

PHILIPPIANS

FOR BEGINNERS

MATURING IN CHRIST

MIKE MAZZALONGO

bibleTalk^{.TV}

THE "FOR BEGINNERS" SERIES

The "For Beginners" series of video classes and books provide a non-technical and easy to understand presentation of Bible books and topics that are rich in information and application for the beginner as well as the mature Bible student.

bibletalk.tv/for-beginners

Copyright © 2019 by Mike Mazzalongo

ISBN: 978-1-945778-81-0

BibleTalk.tv

14998 E. Reno

Choctaw, Oklahoma 73020

Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

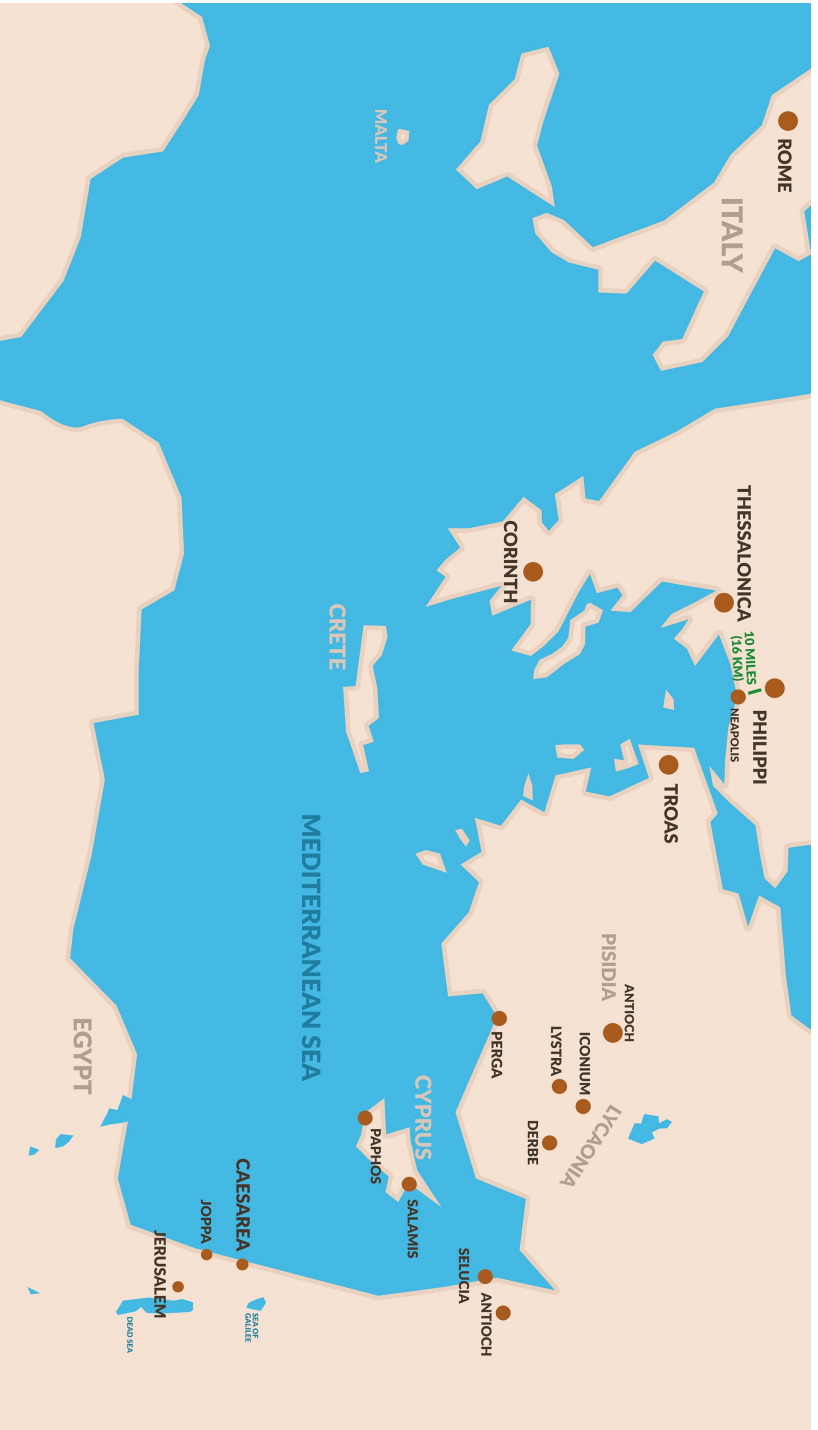
1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. PAUL'S GREETING AND PRAYER PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11	18
3. PAUL'S CONDITION PHILIPPIANS 1:12-26	30
4. THE MATURE CHRISTIAN STANDS FIRM AND IMITATES CHRIST PHILIPPIANS 1:27-2:13	42
5. THE MATURE CHRISTIAN REJOICES IN TRIAL PHILIPPIANS 2:14-30	54
6. THE MATURE CHRISTIAN SEEKS RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH - PART 1 PHILIPPIANS 3:1-6	66
7. THE MATURE CHRISTIAN SEEKS RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH - PART 2 PHILIPPIANS 3:7-21	76
8. THE MATURE CHRISTIAN LIVES RIGHTEOUSLY PHILIPPIANS 4:1-23	89

1. Introduction

The Apostle Paul's letters contain both content (teaching, encouragement, rebuke, commands, etc.) and emotion. For example, in II Corinthians he is sorrowful that the church questioned his sincerity, and in the Galatian letter he was surprised that the church had so quickly turned away from the true gospel. The epistle to the Philippians is no different.

- It has content: instructions about spiritual maturity and what a mature Christian says and does.
- It has emotion: Paul uses the words joy or rejoice 17 times in this short epistle.

Unlike other letters that he wrote in which he was responding to questions or problems being experienced by the various churches he planted, the Philippian letter was written and sent primarily in response to a gift that he had received from this church. In it he also includes news about his and his co-workers' status in Rome, and finishes with an encouragement to pursue a mature Christian lifestyle.



HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY OF PHILIPPI

The city of Philippi was 10 miles inland from its harbor city, Neapolis, in the region of Macedonia and located on a major Roman road, the Via Egnatia. It was named after Philip of Macedon, Alexander the Great's father. In 42 BC, it was made into a Roman colony and as such was intended to be a miniature version of the city of Rome. In 31 BC, Augustus, the first emperor of the Roman Empire, transported a large number of Roman veterans to Philippi and granted it the "Lus Italicum" status which placed it on par with colonies located in Italy.

This meant that Philippi was governed under Roman, rather than local Greek law. People who were born in the city received Roman citizenship, protection under Roman law and were exempt from certain taxes. For example, they were not required to pay land tax or the poll tax which was a personal levy on every citizen regardless of income or property.

Philippi was a place where a Roman character had been imposed over what was originally a Greek city. The language spoken there was not Greek but Latin. The city was governed by two officials who were answerable to Rome. Philippi was an island of Roman culture, privilege and politics located in a sea of Greek language, history and towns. Its population at the time was about 10 to 15 thousand people, 40 percent of these were Roman citizens while 60 percent were Greek. The Greek population consisted of peasants, farmers, service providers and slaves.

Philippi was typical of first century cities where people worshiped various gods and had many pagan temples. In Acts 16:13 Luke mentions that Paul sought out a "place of prayer" and found a number of Jewish women gathered for worship. This detail suggests that there were not many Jewish men in the city

since Jewish tradition (Mishnah Megillah 3b,5a) required at least 10 men to form a synagogue, and this had not yet been accomplished. It was, therefore, into this Roman/Greek hybrid city that Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke journeyed in the year 49-50 AD.

THE FIRST CONVERTS AT PHILIPPI

Paul gives no information concerning the establishment of the church at Philippi in this letter. These details are contained in the book of Acts where Luke's first-hand experience gives us an informed account of how this church came to be. In chapter 15 of Acts we read that Paul and Barnabas returned to their home-base church in Antioch having completed their first missionary journey, and after a time there decided to return to the mission field.

1. Dispute – Acts 15:36-40

Paul proposes that he and Barnabas return to the mission field in order to strengthen the churches that they planted on their previous journey. They have a disagreement at this point because Barnabas wants to bring his cousin, John-Mark, with them as they had done on their previous trip. Paul opposes this plan because the young man had left them to return home before they had completed their first journey.

The issue is settled as Paul chooses Silas to work with him and Barnabas takes Jean-Mark under his wing and returns to Cyprus, his original home. This is only speculation on my part, but it seems that Paul had outgrown the mentor relationship that he and Barnabas shared, and considered Silas a more suitable partner for himself at this stage of his ministry.

John-Mark, on the other hand, still affected by his failure to keep up on the first journey but willing to try again, was in need of a good teacher and mentor like Barnabas.

Through God's providential care, an incident that threatened to break up one team of missionaries actually produced two teams of workers. We also learn that John-Mark went on to serve both Paul and then the Apostle Peter in later years, and eventually wrote one of the gospel records (Gospel of Mark).

2. Timothy is Recruited

⁴¹ And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. ¹ Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, ² and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. ³ Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. ⁵ So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.

- Acts 15:41-16:5

We see that Paul had two objectives on this second journey:

1. To read and explain the letter sent by the Apostles concerning the circumcision issue.

2. To strengthen the faith of the young Christians in the churches that he and Barnabas had originally planted.

They also added Timothy to their number and he was probably given the tasks originally done by John-Mark. Note that despite championing the right of Gentiles to become Christians without the obligation of being circumcised (this was the issue that the Apostles' letter to the churches dealt with), Paul circumcised Timothy (whose father was Greek and a non-believer). This was necessary (not for Timothy to become a Christian - he was already a Christian) to permit Timothy entry into synagogues where Paul preached since uncircumcised men were not allowed access and it was known that Timothy's father was a Gentile. Timothy's circumcision, therefore, eliminated a potential roadblock to Paul's ministry among the Jews.

3. The Spirit's Guidance

⁶ They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; ⁷ and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; ⁸ and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. ⁹ A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ When he had seen the vision, immediately he sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

- Acts 16:6-10

Notice how quickly Luke describes this journey. From their starting point in Antioch of Syria to Troas, their final destination, it is 785 miles (1220 kilometers)! Luke describes the trip in only

a few verses, but their overland route could have taken them several months to complete. In those days the Roman road system permitted fairly safe travel and people like Paul walked 15 to 20 miles a day (24-32 km). They stopped at inns, stayed in the homes of friends and sought out the hospitality of synagogues along the way.

Aside from their work in the churches they had established on their first trip, much of their journey was a failed attempt to go eastward. The "Spirit preventing them" could mean a variety of setbacks or obstacles that blocked them from successfully preaching the gospel in the Eastern regions. These obstacles could have been things like washed out bridges, long stretches where there was no place to stay, illness, lack of funds or simply a message in a dream or vision. All we know is that Paul was convinced that God would not allow them to preach where they originally intended to go.

Once they arrived at the coastal city of Troas, however, Paul had a vision that finally provided the direction that they were seeking. The dream was general in nature (come to Macedonia), however, there were no other details describing the who, where or how of this destination, but Paul's faith was strong to take action based on this limited instruction.

4. Philippi – Acts 16:11-40

In his vision, Paul saw a man of "Macedonia" calling out to him for help, so he and his companions set out from Troas and head for the city of Philippi which was a leading center in the Macedonian region. Once there, they sought out a place where the Jews might gather so they would have an opportunity to preach.

¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. ¹⁴ A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

¹⁵ And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

- Acts 16:13-15

With these baptisms the church was established in Philippi.

¹⁶ It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." ¹⁸ She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment.

¹⁹ But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, ²⁰ and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, ²¹ and are proclaiming customs

which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans."

²² The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods.

