not soon enough. In the meantime, until Paul has word to send, "I thought it necessary" to send another, Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus only appears in the Scripture here. When someone appears only fleetingly like this we are typically left to wonder who they were, what they were doing, and what kind of man or woman they were. Like Euodia, Synteché, and Clement in 4:2-3. Except for a bit of disharmony, we know nothing about them. Ditto Aristarchus, Tychicus, and others.

But Epaphroditus is a different story. Look at (4:10, 14, 18). The Philippians had sent Epaph. to Paul in Rome with a gift for his needs. Being entrusted with the money from the church, he was most likely an elder or deacon. But beyond that, look how Paul describes him in v25-26:

- What was he to Paul?: Brother, fellow-worker, fellow-soldier

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- What was he to Philippians: Messenger (apostle), minister (priest) to Paul (Eph. 4:10, 14, 18), longing for Philippians, distress at their distress.

Read v27-30. Epaphroditus is another example of Christian partnership, and Paul uses a fair amount of ink to uphold him to his home church. Word of his illness had found its way to Philippi. How might some there have reacted when they heard about it? [We sent him to help Paul, now Paul is having to help him! He's a burden, not a help!]

Why does Paul send Epaph. back to Philippi?

- ☞ His longing for them and distress for them (v26)
- ☞ To encourage them (v28a)
- ☞ To alleviate Paul's concern for the Phil. (v28b)

Does he have a heart like Timothy's?

Paul's final word on Epaphroditus can really serve as a rule for the church of any age. It is men and women of servant hearts like Epaphroditus and Timothy who are to be held in high regard in the church. People who give themselves up for one another. They are examples of Christian partnership.

Finally, note the circle of relationships here. From Paul to Timothy and Epaphroditus, and from Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Philippians. That is how the church was designed to operate. One strengthening and encouraging another, who in turn strengthens another, and so on. And that strengthening and encouraging process itself is an encouragement to all who love the Lord.

What do you find most striking about these two men? What jumps out at me is simply their willingness to risk. Risk of jail, hardship, sickness, loss of position. We have no idea if these men were risk-takers by nature, yet it is clear that their servant hearts make them take risks for the church.

What risks are you willing to take on behalf of the body?

Philippians 3:1-11: Rejoice in the Lord

As we come to chapter 3, consider the fact that Philippians is somewhat unique in its organization. It is striking in that most of Paul's letters begin with doctrine, teaching specific truths about Jesus, the faith, God's purposes, whatever. Once that foundation of doctrine has been laid Paul moves into living it out, application.

If we view that structure as the norm, then some might say Philippians puts the cart before the horse. For in this letter Paul has focused most of the letter on *how* to live, how to apply God's truth, before he comes to doctrine, telling us *why* we should live that way.

Now in chapter 3, it is time for a little straight doctrine. Because although it's pretty clear the Philippians knew the gospel, there were some false teachers out there who threatened to undermine the foundation of their faith. Let's read 3:1-11, and tell me what errors Paul was refuting. [read]

What does he warn the Philippians about? [dogs, evil workers, false circumcision] Pretty severe language, don't you think? They've obviously been a pain in the neck to Paul. Are these the people of chapter 1 who preach the gospel to do him harm? I don't think so – those people were preaching the genuine gospel. Who are these people and what do they teach that has Paul so up in arms?

These are the Judaizers, and much of Paul's ministry was carried out in conflict with them. Turn to Acts 15 and let's trace it:

- Acts 15:1-2, 5, 24
- Gal. 1:6-7, 5:1-2, 6-8, 10, 12
- 2 Cor. 11:3-4, 13

Notice how Paul starts off his argument against the Judaizer's case for the law in 3:1.

Finally. ever wonder why so many teachers begin to conclude their sermons 2 or 3 times before they are actually done? “In conclusion” or “In closing” or “Finally” when we actually have 15 minutes to go! Why? [attention-getter, change of focus, new topic]

The great thing is that preachers who practice this method of attention getting have excellent company! We are about 60% through the text of Philippians, yet Paul begins this section with that magical word, “Finally.” Why do you think the Holy Spirit does that? Same reason – to get our attention, signal a change of focus, new topic. And because the new topic is an important one, Paul wants to draw attention to it and make sure it is not missed.

Rejoice in the Lord. After getting our attention, Paul begins his argument with a command. What is it? “Rejoice in the Lord.” Note two things: First, it is a command, not a suggestion or a personality trait. Second, he is not *merely* saying we are to be happy people.

No, the command to rejoice in 3:1 is qualified. How? [in the Lord]. Paul calls us to *rejoice in the Lord*, not simply to rejoice. What does it mean to rejoice in the Lord?

He has said a lot about being in the Lord in this letter:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| • Saints in Christ (1:1) | • Worship in the Spirit (3:3) |
| • Confidence abounds in Christ (1:26) | • Glory in Christ (3:3) |
| • Receive Epaph. in the Lord (2:29) | • Stand firm in the Lord (4:1) |
| • Trust in the Lord (2:24) | • Live in harmony in the Lord (4:2) |
| • Hope in the Lord (2:19) | • Rejoice in the Lord (3:1, 4:4, 4:10) |

Paul doesn't stop to define each and every one of these exhortations. It's like he knows his audience understands what he means. He sends a clear message simply by his choice of words: the Christian life is lived in the Lord.

Our identity (1:1) and fellowship (2:29, 4:2) is in the Lord. Our plans, hopes, and dreams are to be in the Lord (2:19, 24). Our strength, confidence, and obedience are in the Lord (1:26, 4:1). Our glory or boasting is in the Lord (3:3). And finally, and significantly most often said, our joy is in the Lord (3:1, 4:4, 4:10)

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What does that mean? What kind of joy is “in the Lord?” [joy based on your salvation, on who you are in Christ, on your total deliverance from sin] Paul’s call to rejoice in the Lord is a dual command telling us what we are to rejoice in (Christ) and what we are *not* to rejoice in (the flesh).