²³ When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; ²⁴ and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

- Acts 16:16-24

In the preceding verses, Luke describes an incident that resembled what took place in Cyprus during the first missionary journey. There, Paul struck blind a sorcerer who was trying to hinder his work. In Philippi, he casts out an evil spirit from a girl who had been following them about and drawing attention to their ministry. Paul, not wanting a witness from a girl possessed of an evil spirit, quiets her by casting it out. This led to a riot stirred up by the girl's handlers who made a living using her occult skills. Paul and Silas were dragged before the judges, beaten and put into prison with their feet securely locked into stocks. The only difference here was that their imprisonment was not caused by the Jews.

²⁵ But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; ²⁶ and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was

about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" ²⁹ And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, ³⁰ and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. ³⁴ And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.

- Acts 16:25-34

Notice that the jailer had some knowledge of the faith because the earthquake and the fact that none of the prisoners escaped moved him to ask the same question that the crowd on Pentecost Sunday had asked Peter, "Brethren what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

Luke records only a summary of what Paul taught him (faith in Christ would save him). Notice, however, that the very first thing the jailer does after confessing his faith is submit to baptism - just like the crowd at Pentecost (Acts 2:38-42). Luke doesn't mention that Paul taught the jailer and his household about baptism, but the fact that this is the first thing he does after acknowledging his belief demonstrates that this is what he was taught concerning his proper response of faith to the gospel message.

³⁵ Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, "Release those men."

³⁶ And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace."

³⁷ But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out." ³⁸ The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, ³⁹ and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

- Acts 16:35-40

Luke adds the interesting postscript that the magistrates sought to release them quietly. Paul, at this point, reminds them of his Roman citizenship and the illegal manner in which they were treated. He then refuses to leave unless publicly released by the judges themselves. He may have done this to avoid future accusations that he had escaped from prison and was still wanted by Roman authorities.

And so, to avoid their own charges of improper arrest and imprisonment of a Roman citizen, the judges release Paul in a public and legal manner. Paul makes a farewell visit to Lydia, his initial convert at Philippi, then travels to Thessalonica to preach the gospel there.

AUTHORSHIP, OCCASION AND DATE OF PHILIPPIANS

Authorship

There is little doubt that Paul the Apostle was the author of this letter since he named himself and his co-worker, Timothy, in the opening verse. Early church leaders (Clement, 95 AD and Ignatius, 107 AD) mentioned this letter and Paul's authorship in their writings concerning the church of that era. There have never been credible or successful challenges to Paul's authorship.

Occasion of its writing

Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians during his first imprisonment in Rome. We know that after two years of detention at Herod's Palace in Caesarea by the Sea he had appealed to Caesar's court for a judgment on his case since both Roman governors (King Felix and King Festus) had refused to release him because they carried the favor of the Jewish leaders who wanted to kill Paul (Acts 24:27; Acts 25:1-3).

He was eventually sent to Rome and Luke writes in Acts that he was under house arrest there for an additional two years while awaiting his trial at Caesar's Imperial Court (Acts 28:30). He was guarded by only one soldier and free to receive visitors who came for teaching and training. This situation would then explain several references made in his letter to the Philippians:

1. **His influence** for the gospel on the Praetorian Guard (elite soldiers who served as personal bodyguards to the

Emperor or to high-ranking government officials (Philippians 1:13)).

2. **The travel** of both Timothy and Epaphroditus from Rome and Philippi to bring news and information from the church to Paul and then back to the church at Philippi (Philippians 2:19-30).
3. **His gratitude** for their financial help in the past and a recent gift sent to him at Rome while in prison and delivered by Epaphroditus.

This letter, therefore, includes greetings, news, teaching, encouragement and an acknowledgement for a recent gift from the church at Philippi.

Date

Paul is in Rome between 60 and 62 AD awaiting trial before Caesar. He seemed confident that he would be released (Philippians 1:25) and looked forward to continuing his ministry among them. The letter was written during this time period and delivered by Epaphroditus, one of the helpers who had originally brought the gift from the church to Paul in Rome. While Epaphroditus was in Rome he fell seriously ill, however, when he recovered Paul sent him back to Philippi with the letter he had written to them.

There are other theories about the date and place of writing. Some think he wrote it from Ephesus in 49 AD or Caesarea in Herod's Palace in 58-60 AD, however, the 60-62 AD date from Rome accommodates most of the additional information we have about the church at that time and is the conclusion of most scholars.

OUTLINE OF PHILIPPIANS

There are various ways of outlining or dividing up this epistle. There is no one "official" outline that must be used. The outline we will use in this study is based on the theme that I believe the letter follows: Maturing in Christ. Based on this theme, therefore, the outline is as follows:

- I. Greeting — 1:1-2
- II. Paul's Prayer — 1:3-11
- III. Paul's Condition — 1:12-26
- IV. Maturing in Christ:
5 Examples of Christian Maturity — 1:27-4:9
- V. Closing Remarks — 4:10-23



2. Paul's Greeting and Prayer

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

In the previous chapter I said that this letter to the Philippian church was written by Paul the Apostle while he was in a Roman prison awaiting trial somewhere around 60-62 AD. He had received news and a gift from them delivered by Epaphroditus who fell ill while in Rome. After his recovery, Paul sent Epaphroditus back to Philippi with this letter. Unlike his other letters to various churches he had established, the letter to the Philippians contained no rebukes or condemnation. Paul was pleased with the maturity and generosity of these brethren and his letter to them was filled with joy and encouragement.

Greeting — Philippians 1:1-2

¹ Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:

Many things had changed since Paul established this church some 10-12 years previously (49-50 AD). First of all, Timothy was named with Paul as a co-worker (Paul **and** Timothy). When the church was first established, Timothy was starting his ministry as a general helper doing the work that John-Mark had done with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. At this point, however, he had matured and been given more important responsibilities.

The term "bond servant" referred to slaves. Paul was an Apostle and Timothy was an evangelist. Paul had been called to Apostleship (ambassador) by Christ Himself on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19), and Timothy was tasked to be an evangelist (proclaimer/preacher) by the authority of the elders (I Timothy 4:14) through the laying on of their hands. Both men had authority in the church as those gifted with particular roles as leaders. In relation to the church, therefore, they were leaders with authority. In relation to Christ, however, they were slaves whose only task was to do His will.

The term "Jesus Christ" does not have any difference in meaning than the term "Christ Jesus." One says, "The anointed One, Jesus." The other says, "Jesus, the anointed One."

Not only had there been changes with Paul and Timothy, there had also been changes in the church at Philippi. This congregation, begun with Lydia and her household (Acts 16:13-15), had now grown to the point where it had multiple elders and deacons. The Philippian assembly was a fully matured church from an organizational perspective and, as Paul will show in his letter, one that he will encourage to strive for spiritual maturity as well.

In this first verse Paul drew a circle that included himself, Timothy, the saints (members of the church at Philippi), as well

as their leaders and ministers as those who had a common faith and devotion to Jesus Christ. They were all bound to a common Lord as they served in different positions and ministries.

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

The blessing is one, even though two words are used to describe it. Grace refers to God's favor, especially in planning and completing man's salvation through Christ. The word, grace, is code for all that God has done to save us. Peace is another code word referring to the result of grace in the sinner's life.

Here are some of the benefits that flow from being at peace with God because we are under His grace:

- No guilt, fear or shame.
- Freedom to experience joy and confidence.
- A greater knowledge of God, His will as well as His purpose for one's life.

Paul reminds them of their common belief and the core truth of the gospel that led them to this grace and peace: the belief that Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God. He states that this peace comes from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and places these two in equal positions as Deity.

The idea behind the blessing is that only God can give man "grace and peace" which are spiritual gifts. By joining God the Father and the Lord Jesus, Paul acknowledges and expresses the faith that binds the Philippian church, Timothy and himself together: the shared belief that Jesus Christ is God.

PAUL'S PRAYER — PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11

Paul has greeted them and offered a blessing which he used in other letters (Romans 1:7; I Corinthians 1:3; II Timothy 1:2). This blessing expressed a universal truth applicable to all churches for all time: grace and peace come from God the Father and God the Son, and is bestowed on those who believe that God the Father sent God the Son.

In his prayer Paul goes on to express his feelings and hopes for this particular church.

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,
⁴ always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer
for you all, ⁵ in view of your participation in the gospel
from the first day until now.

Paul does not go into detail about the content of his prayers on their behalf but does describe the feeling of gratitude he experiences when praying for them. In other words, he is thankful to God when he thinks about and prays for the Philippian brethren.

The other emotion he mentions is joy. He is joyful when praying. Again, he does not give details, but from this brief description of his prayer life on their behalf we can conclude that his work with this church was successful and satisfying, unlike his ministry to the Corinthians or Ephesians where he had to admonish and rebuke; or the Galatians where he had to seriously warn the church of its possible destruction because of apostasy. The letter to the Philippians, however, has no negative sections, no warnings and no corrections concerning what they taught or how they acted. The only detail mentioned is the help that they

have provided him for his work from the very beginning when the church was first established.

Paul's prayer life is a reflection of their relationship over a decade where he has joyfully given thanks to God for this faithful and generous congregation that has carefully followed his teaching. They had grown in size and maturity, and shown their gratitude by providing for his needs, the latest example being the gift sent to him through Epaphroditus which led to the writing of this letter.

⁶For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

This is the key thought of the letter and from this idea Paul will develop the main teaching section which will begin in chapter 1 verse 27.

He goes from referencing their faithfulness and generosity in the past and present to what he prays for and desires for them in the future: that God will bring them to full Christian maturity ready for the coming of Christ.

Based on their conduct and development so far (something he has actually seen) he is confident that God (who has accomplished this spiritual growth in them) will continue to fully mature these Christians in the future (something he cannot see now, but is assured of by faith).

⁷For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. ⁸For

God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Paul reaches back to what he has already said about the Philippians (their faithfulness and generosity) when he declares that based on their past actions and attitudes, it is only right or appropriate for him to say the following:

1. He has them in his heart: For the Greeks, the "heart" referred to more than simple emotion but included the mind, feelings and will (Lenski p. 712). In other words, he did not simply feel affection for them, they were part of him in that they were in his thoughts and affected his feelings and decisions.
2. This close association resulted in the feeling that they (the entire church) were partners with him in the work of the gospel (including his imprisonment).
3. Because of this partnership, they also shared in the rewards (grace and peace) that came to those who proclaimed the gospel.
4. God, who is the sole witness to his prayers, is the only one other than Paul himself, who knows and understands how much he misses direct communication with them. He has been confined in prison for at least four years (two years at Herod's palace and two years in Rome awaiting trial). He has not been with them for nearly a decade and longs to be reunited with these faithful and kind brethren in person. His love and longing for them is pure and genuine Christian love without any sinful or worldly elements.

⁹ And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; ¹¹ having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Paul began this section by declaring that he prayed for them, and did so often and with joy. In the following verses he shares the content of these prayers on their behalf.

In verse 9, he prays that their love will grow according to knowledge. Not simple affection or attraction based on feelings, but the kind of love motivated by the knowledge of God's will, expressed and guided by wisdom from above. For example, the kind of love Paul talks about in Romans 14 where the knowledge of the strong Christian helps him to avoid harming the weak Christian (a believer with a weak conscience easily provoked to feeling guilty about matters that are not in themselves sinful - I.E. eating the meat from animals that were sacrificed in pagan rituals and then sold at the public marketplace was not in itself sinful but caused some Christians to feel guilty if they used this meat in their cooking). Paul explained that he would rather give up eating meat altogether if in continuing to do so he caused a brother to either feel guilty by association or violate his own conscience by following Paul's example in the eating of such meat (such an attitude was a mark of one who practiced 'agape' type love).

Paul did not want his freedom in this matter to cause someone conflicted by this issue to violate his conscience by doing something which was not expressly condemned in general but went against his personal code of what was right or wrong and

thus fall into condemnation from his own conscience (Romans 14:23).

In I Corinthians 8:1 Paul says that knowledge not guided by love leads to pride, and conversely, love not tempered by knowledge and wisdom is often unfruitful and can lead to sin (I.E. spoiling a favorite child). In I Corinthians 13:2 Paul says that to have all knowledge but no love is to be nothing.

Our capacity and ability to love is increased as our knowledge increases. For example, you like someone you meet for the first time and as you get to know them better, your feelings either grow or are diminished. The element that causes the increase or decrease is your knowledge of that person.

Paul prays that their ability to love will increase as they gain real knowledge and discernment about God, His word and His will. Not general knowledge from below but, as I mentioned before, the knowledge and discernment that comes from above. The Bible teaches that spiritual love, referred to as 'agape,' is a combination of knowledge, wisdom, faith and hope.

1. Knowledge of God's will:

- a. We must love God and our neighbor as self (Mark 12:30-31). This is God's will.
- b. Agape love is based on a decision, not a feeling. We love in response to God's direction, not personal feelings.
- c. Agape loves because it knows and obeys God's will, not because the object of love is worthy or desirable.

2. Wisdom/Discernment:

- a. Agape understands how to express this love in order to edify the object of love and honor God in doing so. I refer back to examples of this mentioned before: The strong not harming the weak Christian (Romans 14), and knowledge without love being empty (I Corinthians 13).

3. Faith and Hope:

- a. Again, in I Corinthians 13 Paul says that love believes all things and hopes all things in the sense that this kind of love seeks to believe and hope in the best of others. In other words, agape love is not suspicious, fearful, negative or critical. This is the kind of love that Paul prays they will cultivate and practice.

¹⁰ so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;

The development of this kind of love in their Christian character will serve them well on the day of judgment (day of Christ).

"Approve the things that are excellent..." refers to their conduct and attitude guided by Christian (agape) love. At the judgment, those who love as Christ loved belong to Christ, and those who do not will be judged for that.

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."
- John 13:35

¹¹ having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

If they continue to be filled with the fruit (the results that come from cultivating this kind of love) which was modeled and made possible through Christ, they will thus render glory and honor to God. Of course, the fruit of righteousness produced in cultivating love is described in several places:

- I Corinthians 13:47 - Patience, kindness, trust, humility, civility, generosity, meekness, forgiving, righteous, perseverant, long-suffering.
- Galatians 5:22 - Joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

In Corinthians, Paul describes these things in terms of what love does or does not do; in Galatians, he describes them as what a person who loves is like or becomes.

Paul, therefore, prays that the Philippians cultivate Christian love according to spiritual knowledge and wisdom because in doing so they will glorify God and be ready for the judgment when Christ comes.

SUMMARY

Paul greets a church for which he clearly has great affection. His thoughts of them provoke him to give thanks to God. The way they conduct themselves assures him that Christ is at work in them and will complete the process of change He has begun. He misses and thanks them for their help and gifts, noting that in this way they share in his mission work. He prays that they will

continue to grow in Christian love because it is in this way that they will honor God and maintain (not earn) their salvation.

This ends our review of the brief greeting and prayer section of Philippians. In the following passages Paul will focus on his personal affairs and condition (Philippians 1:12-26).

LESSON

Our Maturity in Christ is Measured by Our Love

But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

- I Timothy 1:5

Paul describes the fully mature Christian who has been accurately taught God's word:

1. Love (agape): This person understands the who, how and why of love.
2. Purity: This person's love is sincere.
3. Clear conscience: He has no doubt about being in Christ and no fear of the past.
4. She knows and obeys the truth.

The applications are the same for us today. The goal of the preaching and teaching in our congregation is for members to love each other, have an understanding of our faith and maintain a clear conscience. The letter to the Philippians describes the basic method to accomplish this objective: cultivate agape love in

our hearts as Christians. This experience will help us develop other spiritual skills that need building up as well.

For example, you may be a person who often criticizes others. This weakness can be avoided if the next time you are tempted to offer a negative opinion, try saying what love would say (perhaps even saying nothing). Skip giving your opinion, pass the conversation along to others when you can ("be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to grow angry" James 1:19). This is a good idea at any time but especially helpful for a critical person who tends to talk too much.

The "work" of growing in Christ requires that we grow in love. Cultivating love produces spiritual fruit, and spiritual fruit brings us a reward: we honor God and experience greater assurance of our salvation in Christ.

3.

Paul's Condition

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-26

In 60-62 AD, while in a Roman prison, Paul writes a letter to the church in Philippi, a group for which he had much affection. He is thankful not only for the support they have provided him over the years but also for their continued faith and progress in Christ. In this letter he encourages them to continue in this growth pattern and provides them with five examples of Christian maturity that they can emulate in order to achieve the spiritual fullness he so desires for them.

Before getting to this section, however, Paul will inform them of his own present condition and circumstances.

PAUL'S CONDITION — PHILIPPIANS 1:12-26

Regarding His Ministry (verses 12-20)

¹² Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel

Here, Paul describes both the bad and good of his situation. He states the bad and the good in general terms at first.

The Bad

He assumes that his readers are aware of the circumstances of his imprisonment and its injustice: arrested for no cause, kept in prison without charges, transferred to Rome as a criminal, an additional two year wait in a Roman prison for his hearing. All of this he refers to as his "condition."

The Good

Despite what could have limited the progress of the gospel (the jailing of the main proponent of the gospel message to the Gentiles), the gospel prospered nevertheless.

The Bad

¹³ so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,

While under house-arrest in rented quarters, Paul had only one guard (Acts 28:16) which changed daily. Some believe that as the time for his trial drew near, he was transferred to a cell at the Praetorian guard station which was located in the emperor's palace where the courtroom was also situated. This would explain his contact with and influence on the Praetorian guard (as well as individual servants of Caesar's household) as they witnessed the discussions, prayers and teachings that Paul shared with those who visited and stayed with him. These things were then talked about among the soldiers and servants themselves.

The Good

The fact that Paul was to appear in what Lenski (p. 725, *The Interpretation of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*) calls the Supreme Court of the world to explain and defend the gospel and his role in preaching it, had been foretold by Jesus Himself:

When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say;

- Luke 12:11

¹² "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. ¹³ It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony.

- Luke 21:12-13

¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; ¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." ¹⁵

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; ¹⁶ for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

- Acts 9:13-16

Nothing like this or a man like Paul had ever appeared before Caesar, this was to be an event and had those involved talking about what would happen.

These included the Praetorian Guard:

- They were the Emperor's Guard or Imperial Guard.
- They consisted of nine cohorts with 1000 men in each (Tacitus).
- Each man hand-picked, all of Italian birth.
- They received double pay and special privileges.
- Each soldier ranked as a Centurion when serving with regular Legions.
- They wielded great influence in the state.

Through the guard's involvement and interest, the information about Paul and the gospel spread throughout this elite section of the Roman military and beyond to the citizens of Rome. This is the progress that Paul speaks of and, as he will mention later, rejoices in.

The Good

¹⁴and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

His continued proclamation of the gospel despite his imprisonment, along with the interest in his case (by no less than the elite Praetorian guard) emboldened others to speak out. It seems that as the day of the trial approached, Paul's vindication and freedom appeared to be assured. The fact that Paul would be released and the gospel not outlawed as a result gave the many

Christians in Rome the courage to proclaim the gospel without the fear that they would be arrested for their boldness. If Paul pled his case for the gospel successfully before Caesar and was then freed, they could confidently begin to preach publicly without fear of persecution from this same Roman government.

The Bad

¹⁵ Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; ¹⁶ the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; ¹⁷ the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.

Paul turns his attention from the guards and the trial he believes will go in his favor, to the reaction of believers and how his imprisonment is affecting them. He describes two groups who are involved in similar pursuits but with different motives.

One group (mentioned in verse 14) has been inspired by Paul's imprisonment and the interest in the gospel it has caused, to become more courageous in preaching to their neighbors and others in the city. They are motivated by their love for Paul as their teacher and the example they have in Christ. Their motives are pure (preaching from good will) in that the reason they preach is to save souls and not to acquire money or power. They see the situation through the eyes of faith. Paul is not just another prisoner, but is part of God's greater plan to bring the gospel to the entire world.

The other group he refers to is also preaching the gospel but has a different motivation and goal in mind. The driving forces here are envy and strife. Envy of Paul's success and renown despite

his imprisonment. The motivation should be the love of lost souls or the desire to serve God, but these men want to compete with Paul in order to get into the limelight. It seems that their objective was not to convert the lost but somehow create envy, jealousy and division in Paul's heart. They thought that Paul would react to their success as they were reacting to his. Paul does not denounce or even rebuke them for this. He simply describes their true actions: they are motivated by selfish ambition (caring only for oneself without regard for others). Their envy of Paul's success causes them to desire his failure and suffering. They want the gospel to succeed and souls converted to Christ, but they want the credit and renown for this success to come to them, not Paul or even the Lord for that matter.

The Good

¹⁸What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,

Paul explains that what could be a very discouraging situation (some believers are preaching the gospel in order to provoke him to jealousy while he is in prison), has to be seen through the eyes of faith.

Through the lens of faith, therefore, what seems like disorder and acting with improper motives becomes an opportunity to rejoice because whenever the gospel is proclaimed it never returns empty (Isaiah 55:11), regardless of the one who plants or proclaims. God is responsible for the increase (I Corinthians 3:7), not the planter or proclaimer, no matter how good or bad the motives. Paul understood this so that through the eyes of faith he could and did rejoice despite his circumstances.

¹⁹ for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

Paul also considers his upcoming trial through the eyes of faith. He is confident that he will not be condemned but rather set free. He is confident of this outcome for two reasons:

- He depends on their prayers on his behalf.
- He is confident that the Lord will provide him with the words, explanations and proper responses as well as the clear-mindedness and confidence he will need to face this highest court in the empire. He trusts that Jesus will deliver on the promise made to all the Apostles for the times when they would appear before kings and judges (Matthew 10:19-20).

²⁰ according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

His goal in facing the judges in court is not simply to be set free from prison. Whether he is set free or not, his higher goal (seen through the eyes of faith) is that he not say or do anything that will undermine the gospel or dishonor Christ. Whether he is set free or found guilty and sent to his death, in either case, the higher purpose is that Jesus will be exalted, honored and recognized. This higher ideal, above living or dying, can only be seen through the eyes of faith.

Now that Paul has updated the Philippians about the condition of his ministry, he will move on to describe the dilemma he faces because of the condition he finds himself in.

REGARDING HIS DILEMMA – VS. 21-26

Although these two verses are usually separated by some kind of header in most Bibles, they go together to form one thought.

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

In verse 20, Paul states that whether he lives or dies, he wants to honor Christ. In verse 21 he completes the thought by declaring that remaining alive continues his complete devotion to Christ, and dying sends him to his reward in Christ. In either situation, Christ will be the main focus of his existence, in service or reward. This realization, however, presents Paul with a dilemma which he goes on to explain.

²² But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. ²³ But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; ²⁴ yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

Despite his dire circumstances (four years imprisonment, possible execution) he sees his situation in a totally positive light no matter what happens.

If he is freed, he looks forward to being active in ministry. He will be in the capital of the world, Rome, where there has been great interest in the gospel, even at the highest levels (Caesar's

household, Philippians 4:22) and among the military elite (Praetorian Guard, Philippians 1:13). In addition to these, there are the many Jews who have been converted when he first arrived (Acts 28:24), not to mention the many Christians already in Rome (Acts 28:13-15). This is speculation on my part, but after having been imprisoned for four years he may have been anxious to minister directly to churches instead of writing them brief letters. He was aware of the opportunities and challenges in ministry that awaited him should he be released from prison, and as an Apostle would naturally be excited about the potential for growth as a result.

He then mentions the other option possibly facing him: execution. However, he does not refer to it in negative or gruesome terms (death by crucifixion, wild animals or some other painful method to kill someone publicly). His reference to execution simply states its results, again seen from the eyes of faith. Should Paul be executed it would mean a different kind of freedom, his spirit would be released from the prison of his flesh to be eternally with Christ in heaven. This, he says, would be his personal desire because it would be better for him. Actually, he says that it would be very much better.

This is the dilemma: his desire to remain and continue his apostolic ministry or to be with Christ in heaven. He acknowledges that he desires to do both, with his departure to be with Christ being the greater of the two options.