Paul just makes the statement. He doesn’t give any prescriptive advice or pointers on how to rejoice in the Lord, yet. But he does begin to lay out the basic foundation of our salvation. It is that foundation that forms the basis for our rejoicing.

That is the context for Paul’s radical shift from rejoicing to warning in v2. Note as he does this that he is obviously repeating himself (v1). The Philippians have heard this before, but it is no trouble for Paul to write his warning again, and may keep the Philippians from danger.

How do you react when you hear Gary or me say something that you’ve heard us say before? Do you “switch off” waiting until you hear something new? According to Paul, purposeful repetition can be a safeguard for us. How many times do you tell your kids something important, like “don’t play in the street.” Same thing. Cut us some slack.

As the Judaizers traveled around twisting the gospel, Paul warns Philippi to beware, and he reminds them of who they are in Christ (v3)” Instead of the false circumcision (the word means mutilation!) of the Judaizers, he says that Christians are the *true circumcision*. Turn to Rom. 2:28-29. What is true circumcision? [Of the heart]

The physical circumcision of the old covenant was a picture of the believer’s identification with Yahweh, and the Judaizers made it a requirement for salvation. But even from the earliest times of the law God called man to true circumcision, circumcision of the heart. Look at Dt. 10:16 and Jer. 4:4. A circumcised heart was a heart given over to God, one that followed after him in its desire and priorities.

Paul uses the same idea from the Old Testament in Romans 2, and also in Col. 2:11-15. [read]

- Who does the circumcising? [God]
- How many Christians are so circumcised? [all]
- What do you have to do to be circumcised? [be in him, Col.]

Circumcision of the heart is a supernatural work that is completed in *every* Christian, whether they realize it or not. There is no private club with a secret handshake and password for admission. The power and the reality of God’s work on your heart are there for every believer. And that is the basis for our rejoicing. His work is our joy.

Where is the joy in a gospel that requires works to keep it? Can you imagine living in joy if your salvation depends on your flesh? No way!

Having begun his counter-argument with this simple truth, Paul lists three things that characterize the true circumcision. Those whose hearts are circumcised:

- worship in the Spirit
- glory in Christ
- put no confidence in the flesh.

The Judaizer's conception of the Christian was one who believed in Jesus as Messiah PLUS kept the Law. The big word there is "plus." *Any* "plus" in the gospel message dilutes it, perverts it, twists it to a message of works and flesh, not grace. Mixing the grace of the gospel with the fleshy requirements of the Law is like mixing a glass of the purest, sweetest water with dirt. You've taken something that would quench your thirst and turned it into a dirty mess.

It is from the grace of the gospel and the unconditional love of God that our joy is to come from. As Paul calls us to rejoice in the Lord, he calls us to rejoice in the salvation and sanctification he provides, to rejoice in his work on our behalf. Such rejoicing in the Lord is the right, and the "graceful" obligation and discipline of every Christian.

And Paul's message is *all* grace. He has been the flesh route before. If anybody knows the power of the flesh and its weakness, it is Paul. He had the best possible case: right heritage, right party, right cause, right foundation. And yet, all that was once gain to him he now considers loss for Christ's sake. That is the basis for the description of Christians as ones who put "no confidence in the flesh." Next week.

Philippians 3:1-11: Rejoice in the Lord, II

- What does it mean to know Christ? [salvation, intimacy, sanctification] We'll be talking about what it means to know him as Paul means it in v8 and 10.
- How does one know Christ in this way?
- What would be the result in your life if you did? In this body?

Last week we got a good start on this passage. Paul has turned to "final" matters, warning the Philippians about the Judaizers, those false teachers who were distorting the gospel of grace, teaching that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Paul urges his friends to rather "rejoice in the Lord." That is, to rejoice in the salvation and sanctification he has provided, to rejoice in his work on our behalf. Most especially, to follow Jesus *only*, not Jesus "plus" or Jesus "and" anything else. Specifically, to put no confidence in the flesh.

We saw last week that Paul describes Christians as the "true circumcision," which was circumcision of the heart, not the flesh. We saw that this was not original with Paul, but that true circumcision had always been "of the heart", as we saw in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah.

Three things characterize the true circumcision: worship in the Spirit, glory in Christ, put no confidence in the flesh. Think how different each of these characteristics would be from the Judaizer's conception:

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Worship in the Spirit. How would the Judaizer's say Christians are to worship?

[Temple, prescribed ritual] But Christian worship is not *merely* a formal rite or observed strictly according to human traditions:

- formalized worship of the Tabernacle and the Temple done away with by God, so that all believers could worship in the Spirit (John 4:21-24).
- Worship in the Spirit is directed by the Spirit as he prays for us (Romans 8:26-27),
- as we walk by him (Gal. 5:25),
- as we offer ourselves as a sacrifice of worship (Romans 12:1, Hebrews 13:15-16),
- and as we proclaim his excellencies (1 Peter 2:9).

Glory in Christ. In the Judaizer's view, what is the power of the gospel? [flesh] So what saves? [flesh]. They profoundly misunderstood the nature of the gospel. They gloried in their flesh, in their works, because without their works they were not saved. Again, they were at odds with God's intent from the beginning, as shown by Jeremiah 9:23-24: *Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.*

The Christian's hope comes from Christ alone, and so our "glory," our boasting, our satisfaction and fulfillment is not in what we have done or not done in our flesh (Romans 3:27), but rather in Christ alone. (Romans 15:17, 1 Cor. 1:26-31, Gal. 6:13-14). Therefore, Paul's final point is this: Christian's put no confidence in the flesh.