He then describes the way he has settled the matter in his own heart. Being with Christ in heaven would serve him best. The end of work, suffering and the demands of ministry. Remaining would serve the church best and, he knew in his heart, that this was necessary.

²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

Paul says that he is convinced that remaining and ministering to them to grow and encourage their faith is more necessary and thus will take place. This is not a prophecy. Paul is merely stating that when regarding the two options, he is convinced (as far as a faithful and experienced Apostle can be sure) that remaining to serve the church is the better option for now.

He even looks ahead and describes the situation when he would finally be released and physically among them once again. His presence will strengthen their faith. His presence will bring joy to them. His presence will enable them to be even bolder in proclaiming the gospel.

Paul describes his present condition and future hope of release to encourage the Philippians to envision a time when he will once again be with them and the positive spiritual impact that this will have as a result.

LESSONS

In the following verses, Paul will begin the major thrust of this epistle: an encouragement for the Philippians to pursue greater maturity in Christ. Before we begin that, however, here are some practical lessons from the passages we have looked at so far.

1. Christians Must See Life Through the Eyes of Faith

Paul saw his situation through the eyes of faith and in doing so could understand what was really happening. Without faith his condition made no sense and was discouraging: in jail without formal charges, did everything right and was succeeding in his work and yet all of this interrupted by false accusations and corrupt politicians. Through the eyes of faith, however, Paul could see God working through his situation to make progress he himself could not have imagined (evangelizing the Praetorian guard, proclaiming the gospel to the Emperor at the Supreme Court of the Roman Empire)!

One prayer we often neglect to make when things do not go our way or we suffer setbacks and obstacles is the one asking God to help us see things with the eyes of faith. This view, from God's perspective, may not change the situation itself but it can change us, and usually brings with it a sense of peace and courage. If we see what God sees then we are in line with His vision and will. This knowledge is what enables us to persevere with a peaceful and confident spirit.

2. How Christians Choose Between Right and Right

Choosing between right and wrong is not always easy because knowing the right thing and doing the right thing is not the same. Fortunately, we have many ways to discern right from wrong even though our flesh is sometimes weak at following through.

In these passages, however, Paul was deliberating between two right things (serving the church in the name of Christ or being with Christ). These were two spiritually good and right things. The measure he used to decide which he should do, if the

decision and power were his was the following: in both options where did he rank?

Paul's answer to that was simple. Leaving to be with Christ served him first and foremost. Remaining to minister served Christ first, the church second, the lost third and Paul last (in that he would rejoice with the ones he ministered to and be comforted by the One in whose name he served).

This example is not the only way to help us decide between two seemingly right or good things, but it does need to be considered first. Understanding where we rank in the choices we are considering is one way of seeing things through the eyes of faith.

Good things that seek the kingdom, serve those we love, position us where we have to rely on God are options usually seen through the eyes of faith.

Options that put us first, mainly serve our own interests and lessen our ability to seek the kingdom usually appeal to our flesh and in most cases have not been viewed through the eyes of faith. They may offer clear advantages but are not necessarily the best options for Christians.



4. The Mature Christian Stands Firm and Imitates Christ

PHILIPPIANS 1:27-2:13

In a letter to a church he established during his second missionary journey some 12 years before his Roman imprisonment, Paul greets, blesses and prays for a group of Christians he loves dearly because of their faithfulness and generosity. After having given them information about his personal condition, prospects for his eventual release from prison and assurances that he would be with them soon, Paul sets the course for their continued spiritual development.

Beginning in verse 27 of chapter 1, the Apostle will encourage them to make a continued effort to mature in Christ, and to this end he provides them with five examples of Christian maturity to guide them in this process.

THE MATURING CHRISTIAN STANDS FIRM (1:27-30)

²⁷ Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; ²⁸ in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God.

In the previous chapter, we left off at Paul's comments about those who were preaching the gospel in order to make him jealous of their success and freedom since he was in prison. We looked at Paul's response to this where he stated that no matter the motivation, if the gospel was preached it would have its effect and in this he rejoiced.

He uses this sinful attitude by some as a bridge to make a first exhortation to the church concerning their conduct. He tells them that their conduct (which should be worthy of the gospel and its subject: Jesus), as opposed to the conduct of these troublemakers (proclaiming the message in word but not in spirit), should remain the same whether he was released or not. He thinks he will be released and eventually be with them in person, but even if he is not he wants them to act in a mature way.

This first example of spiritual maturity, then, is the ability to "stand firm" in the face of opposition. It is possible for the Philippians to do this because:

1. They share the same spirit, which is their own spirit animated by the Holy Spirit. They each received Him when they were baptized (Acts 2:38).
2. They are united in one mind. They all believe that the gospel is the truth from God.
3. They are all working toward the same goal: to maintain the content of the gospel (i.e. the faith; the body of inspired teaching) against change or compromise.

To do these things without fear is a sign of their growing maturity in Christ and a reason Paul rejoices when he thinks or prays for them. In addition to this, standing firm without fear of their opponents indicates two things.

1. **The destruction of their opponents.** If their attackers cannot frighten them to change course or abandon their faith, it is an indication that their enemies have lost the battle, even though on the surface they may seem like a formidable enemy.
2. **The confirmation of their salvation.** If what they believe as true provides them with the strength to stand firm against their enemies (people and actions they can see), then what they believe about their salvation (something they cannot see but must accept by faith) must also be true as well, since God will administer both the judgment on their enemies and their entry into heaven.

²⁹ For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, ³⁰ experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

Paul adds this observation as a way of encouraging them to stand firm against their attackers, and put into a larger spiritual context the suffering that they were experiencing as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Apostle explains that suffering was not in opposition to belief, as if to suffer for Christ were a failing of God's providential care for His children or some kind of aberration in the Christian experience. Suffering in various ways (attacks against the faith, loss of friendships or family conflicts, the emotional and physical discomfort felt as a result of resisting temptations and violence directed against believers because of faith) were natural parts of the Christian experience, not exceptions to the rule.

Paul summarizes this section about standing firm by stating that God is the source of all that the Philippians are experiencing, some of which is understood. For example, He has sent Christ to atone for their sins, and thus made salvation possible. He has provided "the faith" or the teaching of salvation in the gospel for their instruction. He has sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within them and lead them to spiritual maturity, evidenced by their firm stand against the opposition and attack of their faith. Finally, He has permitted (granted) them the privilege of experiencing suffering as a direct result of their faith.

This "suffering" was not discomfort, inconvenience or pain because of human error or sin, nor was it the suffering that all human beings experienced because of life lived in a fallen world (tornados, floods, accidents, etc.) or life lived in a sinful world (victims of crime, corruption or ignorance). No, this suffering was unique in that it was only experienced by those who followed Christ. Paul says that God allows believers to suffer because of their faith in Christ, in the same way that Christ suffered to save those who would eventually believe in Him. In doing this God granted believers the experience of both the spiritual side of Christ (knowledge of the Father through the

Holy Spirit accessed by faith in the Son) as well as a concrete experience of His human side (suffering because of His faith and obedience to the Father).

If they stood firm, and as a consequence, suffered for their faith, they would experience the complete life of a true disciple. To show that this experience was universal, Paul refers to His own suffering over a long period of time („what you saw in me, hear to be in me...”) for the gospel. The point here was that even Apostles were subject to this phenomenon of belief and suffering as part of every Christian's experience.

Another indicator of maturity...

THE MATURE CHRISTIAN IMITATES CHRIST (2:1-13)

Paul leaves off his encouragement to stand firm in the face of attack and adversity, and describes the kind of things they must do in order to remain strong in the faith while enduring opposition and trials.

¹ Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Those on the outside of the church are attacking and putting obstacles in the way of believers, those on the inside, therefore, must also be involved in countering these attacks by providing things to help fellow believers be still and unmoved. Paul goes from what he believes they are already doing:

1. **Encouragement in Christ.**
Mutual edification as Christians.
2. **The comfort of love.**
Their love for one another provides comfort and consolation (Greek word for encouragement).
3. **Fellowship of the Spirit.**
The strength that comes from consciously sharing the Holy Spirit. The type of relationship that only two Spirit-filled people can have.
4. **Affection and compassion.**
This is actual expressed love seen in physical affection, service and the knowledge that other Christians know, understand and share each other's burdens.

Paul is saying that if these things are there, then add the following in order to complete his joy because in doing so they will be growing in Christ as they should.

1. Be of the same mind by believing and preaching the same gospel.
2. Maintain the same mindset concerning one another, which includes some things already mentioned (love, unity and common goals - faithfulness/salvation).

3. Get rid of selfishness and pride. Paul even lays out a practical way to bring this about.
 - a. Humble your mind (your estimation of self).
 - b. Raise others above yourself so you can clearly see them and their worth.
 - c. Consider and see other people's needs, not only your own.

These things they know and can implement until Jesus appears.

⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Here Paul leaves off the things he knows that they have (faith, love, unity, humility, compassion) and calls on them to go beyond these to imitate Christ Himself, the end state of Christian maturity. What does this imitation of Christ require? Very simply, it calls for the emptying of self. For Jesus, the emptying of self-required that He submit to God's plan of salvation which sought to save man from condemnation due to sin resulting in spiritual death. This idea Paul explains in several stages:

1. Jesus is God, has always been God and because of this neither aspired to be divine (He already was) nor refused to alter His divine nature in some way (in order to save mankind).

2. Jesus altered His divine nature by taking on a human nature incorporated into His divine nature. He gave up nothing of His godly nature in doing this, He merely altered His nature to include and thus permit His interactions with humans as a human being Himself, thus becoming fully human while remaining fully divine.

3. He then emptied His human nature of any glorious appearance that His divine nature would cast on Him as a man (think of what He appeared like on the Mount of Transfiguration, His glorified body shining brightly through His human frame, but this state revealed only to His closest three Apostles - Matthew 17:2-4). He, instead, was born to poor people and experienced normal human life, suffering and temptations (Hebrews 4:15). In addition to taking on a human nature (unaffected by His divine nature) in order to complete His divinely appointed mission, He allowed Himself to be unjustly executed as a common slave (only slaves were subject to execution by crucifixion according to Roman Law). Some think that "He emptied Himself" means that He emptied Himself of part or all of His divine nature and replaced it with a human nature, but this is incorrect for several reasons:
 - God cannot become less than God or else He would not be divine.

 - If Jesus exchanged His divine nature for a human one then He would only be human while on earth and this is not what the Bible teaches (John 1:1-8; Colossians 1:15-20) where both John and Paul explain in detail the dual nature of Jesus. "He was God and man simultaneously" (Lenski, *Commentary on Philippians* p. 770-787).

In context, Paul is not asking the Philippians to somehow submit to a cruel and unjust death in order to imitate Christ (although many have done so in their service to Jesus). The broader lesson for all Christians who seek Christian maturity is that our imitation of Christ really begins when we start the process of emptying ourselves of "self." As God, Jesus had no need and no possibility of becoming less divine, however He did have options as far as the human nature He incorporated into His divine nature was concerned (e.g. king or common man, rich or poor, respected or rejected, victory through power or victory through weakness, refuse the cup of suffering or drink the cup, His will or His Father's will). As Paul writes, He emptied Himself to the point of dying a cruel death like a common criminal. His emptying of self was dictated by the will of the Father in completing the plan for man's salvation.

For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.
- John 6:38

In the same way the emptying of self in our lives resulting in Christian maturity as we imitate Christ requires us to constantly seek and obey God's will instead of our own will for our lives. This does not necessarily mean we will be poor, unjustly accused or executed for our faith. It does mean, however, that we will suffer the emotional as well as the physical pain that comes as a result of denying our own will, desires and flesh in order to do the will and purpose of Christ in our lives.

Paul does not give specific examples of this emptying of ourselves but provides the glorious results of this as it took place in the life of Jesus.

⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus emptied His human nature of any glory that it might have exhibited because it was embedded in His divine nature. However, once His mission was completed, God raised Him from the dead not as His emptied self, but as His glorious self. We see this as the gospel writers described His appearances after His resurrection in the glorious and exalted form Paul speaks of here.

In addition to His glorious appearance, Jesus' resurrection also confirms that He is now exalted above every other human prophet and proclaimed savior who ever lived or will live. Peter states this in Acts 4:12.

And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."
- Acts 4:12

Jesus was rejected and put on a cross as the lowest of slaves, but after His resurrection the way of salvation can now only be accessed through Him. Jesus, the God/Man, is Lord above all. It is implied that the emptying of ourselves in order to be filled with Christ will also, after our own resurrection, yield similar glorious and eternal results (I Corinthians 15:50-58).

SUMMARY (2:12-13)

¹² So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Paul adds a word of encouragement to all those who would seek maturity by imitating this emptying of self primarily achieved by the effort to obey God's will. He is happy to note that they have done this in the past when he was with them and have continued to do so despite his absence (at least four years during his imprisonment).

"Working out their salvation in fear and trembling" is an encouragement to keep the faith and maintain their walk with God recognizing that Satan, through his lies and the draw of the world, are constant threats to their souls. Fear and trembling because the danger is real and they need to be careful (I Peter 5:8).

The good news, however, is that God Himself, through the Holy Spirit, His word and His church are partners with the Christian who seeks to know and imitate Christ. When these partners agree on what they desire, there is great joy and confidence for success. I can, therefore, be confident that what I desire (to empty myself of "self" and fill myself with Christ) is according to God's will and He through the Spirit, Word and church will joyfully accomplish this in me.

So, Paul describes an important indicator of the maturing Christian: the desire to imitate Christ. This, he says, is accomplished as the believer empties himself of self, much as

Jesus emptied His human nature of all reflective divine glory and filled the void with God's will in the mission of saving man. This not only led to the salvation of mankind but the glorifying of Jesus Christ as the Lord of Lords forever.

In the same way, God works at filling us up with the things of Christ so that we too will be raised up with glorified bodies to live with Him forever.



5. The Mature Christian Rejoices in Trial

PHILIPPIANS 2:14-30

From his prison cell in Rome, Paul writes a letter to the church in Philippi which he established and of which he was very fond. To these brethren who are remaining faithful and fruitful in good works, he sends a message of encouragement to pursue greater spiritual maturity. He then breaks down the idea of Christian maturity into specific virtues and practices that the Philippians ought to cultivate in order to receive the blessings that come with this higher calling.

Mature Christians, therefore:

- Stand firm when faced with trial or temptation.
- Imitate Christ in all they do.

MATURE CHRISTIANS REJOICE IN TRIAL (2:14-18)

¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing;

We need to recall that Paul has just explained how he manages to rejoice even though there are some who are preaching the gospel with the express purpose of provoking him to jealousy and envy of their success while he languishes in prison. Here he lays out the basic attitude for everyday successful Christian living: Do all things without grumbling or disputing.

1. **Grumbling:** Muttering, murmuring, complaining. Seeing only the negative, pointing out what annoys us and sharing that with others. Usually included is a charge against those we think responsible for what we disagree with. The problem with grumbling or complaining is twofold:
 - a. **It poisons the atmosphere.** Since nothing is perfect to begin with it is easy to point out faults and weakness and spoil whatever good there may be about a person or situation.
 - b. **It is contagious** because it appeals to man's fleshly and sinful nature. Grumblers usually form a "complainer's club" who impose their negative attitude on those around them. Nothing kills the momentum of a good idea or the impetus to make necessary changes than the constant grumbling of the "complainer's club."

2. **Disputing:** Questioning, second guessing. There is nothing wrong with asking a question or trying to better understand a situation or something asked of us. In this case, however, the questioning is part of the grumbling and complaining. Paul is referring to what people who doubt or refuse to submit do in their resistance to something or someone else's will. They challenge, question or resist the authority, necessity or fairness of what may be taking place. They reason against the thing they are complaining about.

Remember the context in which Paul exhorts them to avoid this type of behavior. In verse 12 he has told them to work out their salvation in fear and trembling. In other words, mature Christians understand that in their walk of faith with the Lord there will be an effort by Satan to undermine their belief through various trials and temptations, even direct attacks on their souls. Fear and trembling because some have fallen away or succumbed to temptation and lost their salvation as a result.

In view of this, Paul instructs them not to play into Satan's hands by grumbling or questioning various aspects of their Christian experience, especially when facing opposition, trials and personal suffering on account of their faith. For example, doubting God's love when suffering on account of one's faith, or complaining about the difficulty or inconvenience of various types of service or conduct required of us. Then there are the various complaints or questions concerning the conduct, sincerity, value or authority of fellow Christians, especially those responsible for teaching or leadership in the church. This type of conduct or attitude actually undermines the development of spiritual maturity in a Christian.

¹⁵ so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,

¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.

In these verses, Paul explains how those who avoid these things will be viewed. He also mentions the rewards awaiting not only those who refrain from this type of behavior, but also for the one who taught them how to be mature in Christ.

Another word for "innocent" in verse 15 is "unmixed." The idea is that even though Christians are in the world and constantly come into contact with worldly ideas, people and activities, they remain unmixed with these. They remain who they are and not affected or influenced by the world. This conduct, coupled with the fact that they also obey and proclaim the gospel, produces light in the dark world of ignorance, sin and death.

In verse 16 Paul rejoices in this fact because it means that his work as a teacher and mentor as well as his personal suffering for the cause of the gospel will not be wasted in this case.

¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. ¹⁸ You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.

Even though Paul was confident of his imminent release (Philippians 1:24-25) he looks to the future and his probable end as a martyr. In Jewish worship, a drink offering of wine was poured out on the side of the altar. This represented the fruit of

man's work or labor offered to God. Paul says that he rejoiced in the fact that his work or ministry on their behalf is and will probably be offered up in the future in martyrdom. He encourages them to share his joy that God would grant him this final opportunity to serve and glorify Him.

It is interesting that he uses the "drink offering" imagery of poured out wine because as a Roman citizen his execution would be by decapitation (not crucifixion) and this type of death would produce a gushing out of blood as the head would be cut away from the body.

TWO EXAMPLES OF MATURITY IN CHRIST (2:19-30)

Paul leaves the lofty vision of his probable martyrdom in the future and returns quite abruptly to matters at hand, namely some information about two of his coworkers, Timothy and Epaphroditus, both examples of mature Christians.

Timothy

We first encounter Timothy in Acts 16:1 while Paul was on his second missionary journey. He was from Lystra (North Galatia/modern Turkey), a church the Apostle had established in 49-53 AD. Timothy's mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, were Christians, and his father was a Greek unbeliever. He joined Paul in 51 AD and along with Luke was one of Paul's closest traveling companions. He ministered to Paul while he was in prison as we read here in Philippians. He seems to have been a timid man, not dealing well with confrontation and often ill with stomach issues (I Timothy 5:23). He was commended into ministry by Paul and the elders (I Timothy 4:14) and eventually sent to work with the church at Ephesus.

¹⁹ But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition.

Remember that Paul expects to be released but this has not yet happened. His intention is twofold in sending Timothy:

1. To bring them news of his release and condition.
2. To assess their situation and bring news back to Paul about the Philippians.

Paul's hope is that Timothy will both bring and return good news that will encourage everyone.

²⁰ For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. ²² But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father. ²³ Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly.

Paul describes Timothy as one who cares about the church (specifically the Philippians) as much as he does. They are equally yoked in their concern for the welfare of these Philippian brethren. He contrasts Timothy with the preachers he spoke of in the first chapter, men who preached for gain or to provoke jealousy or envy in Paul. Timothy, he says, is not like these men having faithfully served with Paul and considered by Paul, not simply as a coworker, but a beloved son serving his father (very much like Jesus served His heavenly Father).

This person, that Paul loves as a son, who is a faithful and mature Christian worker will be sent to encourage them as soon as Paul has definite news about his release from prison, which he thinks will be soon.

In the meantime, Paul will send them Epaphroditus.

Epaphroditus

This brother, sometimes referred to by the contracted form for his name, Epaphras (the name means lovely or handsome) is referred to as the one who first preached to the Colossians (Colossians 1:7) and was sent by the Philippian church with a gift for Paul, and to find out about his circumstances. We do not have much information about him other than his appearance here with Paul and a reference to him as one of the early missionaries who may have planted the church in his home city of Colossae (Colossians 4:10-14).

²⁵ But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need;

Paul will, therefore, wait until he has definite news of his release before sending Timothy to them, but Epaphroditus, who has recently arrived from Philippi to deliver their gift, will be sent back right away. There is not much personal or historical information in the Bible about this man, but the little we do have paints a very good picture of this mature Christian servant. Note what Paul says about him in a single verse (verse 25):

1. **Brother in the Lord.**
Spiritual family.
2. **Fellow worker.**
A helper in the task of preaching, teaching the gospel.
3. **Soldier.**
Someone to carry on the fight with Paul.
4. **Messenger.**
Not just a "messenger boy" but a duly appointed commissioner sent by the church for a specific task.
5. **Minister.**
He was specifically sent by the Philippians to serve Paul's needs while in prison, not simply sent to deliver a gift of money for his support.

Paul adds an explanation concerning Epaphroditus' return. Apparently, he was sent to stay and help Paul in his work but shortly after his arrival in Rome he fell seriously ill. The news of his near fatal illness got back to the Philippians somehow and they began to worry, not knowing of his condition and whether or not he had survived.

²⁶ because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. ²⁷ For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you.

In a way, Paul was giving up any further service or comfort that Epaphroditus could have provided him by sending this brother back sooner with his letter, not wanting the Philippians to suffer any more anxiety over his condition. Note that Paul says that God healed Epaphroditus since he was at the point of death (and apparently, no doctors or man-made remedies had worked).

29 Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; 30 because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

Paul sends him back with an exhortation to the Philippians to receive him with honor (because he risked his life to carry out the tasks they sent him to complete), and receive him with joy because God saved him. Paul was encouraged by him, therefore, the Philippians' choice of this man for this mission was justified. Things did not go the way that they had planned (Epaphroditus delivers the gift, stays to minister, returns when Paul is freed) but with God's help they have reason to rejoice (Paul receives their gift and is due to be freed sooner than expected and Epaphroditus is saved from death and returns sooner as well).

SUMMARY

Paul, in encouraging the Philippians to strive for spiritual maturity, notes that one mark of a mature Christian is the lack of complaining and arguing in dealing with the various challenges associated with living among unbelievers in a fallen world, and carrying out Christian service and ministry.

He then provides examples of Christian maturity as embodied in two of his co-workers: Timothy and Epaphroditus who each, without grumbling or negative questioning, carried out their

ministries in such a way that God was honored, the church was edified and non-believers were exposed to the light of the gospel.

So far in his letter Paul has demonstrated that cultivating spiritual maturity requires that Christians:

1. Stand firm in the faith.
2. Imitate Christ in action and reaction.
3. Rejoice in times of trial (in the passage describing his imprisonment, future martyrdom and Epaphroditus' illness he uses the words joy and rejoice six times).

LESSON

Ministry is Never Without Trials

As far as we know Paul was never persecuted or made to suffer because he was a Pharisee. It was after his conversion, and more importantly, when he began to minister (by speaking out concerning Christ) that the pushback began. The more effective and fruitful his ministry, the greater the trials, obstacles and persecution became. When they have to kill you to shut you up, the world is paying you the greatest compliment on the effectiveness of your ministry and witness. This is why both Paul (in this section) and Peter in Acts 4:23-24; 5:41 rejoiced when threatened with death because of their ministry.

The lesson for us today is that we should not be surprised, discouraged or give in to whining or second guessing God when our efforts at improving ourselves, doing something good for someone else or serving the church in some way are met with

personal difficulties, ingratitude, indifference, unfair accusations or all kinds of roadblocks, this is normal.