Put no confidence in the flesh. To show the bankruptcy of the Judaizer's position, Paul tells a bit of his background, because he has been the flesh route before. If anybody knows the power of the flesh and its weakness, it is Paul. If flesh would ever get anybody anywhere it would be Paul: he had the best possible case: *although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:*

- right heritage - *circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews;*
- right party - *as to the Law, a Pharisee;*
- right cause - *as to zeal, a persecutor of the church;*
- right standing - *as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.*

v7. This is a man who has climbed the mountain of success! He had done *everything* that the teachers of the Law said you had to do to be perfect! He says it himself, *as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.* Only, once he got there he discovered something, or rather, he was shown something: that his works righteousness, his confidence in the flesh wasn't what he thought it was! It didn't gain him anything. In fact, it wasn't even neutral. It was a loss, a negative. [read v7]

All his background, his former confidence, all that stuff Paul once relied upon he came to see as loss for Christ's sake. Now, he is talking about a past event, something that occurred some time back, and which is still in effect today. When Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road, Paul was struck blind and was bedridden several days before Ananias came to him, pronouncing God's intent for him as an apostle.

Imagine what those days were like for Paul. I don't know how much God revealed to Paul then and there, but at least he came to understand that all his confidence in the flesh was less than nothing, that he was worse than mistaken, and that the one he has been persecuting is his God and his Lord. Everything was out the window, and Paul knew he had been operating below ground zero.

And yet, in v8 Paul says an interesting thing. He has just said that he at one point considered all loss for Christ's sake. Now he goes further: "*more than that . . . I count all . . . Lord*" [read v8a]

Hasn't he already given up everything for Christ? What happened on the road to Damascus? What is he saying now? **It sounds as though Paul is talking about catching a bus that he's already on!**

Paul is not talking about salvation any more – that was v7. But he's talking about something clearly dear to him, so dear that everything, not just his former confidence and accomplishments, but *everything*, is filth by comparison [read 8b].

That word translated "rubbish" in the NASB and NIV – skubalon – is a lot more accurate in the KJV – dung. The word had a variety of meanings, but overall it was intended to convey the idea of detestable filth. One translation is "off-scouring." I was thinking of this word yesterday as Alan Speirs and I installed a new garbage disposal at my house. As I cleaned out the old traps from under the kitchen sink, I was up to my wrists in skubalon – years and years of food wastes, dirt, hair, and who knows what else, in a thick paste of nasty, toxic waste!

And that's what Paul says he views *everything* that might be considered gain, as if it were the junk I cleaned out of my kitchen plumbing, in order that he might gain Christ.

[read v8b-9]. When Paul became a Christian he lost everything that anyone would consider of value, but he considers all of that to be unspeakable filth *so that* he might gain Christ and may be found in him, with Christ's righteousness, from God, through faith. Not the righteousness of Paul, from the Law, through works.

That is an important distinction. I believe that if Paul merely ended with v8, "count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ." **We would have to wonder if he wasn't just replacing a works righteousness of accomplishment with a works righteousness of asceticism.** But v9 makes it clear that his values have been turned upside down. His works are loss, all the gain comes from Christ.

Does he mean that a Christian must literally give up everything for Christ? Do we go sit on a pole in the desert? Why or why not?

Further, it is clear that counting all things rubbish has three results in Paul's mind:

- That I may gain Christ and be found in him (v8b-9)
- That I may know him, his power, and his fellowship in suffering (v10)
- That I may attain to the resurrection of the dead (the resurrection yet to come – v11)

v10-11 elaborates what Paul means by the “surpassing greatness of knowing Christ” and “gaining Christ” (v8). Paul already knew Christ, but that doesn't mean he can't know him more intimately. Some say that the words translated “know” in v8 and 10 are different words or have different meanings. For instance, that v8 denotes an intellectual knowledge and v10 an experiential knowledge. Or, that v8 means to know Jesus as Savior and v10 as Lord. He just wants to know him better. Actually they are the same word, but v8 is the noun form, v10 the verb form. I don't think one intends a deeper knowledge than the other.

So what kind of “knowing” is Paul talking about here? Let's use a familiar analogy here. How many of you are married? 10 years? 20? 25? More than 25 years? For those married more than 25 years, how well did you know your spouse the day you got married compared to how well you know them today? There's knowing, and there's *knowing*.

Do you ever feel that way? That you want to know Jesus as he knows you? So that the personal relationship is more than words on a page? Believe me, there are times it is a burning desire in my own heart, at other times not. But Paul's deepest desire was to know Jesus: to experience the power of His resurrection, and to share in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and in so doing to become like Him in His death.

Paul wants to know the power that brought Jesus from the dead, the power he says in Romans 6:4-11 allows us to “walk in newness of life.” That is the power of the Holy Spirit to live a life pleasing to God. I don't think Paul has “miracle” power in view here. His focus is entirely inward and intimate.

Paul wants to know the *partnership* (!) of his sufferings as he continually conforms himself to Christ's death. He wanted to participate with Christ, since he was one of His, in suffering for the sake of righteousness (cf. 1:29). That is precisely what Ananias told him he would do as a servant of Christ (Acts 9:16).

Finally, he wanted to become like Him in his death. As Christ died for sin, so a believer has died to sin (Rom. 6:2, 6-7; Col. 3:3), and Paul lives that death out by counting everything rubbish, cut off from his former way, daily being set apart from sin (Rom. 6:1-4, 11-14) and living a new life by means of Christ's resurrection power (Rom. 6:4).

And he finishes this great statement almost with a whimper, “And so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection.”

But doesn't he know that the resurrection is a sure thing? Doesn't he know that in Christ he has already attained to the resurrection?