The moment a Christian makes an effort to grow, to expand his service or to give more time, effort and money to the church, he becomes a threat to the evil one and the enemy spirits Paul talks about in Ephesians 6. They do not want the gospel spread so any effort to do so will be opposed by them. They do not want people to believe so they will fill the road to belief with all kinds of obstacles (e.g. temptations, false teachings, hypocritical Christians). They do not want Christians who are sitting idly by to become proactive in their faith and their most subtle, vicious and powerful attacks are reserved for believers who want to mature and become more like Christ. Our chances of meeting and overcoming our enemy in our efforts to mature in Christ will greatly increase if we know that there is an enemy and he will eventually be on the attack.

However, God equips us (the Word, the Spirit, the church) for eventual attacks and intervenes so we do not become overwhelmed. For example, God saved Epaphroditus from death because his death might have overwhelmed Paul and the Philippians at a time when he was nearing the end of a long and difficult period in prison.

Paul rejoiced and encouraged the Philippians to rejoice despite these trials because:

- They knew that their suffering was caused by and in service to the gospel of Christ. They suffered as He suffered.
- God was with them and helping them bear under these trials.

- Their rejoicing was a witness that the Spirit that was in them as Christians was exceedingly greater than the evil spirit in the world that caused their suffering.

In the end, their rejoicing in the midst of trial signaled that even though they may have lost the physical battle, they were winning the spiritual war.



6. The Mature Christian Seeks Righteousness by Faith - Part 1

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-6

So far in this letter to the Philippian church Paul has pronounced a blessing on them, given them news regarding his personal status as he awaits trial in Rome and his plans to revisit them when he is freed from prison which he feels is imminent. In the meantime, he commends them for their faithfulness and generosity, and he encourages them to pursue greater Christian maturity. He then proceeds to describe five examples of the maturity all Christians should seek after:

1. Christians should stand firm in the Lord and in the faith despite trials, attacks and temptations.
2. Christians imitate Christ and not those in the world.
3. Christians are not defeated by trials, they rejoice during trials knowing that victory awaits them and that trials are tests of faith.

In this chapter, we will examine the fourth example of Christian maturity, the fact that mature Christians seek righteousness by faith not by works.

THE MATURE CHRISTIAN SEEKS RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH (3:1-21)

A Warning

¹ Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.

Paul has a warning to impart but prefaces this with an exhortation to rejoice in the Lord since this should be the standard "go to" position for Christians no matter what the conditions or situation. His warning will not be about something new, it will address an ongoing concern that he has probably warned them about in the past. He assures them that he is not troubled by repeating this warning and is confident that in doing so he is guarding their souls from the errors taught by the false teachers who are creeping into the church and causing trouble. The false teachers were referred to as "Judaizers" and they promoted the idea that you had to become a Jew (by circumcision) first, before you could become a Christian and thus be saved.

The Enemy Defined (3:2-3)

² Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;

Paul goes directly to the core of the matter. To refer to someone as a dog was a serious insult since, in those days, dogs were not kept as pets but wandered aimlessly, usually in packs and acted as scavengers. It was a term the Jews used to denigrate Gentiles.

The Judaizers were "workers" but their efforts and activities were evil and had a destructive result: the falling away of a believer from Christ and His salvation. The symbol of their teaching was circumcision, which they insisted was necessary for salvation. Their thinking was that Christianity was part of Judaism, therefore if a Gentile wanted to become a Christian, he had to first submit to Jewish regulations which included food laws and other requirements, but the main demand was circumcision. Circumcision was an ancient practice among the Jews, beginning with Abraham, and it signified that the individual was included in the covenant relationship between God and the Jewish people. All Jewish boys were to be circumcised eight days after birth (Luke 2:21).

Circumcision, much like animal sacrifice, was a preview or forerunner of things to come when Christ appeared. The sacrifices of the temple previewed a time when Jesus, the Lamb of God, would sacrifice Himself for the sins of all men (1 John 2:2). The physical circumcision performed on the body was a sign of one's willingness to obey God and be one of His chosen people. This, however, was a preview of a time when God's people would be regenerated by God's Holy Spirit from within and be circumcised spiritually. Physical circumcision would no longer be needed for religious purposes (it continues for health purposes). Even in the Old Testament the prophets spoke of what God really wanted, "... a circumcision of the heart." (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4). Paul told the Romans that physical circumcision no longer had any spiritual benefits.

²⁵ For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

²⁶ So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?

²⁷ And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? ²⁸ For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. ²⁹ But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

- Romans 2:25-29

In Colossians, Paul explains the relationship between Christian baptism and Jewish circumcision.

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. ⁹ For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, ¹⁰ and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; ¹¹ and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; ¹² having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

- Colossians 2:8-12

The Colossians were also having problems with Judaizers teaching the necessity of circumcision for Gentile converts. Note that in verses 11-12 Paul explains two features of Christian baptism:

1. That through baptism Christ Himself performs a "spiritual" circumcision on the believer.
2. What is removed at baptism is not only a small symbolic piece of flesh as in physical circumcision, but He removes the entire body of sin (our sins are all completely forgiven and replaced by the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:38).

This is why physical circumcision is not required. It is inferior, it is only a preview, it does not serve to remove sin (never did), cannot regenerate the sinner (it is only relevant now for health reasons). However, faith in Christ expressed in repentance and baptism removes sin and fills the believer with the Holy Spirit. The New American Standard Bible refers to the attempt to force circumcision onto Gentile believers as a "false circumcision."

However, in the original Greek, Paul referred to it as "the mutilation." This better described the unnecessary imposition of this practice on believing Gentiles who wanted to become Christians at that time.

THE TRUE CIRCUMCISION (3:3)

³ for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

Paul uses this verse to summarize and compare the Judaizers and what they are doing to himself and the Philippians as well as their status in Christ. He lists three attributes that he and the church that he planted in Philippi share. He tells them:

1. We are the true circumcision.

We are the substance, not the shadow or preview. We are the fulfillment of what the physical circumcision of the Old Testament pointed to. We are the opposite of the mutilation. From a religious and theological perspective, we are the legitimate children of God, not inferior to Jews or Jewish Christians (which the Judaizers were suggesting with their requirement to be circumcised in order to become a Christian).

2. We worship the true God in the true way.

A better rendition of "worship in the Spirit of God" (as the NASB translates this phrase) is "those worshipping God's Spirit." The idea is that Christians are the ones worshipping the true God and doing so according to His Spirit (according to the Revelation given to man by the Holy Spirit in God's word). In addition to this, the defining feature of that worship (that signals its authenticity and gives it power and glory) is that it is done in the name of, and for the praise of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, not Moses or the Law or any other being. People of all kinds worship various deities in a multitude of ways and in any number of shrines, buildings and sacred locations. This was true in the Old Testament, in Paul's day, as it is true today. However, only the worship of God through the person of Jesus Christ according to the Spirit of God is legitimate, is effective, is as Paul says: true worship. Worship, no matter how elaborate or sincere, even if practiced by billions of people, that does not glory in Christ, is not the worship in Spirit and truth that God seeks from those who worship Him.

3. We are saved by faith, not works of the Law/flesh

Paul does not only refer to the initial gospel message here that the lost sinner is initially saved through his faith in Christ as the divine Son of God expressed in repentance and baptism. His hearers are quite familiar with this teaching, having all experienced it at their point of conversion. Paul's point here is how one remains saved between the initial conversion and the time of one's death. The Judaizers were not only promoting circumcision to those Gentiles who had not yet confessed Christ or been baptized, they were also insisting that Gentiles who were already Christians submit to circumcision in order to guarantee their salvation. Paul claims that we are not only saved by faith when we first become Christians, but we preserve that salvation throughout our lives by continuing to believe and trust in Jesus to keep us saved and preserve our hope of eternal life. Our confidence, he says, does not rest in what the "flesh does" (circumcision and other works of the Law), our confidence rests with Christ and what He has done for us (died to pay the moral debt to God for our sins).

This allusion to "confidence in the flesh" is also a thought-bridge to the next section where Paul will use his former life (Jewish Pharisee) as a supreme example of one who once had great confidence in the flesh. He will then compare this with his new life as a Christian.

PAUL'S TRANSFORMATION (3:4-11)

⁴ 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: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a

persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

Since the objective of the Judaizers was to bring the Gentiles under the Law, Paul uses himself as an example of one who was formerly under the Law, and was under the Law to a degree that neither the false teachers nor their followers could match. He lists six areas where he excelled when measured by the Law:

1. Circumcision

Unlike some of the Judaizers or their followers who were circumcised as converts or as adults, which was the case for the Gentile Christians who were being seduced by the false teachers, Paul was circumcised on the eighth day after birth according to the Law.

2. Nation of Israel

He was a Jew, not a convert to Judaism.

3. Tribe of Benjamin

He traced his lineage to one of the two tribes that made up the southern kingdom of Judah. The 10 northern tribes (kingdom of Israel) were destroyed and scattered (722 BC). However, the southern kingdom remained intact and even though it was attacked and exiled in Babylon (589 BC), a remnant eventually returned to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and repopulate the land. Being from the southern kingdom was a mark of pride as a true Jew with an unbroken historical lineage.

4. A Hebrew of Hebrews

This refers to the fact that Paul was a pure-blooded Jew. There were no marriages with non-Jews on either side of his family all the way back to his ancestor Benjamin.

5. A Pharisee (means "Separate")

According to the Law the highest positions in society were occupied by the Jewish priests (decided by family lineage) or Pharisees (lawyers who taught and interpreted the Law). They were the strictest and most conservative religious group within Judaism.

6. Persecutor of the Church

If you are to measure zeal for the Law, then the most enthusiastic and extreme of the already extreme was Saul of Tarsus who actually imprisoned other Jews that he believed were violating Law by following Jesus Christ.

Paul is comparing his own credentials as one who was zealous for the Law and its application, to the Judaizers and their credentials and zeal for the Law. The implication is that in such a comparison, he is by far more pure and zealous for the Law as a Jew than they are or could ever be. This is an important point to establish before he speaks of his transformation as a Christian which we will cover in the next chapter.

SUMMARY

Paul warns the church to be careful not to succumb to those teachers who are trying to undermine their confidence in the salvation they have received on the basis of faith by promoting a salvation based on works of the Law, the chief of which was

circumcision. He reminds them of circumcision's role (as a preview of things to come) and the fact that salvation is based on faith expressed in repentance and baptism (where the true circumcision takes place - the cutting away of the body of sin by Christ) must be held on to.

In order to expose the false teaching and legitimacy of these Judaizers, Paul compares their credentials according to the Law to his own and will then demonstrate how in his life he decided to abandon these so called privileges given him by the Law for the superior gift he has received by faith in Jesus Christ.

LESSON

Satan is always promoting a "better way" which is nothing new and as old as the Garden of Eden itself. Satan promised:

- **Eve:** A better life, knowledge, improved spiritual life if she ate the fruit. No need for obedience.
- **Jesus:** All kingdoms are yours if You worship me (Devil). No need for the cross.
- **Philippians:** A better plan (Law/circumcision). You'll have a physical reminder of your salvation. No need to walk by faith.

Satan will always be offering us a better and easier way, even to be saved. Philippians teaches us to know, understand and maintain our salvation by faith even when Satan offers us a better way.



7. The Mature Christian Seeks Righteousness by Faith – Part 2

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-21

In part two of this section we are picking up Paul's argument for salvation based on faith in mid-thought. He is challenging those teachers who were promoting salvation by a system of adherence to various rules, the chief of these being the necessity of circumcision in order to become a Christian. These Judaizers took pride in their Jewish heritage and used this as a way to authenticate themselves and give authority to their false teachings.

In response to these teachers, Paul reviews his impeccable credentials as a Jew (superior to the false teachers) and his undeniable sincerity and zeal as a Pharisee who, at one time, had been on a mission to destroy the church by attacking and imprisoning its members. He is comparing his "Jewishness" to that of the false teachers with the goal of demonstrating his superior standing and zeal for the Law.