Commentators feel that Paul does not mean to sound doubtful about the resurrection. Rather, he is expressing a humility that is fully dependent upon the Lord's grace and mercy. "Somehow" in this light is not so much "How I will ever make, I don't know!" But rather, "How God could choose to raise me, I'll never understand!"

His point to the Philippians is, "Having experienced grace, why would anyone want to add that fleshy stuff back in? Mixing law with grace is like mixing dirt with water, it's a net loss."

How can we know Christ more intimately?

- Consider what rubbish you may be wallowing in – are you holding something dear that you should count as filth?
- Ask God to give you the desire (Phil. 2:13)
- Meditate on passages that focus on Jesus (Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20; Is. 52:13 – 53:12)
- Study Jesus in the Gospels with Phil. 3:10-11 as your primary motivation
- In light of your partnership with one another, encourage one another in your pursuit of an intimate walk with Jesus (Heb. 10:24-25)

Philippians 3:12-21: Press On

In v1-11 we have seen Paul warning the Philippians about the false teachers who distort the gospel and teach that circumcision was necessary for salvation. He tells them to "rejoice in the Lord." That is, in the salvation and sanctification he has provided. Secondly, to put no confidence in the flesh, but to glory or boast in Christ alone, not Jesus "plus" or Jesus "and" anything else. Finally, Paul says that knowing Jesus intimately is what he most desires. He counts all things rubbish in order to gain Christ and be found in him (v8b-9), to know him, his power, and his fellowship in suffering (v10), and to attain to the resurrection of the dead (v11).

Paul isn't done yet, literally, and he wants the Philippians to know it. For all the drama of his conversion, the richness and intimacy of his walk with Christ, the depth of his understanding and knowledge, he still has miles to go. [read v12-14]

Paul's own opinion of himself was that he had not yet "obtained" or "already become perfect." **What is it that Paul hasn't obtained yet** in v12 (resurrection)? If Paul is talking about the resurrection, what do you do with these verses:

- Eph. 2:1,5,6;
- Col. 2:12; 3:1.

Paul himself makes clear that all Christians have *already* been raised. So what resurrection can he mean? Paul isn't talking about *that* resurrection, the work of God in our hearts raising us to "newness of life." The word for resurrection in v11 is different from the common word. Literally it means the "out-resurrection," implying physical raising of bodies from among other dead bodies. He is talking about the actual physical raising of the dead, when the Christian's hope of glory becomes reality. He is saying, "when I have attained heaven."

Is that all? Is there anything else in v12 to which he has not attained? Paul is saying he has not yet attained all that he has outlined in v8-11. **Are these things related?** The resurrection of our bodies and knowing Christ intimately? (An intimate walk, a desire, however fleeting, to know him, a desire to be pleasing to him – that desire is an evidence or fruit of God's work in our lives. They give evidence to the resurrection that God has already given us, and testify that the final resurrection awaits us.)

As we said last week, there's knowing and there's **knowing**. Intimacy requires time, and Paul is in the process of knowing Christ intimately, but he doesn't know him to fullest degree yet. In the same way, though God has spiritually raised Paul with Christ, he has not physically been raised, his flesh still is subject to the temptations and corruption of this fleshy world. Paul has not yet "become perfect," which as we have said before is better translated "mature." In real terms, Paul has not yet arrived, been truly completed, made perfect.

Not being perfect, what does Paul do? (presses on) For what? (to lay hold of something) What? "that for which I was laid hold of by Christ." Let's talk about what "that" is for a second.

Why was Paul saved? Why were we saved? (obey God, glorify God, love him, enjoy him forever, serve him) Where will we do those things to the fullest extent God designed us for? (heaven). This world is not our home, not our final destination. Heaven is where our salvation will be made complete, where we will be and do what God fully intends us to be. Heaven itself, what happens there, and most of all Heaven's King, is the prize, the goal of our salvation!

That is what Paul is talking about in v12. He is more explicit in v14: "the prize of the upward call of God" Picture the olympic runner who has won his race. At the end, he is called up to the dais to receive his prize. In Paul's picture, that "call" is God's invitation to man to accept the benefits of salvation. Guess what the prize is? Heaven itself, eternity with God, with his purposes for us fulfilled. He, and we, were laid hold of by Christ so that we might spend eternity with him, glorifying and enjoying him forever.

If Paul must set his mind to "press on" what about us?

Back to v12, Paul says he presses on so that he may "lay hold." Consider his word choice. "Lay hold" can also be translated "apprehend." As in seized, or taken possession of.

Paul wants to lay hold of the prize in the same way he was laid hold of, or apprehended, by Jesus. Picture God the Son reaching down to murderous zealot on the Damascus Road, picking him up by the scruff of his neck, turning him around 180 degrees, and making him the absolute champion of the cause he once hated. Christ by his holy power and influence laying hold of Paul's mind and will, in order to prompt and govern it.

How effective was that “apprehending”? How complete and utterly final its results?.

So how much does Paul want to apprehend his calling to heaven? How effectively, completely, and utterly final does he want his hold on it to be?

Because he wants to apprehend is so fully, he presses on. How he presses on Paul tells in v13. He has 3 points he wants us to understand here – two negative and one positive. One thing he must not do, one thing he refuses to do, one thing he must do:

1. “don’t regard” – never viewed himself as having arrived
2. “forgetting”
3. “reaching forward”

What “past things” might Paul be choosing to forget?

- Former reliance on his flesh
- Persecution of the church
- Current circumstances and concerns

Why does Paul need to forget these things that lie behind?

- What did they contribute to his salvation?
- What do they contribute to his maturity?
- What positive value do they contain (none, v7)?

Dwelling on the past has you facing the wrong way. It blurs your focus, wastes your time, diverts your passion from the goal, from heaven. They are actually a worse prison than the one he now occupies. Did Paul ever fail? Sin? Make a poor strategic choice? Sure – he just didn’t always tell us about it! Did he engage in self-pity about it? Despair? Throw his hands, saying “Can’t be helped, flesh is weak, you know!” No, he pressed on!

Do you currently reside in that kind of prison? Are you dwelling on a sordid past, a stumbling present, or a scary future? I’m not sure we do ourselves much good with the kind of therapy that examines our past in detail. Better to acknowledge, and then discard our past sins, failures, or successes, and then move ahead.

What would Paul say to someone in therapy? Forget what lies behind, reach forward, press on!

Saw “Saving Private Ryan” this week. *Great* film, pretty intense. It’s also a perfect illustration for Paul’s point. In a week’s fighting in WWII, 3 of 4 enlisted brothers are killed, 2 at the D-Day invasion. As an act of mercy, the army orders an American squad to find the surviving 4th brother, fighting somewhere behind the German lines, in order to

send him home. So a squad of men is formed, ordinary men, regular guys. Amazing heroics, fighting their way through extraordinary danger. That private had impressed upon him one thought from that point on – to have earned what was done for him. To have lived up to the rescue, to have lived a good life, as a good man.

I walked out a little teary, a little envious of the heroic issues of that day, the clarity which which they were pursued, the awesome example that private could follow. And then I realized that as a Christian, I have an even nobler example. God the Father didn't send a squad of angels, he sent his one and only Son into dark, dangerous, enemy-held territory. And he provided a rescue for each and every one of us. Don't we need to live up to that rescue? Not in order to earn or deserve it, but simply to live up to the example? That is what Paul is talking about.

Paul means what he says. He tells us twice to “press on” – v12, 14. An aggressive, forward-looking, keep growing approach to living as a Christian. Yet, 2:13 told us that it is God who is at work both to will and to work his good pleasure! Did Paul already forget? Doesn't that mean we can just kick back, let go? No, it is even more of an imperative. Clearly, no vacation, no justification for laying back. God has saved and God is at work, therefore, we must press on.

V15-16. *Therefore* – let us have this attitude: Who's perfect? Nobody here - “mature” again. Paul isn't being sarcastic here. There isn't some group of Philippians who claim to be perfect already. He is just saying that those who are mature *will* have this attitude. Another way of saying it is that anyone who thinks they are mature *better* have this attitude.

What attitude? “don't regard”; “forgetting”; “reaching forward”

And if you don't? v15 – God will show you. Not a judgmental thing either. Paul is talking about some kind of normal and ultimately inconsequential disagreement some at Philippi might have with him on this point.

Is it possible to imagine a group of Bible-believing, Jesus-loving, striving Christians who might be a bit more focused on their pasts than Paul would like? More concerned about their failures than would suit him? Maybe. Paul has given them his best shot, and he's willing to let God drive the lesson home, ala Eph. 1:17: that God would “give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.”

Even as he invokes God's wisdom for those who might disagree with him on this point, Paul again admonishes them to keep living, literally “following in line” (v16). Following in line means to maintain a consistent walk, not deviating or wavering. This is the polar opposite of the weak-minded Christians James lambasts in James 1:6-8: “the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

We are to be consistent, not deviating “from the standard we have attained” – which is what?

No confidence in the flesh, glorying in Christ (3:3)

Which attitude is better?

I don’t need to press on – I’m perfect already!

I can’t press on – I’m hopeless!

I don’t think most of us struggle with such perfectionism. A little here and there, but I think we may struggle more with v13 – forgetting what lies behind us, or what is tripping us up today. The attitude that says “what’s the use – I’m hopeless?” is equally wrong. Christian perfection is not static. We *never* arrive! But we are not to despair, we are to constantly press on! ***Christian perfection is in reality a constant striving for perfection.***

Philippians 3:17-4:9: Follow the Leaders

Paul has covered a variety of topics to this point:

- Partnership - 1:1-11
- Circumstances – 1:12-26
- Citizenship – 1:27-2:4
- Christ’s Attitude – 2:5-18
- Servants of God – 2:19-30
- Rejoice in the Lord – 3:1-16

The passage beginning in 3:17 contains two main streams of thought, 3:17-21 and 4:1-9. They are united by two themes: following our leaders (3:17, 4:9) and living in the light of Christ’s return (3:20, 4:5)

Follow the Leaders (3:17-21)

Remember where we left Paul? What was he talking about in v8-16?

- rejoicing in the Lord rather than putting confidence in the flesh,
- counting all things loss to know Christ,
- pressing on in his walk.

Now in v17-3:21 he exhorts them to follow his example rather than the example of the false teachers who put their confidence in the flesh, the enemies of the cross.

Paul’s confidence is striking isn’t it? But this is the not the only time he urges his followers to imitate him. In 1 Cor. 4:16 he wrote "I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me." And not just Paul, but those who "walk according to his pattern." That word,

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pattern, is a very striking word. It is "*tupos*." Its root meaning denoted a blow, hence, an impression, the mark of a blow, as in John 20:25.

*The other disciples therefore were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I shall see in His hands the **imprint** of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."*

What makes the imprint, the *tupos*, of the nail so clear? First, it is not a casual mark, but a violent one, a mark that changes utterly. Second, the mark is one that accurately represents its origin. What makes the mark can be discerned by looking at the mark. So Paul says to follow him, and those like him whose lives obviously reflect the change in them and are true to their origin. Is it because Paul is so dynamic and holy that we are to follow him? No - 1 Cor. 11:1 - "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ." It is because he follows Christ. As those who followed Paul's pattern bore his impression, the stamp of his life, so Paul bore the stamp of Christ's. And so he could say, "follow my example."