PAUL'S GOAL (3:7-21)

In the next section, he will:

1. Proclaim the superiority of God's method of saving people through Christ. He will use himself as an example of one who has a reason to boast in the flesh (true Hebrew, Pharisee, persecutor of Christians) who discarded all of these seeming advantages in order to follow Christ.
2. Explain what his and, by extension, every Christian's goal in life should be.
3. Use himself as an example of righteous living (for the second time) and warn those who are not following this example.

Paul makes the argument that righteousness comes by faith and produces righteous living which is the true mark of Christian/spiritual maturity, not the observance of rules and laws dictated by the false teachers and confirmed by the requirement to be circumcised.

Let us, therefore, examine more closely the three ideas Paul writes about in verses 7-21 of chapter 3.

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE GOSPEL'S METHOD OF SALVATION (3:7-11)

We need to remember that Paul was defending the core teaching of the gospel which was the manner a soul was saved and preserved for eternal life with God in heaven. The Judaizers were

introducing a system of salvation that simply would not work. Fifteen hundred years of Jewish history demonstrated that using the Law as a tool to create righteousness in man was bound to fail. In other words, using a system where adherence to the rule of law in order to render someone acceptable to God (righteous/perfect) never succeeded for two reasons:

1. Human beings were incapable of keeping the Law perfectly and consistently. Paul summarizes this reality in Romans and Galatians.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
- Romans 3:23

¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them." ¹¹ Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "The righteous man shall live by faith."

- Galatians 3:10-11

2. The Law was not given to create righteousness in man, it was given to reveal sin and the punishment for sin.

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; ²⁰ because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

- Romans 3:19-20

In answering the Judaizers, Paul begins with his own experience of one who attempted to achieve righteousness using this system. His check list of religious qualifications as a zealous Pharisee attempting to destroy the church was a badge he wore proudly as one who believed sincerely that he was acceptable/righteous before God because of these things. This checklist was also a way of showing that as far as being righteous through a system of law was concerned, Paul far surpassed any claims that the Judaizers might make in this regard.

Once this thought has been established, Paul then describes the transformation that took place in his life that was brought about by faith in Jesus Christ.

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.
- Philippians 3:7

The former status he described (which the Judaizers saw as advantageous in the pursuit of salvation) Paul now completely rejected and considered as loss or damage. What he once thought were advantages in obtaining righteousness were, in truth, disadvantages when considering salvation through Christ. These things (purity of race, zeal for law, violent persecution of the church) did not help him as he once thought. They, in fact, hindered him from obtaining the righteousness he sincerely desired.

⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

Paul amplifies his statement by declaring that when weighed against the knowledge of Christ, not just the knowledge of His ministry and teachings, but the intimate knowledge of the person of Christ Himself, everything he considered as precious or important became useless. Paul had been called directly by Jesus (Acts 9) and encouraged at a low moment in his ministry by the Lord Himself (Acts 18:9-11). He declares that the knowledge of the teachings and person of Christ surpass the total worth of what he considered valuable before (i.e. his advantages as a prominent Jewish Pharisee and the sum of what he thought he knew about God, salvation and righteousness). His knowledge of Christ had reduced the value of these former things to the point of rubbish.

He points out that even the things he lost since becoming a Christian and an Apostle (his health, freedom, safety, financial security, respect of the Jewish community, etc.) were also worthless when compared to the value of having Christ and what He had freely given and continued to give Paul.

⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

Here Paul summarizes the reason for his transformation and rejection of what he valued in his former life. God had revealed through Jesus Christ the way righteousness (and the salvation that comes with it) was obtained. He witnessed the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus. He was told when called and had since suffered as Christ suffered in the carrying out of his ministry. Paul also expected to die as a martyr since he had been assaulted and threatened with death many times. This epistle was written from a Roman prison while awaiting trial and if he

lost his case, would be put to death by the Roman government. All of this, however, did not diminish the other promises made to him (and all believers after him) that like the Christ he believed in, he would also experience a glorious resurrection from the dead.

His detractors (the Judaizers) were surely using his imprisonment as a way of undermining his authority as a teacher and perhaps discounting his message of the gospel (i.e. "...if he is an Apostle with a gospel from God, what is he doing in prison?"). Paul brushed aside any comparisons of his ministry or message by glorying in his sufferings since they were the result of having received the truth concerning the most important issue in religion: how one is saved.

He does not debate the Judaizers, instead he merely states that salvation is obtained through faith in Christ, not through any type of law-keeping system. He does not specifically offer this as proof for his claim, but the fact that he considers his own attempt at gaining righteousness through law-keeping as rubbish, has willingly given up every advantage and comfort in his service to Christ, and is ready to die for the faith providing a powerful witness for his message.

What is not said here but implied is the question, "Have the false teachers experienced the same knowledge of Christ and would they be prepared to lose as much in the service of their message?"

PAUL'S ENCOURAGEMENT (3:12-16)

Now that he has addressed the issue (false teaching regarding salvation) and indirectly referred to the false teachers (by comparing his credentials to theirs), he will turn his attention

back to his readers with exhortations to pursue spiritual maturity.

¹² Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Here Paul states his case/premise which he will develop in the next few verses. The question that arises now is, "What is the thing or perfection that Paul presses on for?" The answer is in verse 11 and 20.

In the previous section, he has explained that everything he has had and lost because of Christ is worth nothing in comparison to what he now possesses as a Christian: the hope of resurrection.

¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

In verse 12 he expands the thought by explaining that he has not yet experienced resurrection and the perfection that will accompany it. Christ "laid hold" of Paul on the road to Damascus (when Paul was converted) so that one day he could, himself, "lay hold" of the resurrection and eternal life promised to all faithful Christians. The perfection he speaks of is the full maturity of both knowledge and conduct in Christ one will have when the mortal body is shed and the glorious eternal body is put on at resurrection.

⁵⁰ Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet;

for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

- I Corinthians 15:50-53

¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,

¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

- Philippians 3:13-14

He has talked about his own past and the transformation he has undergone along with references to the suffering he has and continues to endure, but he does not dwell on these things. His mind is focused not only on the future in general, but a specific event in the future: his own resurrection. It is a goal in the sense that it guides his decisions and actions. It is a prize (not a payment) because it is a gift and not something he can earn.

Paul is an Apostle, but like every other Christian he too pursues the "upward" call of God which is the call to resurrection and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

¹⁵ Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;

¹⁶ however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.

The "perfect" in this verse refers to spiritual maturity among those in the church, not the perfect state one will have at the resurrection. Paul addresses those who consider themselves

mature in Christ, not new disciples or those with little knowledge of the Scriptures.

He encourages these (who have influence in the church because of their spiritual maturity) to maintain the same attitude or standard, two words referring to the same thing, which is what Paul has just taught them. There may be discouragements about various matters but if they maintain the basic and critical teaching concerning the gospel and faithful Christian living, God Himself will help them with understanding that will lead to unity. In other words, those who are mature need to maintain their belief and practice according to Paul's teaching and example, and if there are differences these will be taken care of, with God's help, if they continue in the way that Paul has shown them.

PAUL'S WARNING (3:17-21)

Paul concludes this section by turning his previous exhortation to follow his example as one whose eyes are fixed on the heavenly goal and live in the way that the "perfect/mature" Christians among them live. Instead of describing their lifestyle, Paul describes the very opposite lifestyle of those who are teaching the works/circumcision method of salvation. He mentions a few of their actions:

1. Enemies of the cross

They negate the power and purpose of Jesus' sacrifice by substituting a law/works system of salvation.

2. They serve their own desires (appetite)

Not necessarily food or drink. What they do is guided by what they desire (money, power, etc.) and not the will of God.

3. What they see as success (glory) is in reality shameful before God

The Judaizers boasted in their followers who had exchanged their freedom in Christ for the futile effort to become righteous through adherence to the Law. This exchange was seen as a victory by these teachers but a terrible loss to the individuals and a dishonor to God who sacrificed His Son on their behalf.

4. They are devoid of the Spirit

Their teaching, motivation and thinking were not guided by the Spirit of God. The rewards they sought after were worldly (power, money, glory of man).

In verse 19, Paul mentions the end result of their lives and work: destruction. Paul uses the word perdition which refers not only to their lives here but to everlasting ruin in the future.

In the last two verses in this section/chapter, Paul immediately compares the goal and result of the Judaizers (earthly things and destruction) to what awaits the faithful.

²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Note the way Paul provides more detail to what he only referred to as the "prize" in verse 14.

1. Where (verse 20)

Christians are citizens of heaven, not earth. We are only pilgrims here, our true home is heaven.

2. Who (verse 20)

Jesus Christ is the one we eagerly await to bring us there.

3. What (verse 21)

He removes the physical body through death and equips us with a new glorious body that will enable us to exist with God in the spiritual dimension called heaven. Our new glorious body will be like His glorious body (think transfiguration - Matthew 17:1-18, think angels - Matthew 22:30).

4. How (verse 21)

Jesus is God and as God has divine power to create or to transform. Paul refers to the extent of Jesus' power to subject all things to Himself. In other words, the one who rules the physical and spiritual worlds has the power to both resurrect us from the dead and fit us with glorious, eternal, spiritual bodies.

And so, Paul encourages the Philippians to avoid being influenced by the Judaizers and their false as well as destructive teachings, which he warns will bring to utter ruin these teachers and their followers. Instead, he instructs them to follow his lead in staying focused on the prize awaiting every faithful Christian: resurrection and eternal life with God in heaven.

LESSONS

1. Forget Yesterday

When we think of the past we usually focus on our failures. Why? What could I have done differently? God will never forgive me for that. If I only knew then what I know now, etc. Continually dwelling on past failures or successes has a way of immobilizing us in the present. It is what people do when they do not want to move forward with their lives.

It is wise to consider the past when making decisions about the future, but we have to resist the temptation to live in the past because in doing so we often fall victim to doubt, depression and despair.

2. Live for Today

Jesus tells His disciples that the Christian's daily task is to seek the kingdom in all that we do whether it is in the way we do our jobs, the manner we deal with people, the strategies we use to solve problems or serve those around us. He promises that He will work things out in such a way that while we are focused on that daily task (seeking His will and purpose), He will make sure that our daily needs are met.

Living for today has a way of checking that impulse that draws our attention to the past. If we take today's allotment of spiritual and emotional energy given to us by God to deal with today's issues and demands, and invest them in a futile effort to remake or mourn over things that happened in the past, we then have nothing left to deal with life as it is today.

This is one of the reasons why people who obsess about the past are always tired and have no enthusiasm or energy. They have used up today's resources on a useless effort to relive or fix yesterday's problems.

3. Focus on the Goal

No one gets to heaven by mistake or without their knowledge and consent. Paul the Apostle who performed miracles, converted many people, planted many churches and wrote at least 14 of the 27 New Testament epistles, made sure that he stayed focused not simply on the "future" in general, but on the one goal he had which was in the future.

That goal had three stages:

1. Conscious resurrection from the dead. Paul would still be conscious of who he was after resurrection (Matthew 17:2 - Moses and Elijah appear as themselves at the transfiguration).
2. He would be equipped with a glorified body similar to that of angels (Mark 12:25).
3. Those resurrected will be exalted to the right hand of God and participate in an eternal existence within the Godhead. (Ephesians 2:6; II Timothy 2:12; Revelation 2:26-27).

Remaining fixed on this goal provides the motivation to forget the past and persevere through present difficulties. God never said that getting to heaven would be easy, but He assures us that it will be worth the effort.



8.

The Mature Christian Lives Righteously

PHILIPPIANS 4:1-23

Paul is at the point in his letter where he will offer final encouragements and greetings to this church which he is very fond of. In a brief three chapters he has:

1. Offered a prayer of thanksgiving, promise and blessing on their behalf.
2. He has also briefed them on his condition and prospects of being freed from prison.
3. Paul has shared his dilemma of wanting to be with Christ or staying on and continuing his work.
4. From these personal remarks he has moved on to the core issue of the letter which was an exhortation to continue believing that salvation comes by a system of faith not a system of law-keeping.
5. His goal was to point the way to a more mature experience and expression of the Christian faith. This maturing in Christ has certain features that can be seen

in a Christian whose faith is growing. To this end, Paul gives them five examples of Christian maturity:

- a. The mature Christian stands firm in the faith, not moved away from belief by false teaching or adversity.
- b. The mature Christian imitates Christ in his denial of self with a view to be molded in the image of the Lord.
- c. The mature Christian rejoices in trial knowing that trials are a way of growing and measuring faith.
- d. The mature Christian seeks the righteousness that comes as a result of believing in Jesus, not righteousness through law-keeping.