How confident are you? Is your walk such that you could tell your friends and those in your care "follow my example?" Most of us would say no, right? But think about what that says of us. Would any of us follow someone we didn't trust or something we knew was wrong? Is someone or something worth following if their lives don't match their words?

Why do we need a pattern? 3:18, because many walk to a different pattern, as enemies of the cross. We **need** a pattern. When Gary in I attended a pastor's conference in LA we stayed with old friends of mine. The wife is quite an accomplished seamstress - designing and sewing wedding dresses and gowns. She's been doing it for 20 years. There is nobody better with scissors and a sewing machine than she. She has her sewing materials in their guest room, and you know what I saw when I would open the closet door? Boxes and boxes and boxes of dress patterns. Hundreds of them. For all of her skill and experience, she would not consider trying to make a dress without first making a *pattern*. It would be a waste of good material.

We **need** a good pattern because there are so many bad ones out there. I think we will follow a pattern whether we consciously choose one or not. It is tough to avoid being pressed into their mold. The evils of this world, the lusts of our flesh, the temptations of the Devil, press on us and push us (1 Jn 2:16). To keep from being squeezed hopelessly, we need a pattern. Who are you leading? Who are you following? Watch out who you emulate - you're going to emulate someone.

But what if your leaders are sinful men who stumble and fall? Well, I hate to break this to you, but... they are! Therefore you have to hold them to account, and follow the ultimate authority - Christ.

We are gracious in that we forgive one another our sins and weaknesses, and content ourselves with saying, "I follow Christ." Yet what I read in Philippians tells me that I need a pattern to follow. If I'm a leader, I need to be able to say "follow me" with sincerity. Let's do away with false humility. Let's order our lives so that we can say

"follow me." And let's realize that following those who follow Christ means we will have to humble ourselves.

Our patterns won't be perfect. But as we follow the ultimate pattern, Jesus, we will be transformed by the Word, in the power of the Spirit (Rom. 12:1; Col. 3:16; Phil. 1:6, 2:13).

Second, need a good pattern because following bad lands us in a fruitless, destructive life, v19.

- ends in destruction,
- idolizes the appetites (not just stomach or food. Meaning here is all physical, fleshy appetites indulged w/o restraint – Rom. 16:18),
- glorifies things they should be ashamed of
- earthly-minded.

Instead, we are to live as citizens of heaven, v20-21. Where have we heard that before? (1:27 – Paul is wrapping things up for real!) As citizens of heaven we are waiting for the return of our Savior and King. This is the consummation of the upward call that Paul is pressing on toward. When he returns he will fully and finally transform and conform us to his pattern by his power.

Living in the light of Christ's return, we follow our leaders, pressing on.

Philippians 4:1-9: Stand Firm

As we come to Philippians 4:1, notice the "Therefore." What's it there for? 1) Because Christ is coming back to transform and conform us, 2) Because there are many enemies of the cross, 3) Because we are to follow our leaders, we are to ***stand firm***. Paul doesn't leave us to guess what he means by standing firm, it follows in the next 8 verses. From v2-9 there are 8 imperatives, 8 commands that issues and expects the Philippians to obey.

After all is said and done, all the encouragement and exhortation to the Philippians about their partnership with Paul, citizenship in heaven, etc. etc., it all comes down to this. These 8 commands must be pretty important for the Philippians and for us as well. The first 4 commands have a familiar ring, they are applications of Paul's exhortation in Phil. 2:2-4 (read). At heart they are about our relationship to one another.

Peace with One Another (v2-5)

Live in harmony – v2. We don't know what was up with Euodia and Synteché, but they had a problem living in harmony. Does this necessarily mean that we agree on everything? Not necessarily. It isn't nearly as important to have the same ***opinions*** as it is to have the same ***attitude***. We are to have the same goal, not necessarily same method. But that's easier on paper than in life. People in relationship will eventually be people in conflict. How do you deal with conflict?

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- By having one mind, love, spirit, purpose (Philippians 2:2)
- By adopting no favoritism (Romans 12:16)
- By making the glory of God your mutual goal (Romans 15:5-6)
- By allowing room for disagreement (Philippians 3:15)

Help harmony thrive – v3. Euodia and Synteche weren't the only objects of the harmony directive. Whether the person Paul is addressing in v3 is a particular person or just all the true comrades in Philippi really doesn't matter much. Who Clement was (probably an elder or deacon), isn't a big deal. The command here is to "help these women" The obvious intent of the command is to help them be in harmony. Clearly, a command that would apply to any who have shared Paul's struggle in the gospel, who are fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Whose responsibility is the harmony of the church? *Everybody's!* Really? What about "time heals all wounds?" If you just ignore it, won't it go away? Maybe, maybe not. If you know someone disaffected, what is your responsibility? This is an application of the greater commandment to love one another. Loving one another, we will not sit idly by and watch each other be hurt. Loving Christ, we will not sit idly by and watch the unity of his body be destroyed. After all, we are all fellow-workers and fellow-soldiers. How?

- Adopt James 1:19 as your personal style: "be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger"
- Follow the example of the church in Acts 15:
 - The church allowed "much debate" on all sides (15:6-7a)
 - Be clear about facts and events (15:7b-12)
 - Judge the problem by Scripture, not opinion (15:13-21, esp. 16-18)
 - Lead wisely, and as one (15:22-29)

Rejoice in the Lord (v4 - note the repetition). Why does Paul throw this in? Talking about harmony in relationships, and boom! Out of left field, rejoice!. I think this is here again by design. Consider:

- What's the opposite of rejoicing in Lord? Per chapter 3, trusting in the flesh (see [Philippians 3:1-11 – Rejoice in the Lord](#)).
- How harmonious a fellowship is it where your self-righteous adherence to works determines your salvation, and probably also your status in the congregation? Not likely a happy place.
- Rejoicing in the Lord is a *protection* against back-biting, self-righteousness

Have a forbearing spirit (v5). Gentle. Be gentle with one another.

- How many should know of your forbearing spirit? [all men].
- How? [by always being gentle].
- Forbear at all times (1 Pet. 3:8-11),
- even when Christian's sin against you (Gal. 6:1-2).
- Because the Lord's return is near. To some that also seems like a comment from left field, but it's not. James says the same thing in 5:7-9: "Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door." Anybody here want to be found by Jesus acting as the judge and jury over his Body and the world?

If this were therapy we'd all be looking for ways to have peace, to be content and at rest in our spirits. The next 4 commands bear directly on that. Anybody here have peace? Anybody here want it? Then pay attention.

Peace (v6-9)

There are two basic ideas in Paul's mind here. First of all, if we want peace:

Be anxious for nothing (v6a). We have no cause for worry. This is the most elementary principle, yet one of the most difficult to practice. (Mt. 6:25-34 read). God is in control, and God loves you. What cause do we have for worry? But God doesn't ask us to sit and concentrate on not worrying. It's not a happy-go-lucky, "que sera, sera" approach. We are given a command to replace worry. ***Instead of worry***, we are to

Let your requests be made known to God (v6b). We are to pray, and ask, with what? [thanksgiving] for what? [everything]. What is acceptable to worry about? [nothing] What is too trivial to pray over? [nothing] "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints..."(Ephesians 6:18)

It's not "Don't worry, be happy" but "Don't worry, pray". ***When you pray instead of worry, does Paul say you will get what you ask for?*** Not necessarily – but you will get peace (v7). Not just any peace, but God's peace: Incomprehensible, Guarding hearts, Guarding minds (Is. 26:3 - "*The steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in Thee.*"). So we are to pray.

Second of all, if we want peace,

Let your mind dwell (v8). *Dwell* – the word has an intensity about it. It means to think hard about something, to reckon, count, compute, or calculate. Where is your mind engaged? What do you spend your time thinking over? On what do you meditate? On whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellence, worthy of praise?

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- What fits that description? It's probably a short list, headed up by Scripture – some art, some music, some discourse. But I fear that most of us fall very short here.
- What doesn't fit? (Jerry Springer – sure, but that's too easy. Think of what you watch, listen to, and participate in. I haven't measured up well, especially in the news area. God has called us to a high calling, we are to be high-minded (in the 2 Cor. 10:5 sense of "*destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*").
- Let me step on some toes here. It really does matter what movies you watch, what music you listen to, what things you let your mind dwell on. It's not simply a matter of R moves vs G, or classical music vs. metal. Plenty of G movies and easy listening music fails the 4:8 test. Some R movies are worth seeing. But this is serious. It isn't a relative standard – "I can handle the profanity" maybe yes, maybe no. I ask you to evaluate whether or not what you let your minds dwell on matches the 4:8 test.
- Here is the reality. If you don't take care in this area, you will have more problems in your thought life, not less, you will less peace (if any at all), not more. If you want peace, take care where your mind is focused.

Practice these things (v9). Practice – indicates process, not one time accomplishment. This should be comforting. It isn't a matter of sinless perfection here, but the continual practice of obedience that we are required to render. This is back to 3:17, following the leaders.

- What is the result of following godly leaders here? Peace.
- What would be the result of not following? Not peace.
- Put this command in the context of the whole passage and it is very clear, even obvious. Practice these things – living in harmony, rejoicing, forbearing, praying, filling mind with excellence, and the God of peace will be with you. Don't practice these things, and no peace.

Philippians 4:10-23: Grace for Giving

Paul brings this letter to a close by thanking the Philippians again for the gift which they sent with Epaphroditus. As he expresses his thanks, Paul also expounds a couple of key principles of giving and receiving. This will be our close to this study.

Content in every circumstance – v10-13

Paul rejoices that the Philippian's concern has found opportunity – v10. How did the Philippian's find an opportunity that matched their concern? How did they know Paul could use their help? Did they ask him? Probably not. Most likely they watched what was going on in his life and ministry – they kept tabs on him. Hearing of his situation in Rome, they knew it was time to give. The key point is that they were looking for an opportunity to give, and that is the first principle: Genuine concern will seek out opportunities to meet needs.

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Are we eager to meet needs? Or would reluctance be a better word? If we ask someone if we can meet a need, what is the odds-on response? "No thanks, I'm okay." If you think there is a need, just meet it. Be wise, but don't worry overmuch about wasting resources. They are all God's anyway.

Paul is content in every circumstance – v11-12. That is saying a lot: humble means, going hungry, suffering need is about the same to Paul as prosperity, being filled, and having abundance! How could anyone have that attitude? Because of the truth of v13 – "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." That is the second principle: Genuine contentment comes from Christ's strength, not our circumstances.

That is a neat little verse, easily memorized (and often!), hauled out for use when the going gets tough. But does it really express the truth of our lives? It is a true statement, but it is also possible for a Christian to live his life in such a way as to inhibit the freedom of Christ's strength in you. 2 Corinthians 12 expands on this idea. Paul has suffered from what he calls a "thorn in the flesh" and when he asked God to take it from him, here is the response. [read 2 Cor. 12:9-10]

"perfected in weakness" completed, matured. The idea here is that God's strength grows as our strength diminishes. What kinds of weakness does Paul describe in v10? [insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties]. These are all things that make us aware of our finiteness, our inability to control our lives, our alien standing in the world.

The issue is not so much to go and seek these things, but do I consciously avoid those things that will expose my weakness? Make me vulnerable to insult? To distresses? Do I tend to choose only those things that show my strengths and keep me comfortable? To the extent that I do, I reduce God's strength in me. And consequently, my ability to minister and to be content in all that goes on in my life. What kind of dumb trade-off is that?