In this final section, Paul will describe the mature Christian in terms of lifestyle: The mature Christian demonstrates his growth in Christ by living righteously.

After making this point he will close his letter with a greeting and a blessing.

THE MATURE CHRISTIAN LIVES RIGHTEOUSLY (4:1-9)

In chapter 4:1-9, Paul describes three ways that individuals, or the church as a group, demonstrate their righteous lives and thus their maturity in Christ.

Living in Harmony (4:1-3)

¹ Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

Note Paul's great affection for these brethren. He uses the term beloved twice in one sentence. He states that he longs (yearns) to see them. He refers to them with the exalted words, joy and crown. Their existence and growth brought Paul joy. This is the only church that he addressed in this way. He confesses that they were a credit to him in God's eyes and that he took a righteous pride in them.

He exhorts them a second time concerning the matters he mentioned in the previous passage: to stand firm in the faith and not be moved by false teachers.

² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. ³ Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

The discord mentioned here is not at the church level but between two female disciples. Paul considers both at fault because he gently admonishes both women to live in harmony before the Lord. In verse 3, the term "true companion" could also be translated into the man's name, Syzygus. In either case, Paul appeals to this person to help the women (former workers with Paul) find peace with one another since they have been faithful servants in the past, and their names written in the book of life (going to heaven).

Paul does not want their dispute to grow and produce a poor witness for the church and lead to eternal consequences for these women should the situation continue. He recalls a time when they and another one of their number, Clement, worked in harmony with himself and other disciples. This may be a gentle reminder to get busy in the Lord as a way of remedying the trouble they are having. Mature Christians have disagreements and disputes from time to time, but they do not let these destroy the bond of fellowship they have, nor allow their own conflict to cause division in the church.

In Ephesians 4:1-3 Paul elaborates on the importance of maintaining unity in the church.

¹ Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

- Ephesians 4:1-3

He begins by reminding the Ephesians of who they are and what is expected of the Lord's disciples (they have been called to live as He lived and pursue maturity in Christ). Note also the attitudes and virtues necessary to maintain peace and unity among those who have been forgiven for sin and set for eternal life but still inhabit a sinful flesh easily drawn into division and strife.

These situations are not resolved by force or argument, by scheming or creating factions and divisions in the church. The goal in a dispute is not to win the argument, it is to maintain the unity while we work out our differences. Achieving this requires

the mature Christian virtues of humility (having a true measure of oneself), gentleness (seeing both sides, not self-willed, not 'my way or the highway'), patience (the willingness to bear under difficulties, trials and misunderstandings without losing one's composure), tolerance for one another (recognizing the failings and weaknesses of others and not being provoked by these to unkindness or other unchristian behavior), and all these virtues being motivated by Christian love (agape - wanting what is best for the other person because of your faith and not because they deserve it).

In verse 3, Paul says that mature Christians make an effort (are diligent) to preserve unity among believers because exercising the virtues noted in verse 2 in a dispute situation is not easy and requires emotional and spiritual strength. And so, a very public demonstration of Christian maturity takes place when believers openly interact with one another in harmony and peace despite differences that arise from time to time.

Living in Confidence (4:4-7)

How does a mature Christian build and demonstrate confidence and assurance as a child of God? Certainly not by using fleshly ways such as bragging (I am the greatest), trash talking (I will beat you), or showing off one's skills, wealth or possessions. These tactics are the world's way of promoting assurance and confidence. Paul describes the person who has confidence, not in himself or his abilities, but confidence in the One who provides all that is needed here on earth and promises heaven as well.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵
Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. ⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your

requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This section reveals the way a Christian builds and maintains spiritual confidence. However, for clarity's sake, we need to change the order in which it is read to bring this information out:

⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Building confidence begins with prayer. Paul borrows from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6) in summarizing Jesus' admonition to not worry about daily needs by simply stating that they should not be anxious about anything at all. Confidence-building requires the understanding that God is the One who provides all that we need, not self. We are stewards, developers and consumers of these things, but He is the provider. Knowing and trusting in this reality removes the anxiety that naturally exits in us when we think that we are ultimately responsible to provide for ourselves and others.

Mature Christians do not worry about how they will obtain what they need, they invest that emotional and spiritual energy (wasted in worrying) into a regular prayer life that has both components of asking for what is needed physically, emotionally and spiritually, and thanking God for what He has already provided. A dynamic, ongoing prayer life is the source of one's confidence.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

The true mark of confidence is joy, not bravado. The Christian who begins to observe God's movement and influence in his life as prayers are answered and the Spirit works various things out is humbled and filled with joy at the same time. This is what Paul is describing in verse 5. Let the effect of seeing God at work in your life (feeling humbled), let that humility and gentleness be seen. It is a mark of maturity, it is our confidence in Christ replacing confidence in self, and this transformation becomes a powerful witness.

⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

And what does this confidence produce? Not bragging (e.g. I'm holier than you, I've seen God working and you have not, etc.). This confidence produces peace of mind, a kind of peace that surpasses reasoning. For example, some who are rich or powerful have peace to a certain degree because they can see and count the resources they have that protect them from harm or poverty. Maturing Christians, on the other hand, have peace beyond understanding because with God as their provider and savior, their peace of mind is guaranteed. This occurs because no matter what happens in this life, they know that their resurrection and eternal life are guaranteed through Jesus Christ. Confidence and peace, therefore, are based on faith, not numbers; based on a person, not things.

Living in Purity (4:8-9)

⁸Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there

is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise,
dwell on these things.

In his effort to equip the Philippians for mature spiritual living, Paul also provides them with a spiritual testing kit. Testing kits are used for swimming pools in order to determine if the chemicals in the water are balanced and if the water is clean. Paul provides his readers with a kit that will help them determine if what they think, say and do are spiritually acceptable and worthy of mature Christians who are living a pure (clean) life. Each of the words serve to examine something from a different perspective. The kit works to observe and rate both incoming and outgoing ideas, words and actions so that the individual can monitor his own conduct as well as the attitude of others in order to avoid approving by association the unchristian conduct of other people.

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

Paul now gives himself as a model or human testing kit. His point to them is that if the words are not enough, they are to use his life and teachings as a working example of how to live a pure and faithful life as mature Christians. He brings the whole section together by saying that testing what they do and following his example are the practical ways that a mature Christian can build the confidence that ultimately leads to the peace surpassing understanding that he previously described in verse 7.

PAUL'S CLOSING REMARKS (4:10-23)

Praise for the Philippians (4:10-20)

We know that this congregation had helped Paul in the past and had sent a gift to him with a request to know of his circumstances which, in turn, prompted the writing of this letter.

¹⁰ But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.

Paul acknowledges their gift as well as the fact that they had helped him in the past. He even recognizes that they had always been willing to help but lacked opportunity. His constant traveling and the difficulty of communication during that time were probably the causes of this. The fact that they knew where he was and had remained stationary (Roman prison for two years) probably produced this opportunity.

¹¹ Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

¹² I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. ¹³ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

¹⁴ Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction.

He tempers any worries they may have about his present condition (prison, needing money) by providing them with

insight into his emotional condition. He does not want them to think that he is discouraged by his situation. Their gift is helpful and needed but it is not what will keep him going or keep his spirits up. What sustains him (as a mature Christian) is that he has learned to be content (Greek word means "enough" or "sufficient") in whatever circumstances he finds himself in, whether he has much or little.

In verse 13 he answers the question his readers would naturally ask at this point, "How are you able to be content with little or much?" His answer is brief but all encompassing. His contentment is derived from the fact that Christ strengthens (Greek word meaning "enables" or "empowers") him. In other words, Jesus enables him to live with much without falling into worldliness and lust, and also empowers him to survive with little without becoming discouraged and questioning God's will.

His contentment is not based on what he has but rather on who he believes. Paul is not introducing a new and different idea here. He is using his own situation (a godly man wrongfully imprisoned and suffering from incarceration for four years) as an ultimate example for what mature Christianity looks like. In his own life, and especially in his false imprisonment, he has stood firm in the faith, he has imitated Christ in his conduct, he has rejoiced despite his difficult circumstance, and he has consistently taught, sought and modeled righteousness by faith to them from the beginning. His development as a mature Christian has ultimately brought him to the point in life where he can truly be content in any circumstance.

What is not written but understood is that this level of contentment is not only reserved for Apostles, it is available for all Christians who increasingly depend on Jesus Christ and seek Him out in prayer.

Paul adds an additional line thanking them in order to underscore his appreciation for doing this good deed. He raises their act beyond simple charity by saying that with their giving they have shared (fellowshipped) in his suffering (i.e. their sacrifice helped relieve his suffering).

¹⁵ You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; ¹⁶ for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. ¹⁸ But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

Paul continues his comments concerning their gift by reviewing past instances where they helped him financially, especially at times when it was crucial because no one else had done so. He not only appreciates their history of giving, but also the blessings that the Philippians received from God on account of their generosity towards him. He confirms that their recent gift delivered by Epaphroditus (one of his helpers from the church in Colossae) has more than fulfilled all of his material needs. He then draws on other imagery to describe their gift (in verse 12 he described it as fellowship in his suffering), this time he uses the Old Testament imagery of a sacrifice offered at the temple in the proper way which was pleasing to God.

¹⁹ And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The result of their action in caring for Paul's needs is his prayer that God will provide for all of the Philippians' needs. The difference, however, is that God has unlimited resources and can supply any kind of need. This point reaches back to the idea that contentment comes when we realize that God can and does do this.

Paul completes his comments and praise for their gift by praying that God will supply all of their needs. He finishes the section with a short doxology (spontaneous praise) giving God the glory for all things, including the good deed done by the Philippians in sending their gift.

FINAL GREETING AND BLESSING (4:21-23)

The Greetings (4:21-22)

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

As was the custom, the greeting part of the letter was placed at the end, not the beginning as it is today. The Apostle sends personal greetings to the church at Philippi. Those with Paul (Luke, Epaphroditus, Timothy and others) also send greetings. Paul had converted other prisoners (Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave) and as I mentioned at the beginning of the book, many of Caesar's elite body guards (Praetorian Guard) had heard the gospel through Paul, and these also were sending their regards, not to mention other officials and servants Paul had come into contact with.

Final Blessing

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

Grace (the saving favor of God) is the most precious blessing Paul could ask for on behalf of these, his most cherished brethren.

LESSON

Maturity Leads to Contentment and Peace

The climax of this letter is found in the section where Paul explains that he has learned (it is a process) to be content. Maturing in Christ is the learning process that brings us to that point of spiritual development where we are able to fully depend on Christ to empower us for every situation in life, good or bad. The great reward for arriving at this level of maturity is that it creates in us the marvelous state of contentment that Paul speaks of here. This contentment is what he describes in chapter 4:7 as the peace surpassing understanding. They are two sides of the same coin: one describes our condition despite our circumstances (contentment), and the other describes how this contentment makes us feel (peace beyond understanding).



BibleTalk.tv is an Internet Mission Work.

We provide video and textual Bible teaching material on our website and mobile apps for free. We enable churches and individuals all over the world to have access to high quality Bible materials for personal growth, group study or for teaching in their classes.

The goal of this mission work is to spread the gospel to the greatest number of people using the latest technology available. For the first time in history it is becoming possible to preach the gospel to the entire world at once. BibleTalk.tv is an effort to preach the gospel to all nations every day until Jesus returns.

The Choctaw Church of Christ in Oklahoma City is the sponsoring congregation for this work and provides the oversight for the BibleTalk ministry team. If you would like information on how you can support this ministry, please go to the link provided below.

bibletalk.tv/support