Let's go one step further, turn to Eph. 3:16-18. Paul says that it is through God's strength that Christ dwells "at home" in our hearts (v16b-17), and as a result of that, we can fully understand the depth of God's love (v18). In other words, when my weakness allows God's strength to be complete in me, my heart and life will be such that Christ is comfortable there. And with that comes a more full realization of his love for me! Who wouldn't want that?

One further point here. Turn to Col. 1:11-12a. What is the result of being "strengthened with all power?" [all steadfastness, patience, joyful thanks]

If such were true in our lives we could ask, "Who *couldn't* be content in every circumstance?" Are you? If not, ask yourself this question: Am I weak so he can be strong, or am I relying on my own flesh too much?

Do you see how these two principles work together? If I am genuinely concerned about other's needs, I'm going to look for ways to help them. I'm going to give first and ask questions later. As I do that in Christ's strength, I can be truly content with my own circumstances. I don't need to worry about how I'm going to get along or what will happen to me, because Christ will give me his strength to go through every circumstance.

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God shall supply all our needs – v14-20

In spite of Paul's contentment, their gift was timely for him – v14. He appreciates their sharing.

The Philippian's were a giving church – v15-16. They shared with Paul when no one else did. Even in Thessalonica, Paul's first extended visit after his first stay at Philippi, he received violent treatment there from the unbelievers there (Acts 17) and supported himself (2 Thess. 2:9). But the Philippians gave, and more than once. Again, they knew of his need because they were genuinely concerned, and were looking for an opportunity!

In v17, Paul says that he is seeking profit, or fruit, which would increase to the Philippian's account. In v18 he says that all of his needs have been met abundantly, and further, that the Philippian's gift is an offering of worship "acceptable to God." To Paul, the giver gets as much out of the gift as the recipient. Maybe the first question we should ask ourselves when considering a gift is not, "Do they really need it?" but "Do I need to give it?"

This is the third principle stated in v19, that **God will supply all our needs in a measure corresponding to his wealth**. This is an important one, so we'll take a couple of minutes to look at it from another letter's perspective. Turn to 2 Cor. 9.

Paul is taking up a collection for the poor of Jerusalem. Corinth had previously volunteered to contribute to this collection, and Paul had boasted of their zeal to the Macedonians, Corinth's northern neighbors, which is where Philippi was located.

It's not as if Paul distrusted the Corinthians, but just to stay on the safe side, he sent Timothy and Erastus ahead to prepare their promised offering (Acts 19:21-22). Paul is heading to Corinth, and doesn't want to embarrass them, or to be embarrassed himself, in case they haven't followed through with their gift.

He wants to encourage their faithfulness in giving, so he gives them an illustration they can relate to in 2 Cor. 9:6-7 – Like a farmer, if you sow little seed, you'll reap little crop, but if you sow bountifully, you'll reap bountifully. Is Paul the first century's Reverend Ike – send me money and God will give you a Rolls Royce? "God wants you rich!" No – God's bounty is a completely different kind – we'll get to that in a moment.

Second, give cheerfully, not grudgingly, v7. No church body or individual should compel you to give a certain amount, and you should not give in a grudging manner. Whose money is it? It's God's, not yours, not the church's.

In Acts 5, a husband and wife, Ananias and Saphira, sold some land and gave it to the apostles, claiming they were giving all the money from the sale. In reality they held some of it back, but they wanted to look good. On confronting them, Peter said in 5:4, "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control?" They were under no compulsion to give all the money to the church, but they lied about the amount for appearance's sake, and Peter says that in so doing they lied to the Holy Spirit. They were both stricken and died as a sign of judgment to the church. Praise God for his grace to us!

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Do you have a responsibility to give? Yes, you do, but your stewardship is your responsibility, not the church's. Our responsibility is to make needs known, not to tell you how much you have to give.

The underlying reason Christians should give bountifully and cheerfully is stated in v8-9: God is able to make all grace abound, all sufficiency for everything, abundance – for my wants and whims? No, for **every good deed!**

That is, God gives to us so we can give to others (v10). When we do, Paul says we will "increase the harvest of our righteousness." He isn't saying that we buy our way into heaven, or that if we give we'll get our sins forgiven. Instead, the giving itself is a sign of God's righteousness in us.

V11 says that enriched in everything – why? For "all liberality." That is, so that we can be even more generous! We can continue to give it all away! Result in v12-15 is glory and praise and thanksgiving to God, because of your generosity! Secondary result, prayers offered on your behalf.

So giving is a sign of God's righteousness in you, and is a continual process that results in more giving, and ultimately to praise to God because of your generosity and prayers for you. And that takes us back to Philippians.

The fruit Paul seeks for the Philippians in 4:17 is the same "harvest of righteousness" he sought for the Corinthians, the glory and thanks being given to God on their account, the prayers of the saints on their behalf.

What do I need to hang on to my money for? If v19 is true "My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory." – give it away! "According to", not "Out of." A rich man could give \$5 and it would be "out of" his riches. But if he gave "according to" his riches, he'd be giving millions. "According to" means of like kind. Vast riches given according to the vastness of the repository.

- Of money? That's not Paul's point here.
- Of grace? Yes
- Of need? Yes. And all the glory will go to the Father – v20.

Three principles again:

- Genuine concern will **seek out** opportunities to meet needs.
- Genuine contentment comes from Christ's strength, not our circumstances.
- God will supply all our needs in a measure **corresponding to** his wealth.

What simple, wonderful truths Philippians conveys. Paul closes this letter in v21-23 with his normal greetings and a simple benediction, which is my prayer for you, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."