

PHILIPPIANS STUDY NOTES

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Philippians 1

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

Philippi was a city in the Macedonian province of Greece. It is referred to as a “leading city” of that province (Acts 16:12). It was the first city on the continent of Europe visited by Paul with the gospel. He crossed over into Macedonia from modern day Turkey, in response to a vision given by God to him in Troas (Acts 16:9-10). We don’t know how long this first stay was there, but it resulted in a church being formed that partnered with Paul throughout his ministry.

This letter was written by Paul when he was in prison, most likely in Rome. He refers to himself and Timothy as “bond-servants”. This reflected Paul’s commitment that he had made to Jesus Christ. It was a relationship of absolute submission no matter what the task or the circumstances. He was not seeking fulfillment, happiness, or personal peace, though it is apparent that he found these. He sought only to do those things that His master needed him to do. He happened to be in prison in Rome, but his real subjection was to Jesus Christ.

Just before Paul had received direction from God to go over to Macedonia, while he was in Lystra, he met a “disciple” named Timothy (Acts 16:1). This young man was the son of a Jewish woman and a Greek man. He was well thought of, and Paul began using Timothy as an assistant from that time on. Paul’s first visit to Philippi would have been one of their earliest excursions together. So it was that Timothy was apparently in Rome during this time of Paul’s imprisonment, at least until Paul sent him off to do specific missions that related to the work of ministry. This greeting comes from both.

Paul always referred to Christians as saints, or holy ones. The word means “set apart.” It conveys several things. First, it conveys that they are like the God they worship, unique and separate from all that is. Second, it conveys that they are designated as distinct from the rest of humanity by God. This is an important designation, one that Paul claimed was made before the world was created (Eph. 1:4). They are unique in the vast sea of humanity. Third, the term holy ones indicate a destiny or purpose. They are not simply picked out and set aside, they are set aside for a distinct use. The entire group of these set-apart-ones composes Christ’s Church.

These set-apart-ones are “in Christ,” a phrase that means that God sees Christ and all of them together as one. That the saints compose the “body of Christ” is not just a means of illustrating how things should work. It is a description of how God views those who have believed in Christ. They are joined to Him, inseparable from who He is.

Paul singles out the overseers and deacons. Everywhere such individuals are esteemed by him in a special way. He sees the saints as being “with” them. This is God’s way of viewing the Church. He sees the individual saints as being attached to people of influence that have been appointed by Him for the welfare and care of the whole. This affirms the influence of these officers in the Church and their legitimacy. Designating those who officially serve and those who officially lead has for this reason been the habit in Christianity from the earliest days. This affirms the concept as well of the “organized church,” something that we must not casually discard.

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

This is a common greeting used by Paul. It summarizes well all of special revelation from God. Revelation is the uncovering of this about God, that He desires to restore peace between Himself, and humanity and

He does so through grace. It is not that He must have peace, or that he cannot prevail in the hostilities. He clearly can. But His love compels Him to graciously withhold punishment and extend peace to those who have become separated from Him. So this greeting is what Paul's life and message are about. It was the message of the angels to the shepherds of Bethlehem, and it became the message of Christ's life and so that of His body, the Church.

1:3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.

The tone of this letter will consistently bare out the truth of this statement by Paul. His relationship to the Philippians was a very precious one. There had been pain in some of the experiences (1 Thessalonians 2:2), so it is not as though Paul's history with them was one of "happy times." But through those things the Philippians were responsive to the truth, caring and considerate of Paul and anxious to participate in His work beyond their own city.

In the Philippians Paul had co-laborers and friends. Everyone who has given themselves to ministry knows what Paul is feeling here. We are concerned about all people and in the interest of the kingdom we can work with all people, but there are some whom our hearts become knit together with in some special way. It is often that way from the moment we meet them. This appears to be the kind of relationship Paul enjoyed with the Philippians and it is evident throughout this letter. From a human and a divine point of view it is very hard to explain this, but it seems to be a reality of the human experience. We must manage this very carefully since we easily gravitate to and settle in with people such as this.

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

Paul continues to express his affection for the friends in Philippi with these words. There is no doubt that Paul's prayers for some were filled with anguish. But in praying for the Philippians, he was filled with joy. This is not because they had no need of growth, but because they had inspired great confidence in him. His intercession for their needs was always accompanied by the joy that was a byproduct of their rock-solid commitment at every turn to the things of God's heart. Where there was a matter of the kingdom at stake the Philippians rose to the occasion.

1:5 in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

Participation in the gospel involves believing it, trusting in a growing way in it to live it, and then spreading it. There are many who do two out of the three. But those who do all three are a treasure. We find that the Philippians joined themselves to the gospel in every way.

When Paul speaks of their participation in it, one thing he has in mind is the fact that they contributed financially to his ministry of spreading the gospel and establishing Churches (See 4:10-20). This had been their history and the occasion of this letter was the arrival of a messenger from them, Epaphroditus by name, with a financial gift. So to some degree this is a thank you letter to them for their continued thought of the work Paul was doing. There had been a lull of some sort (4:10), but their renewed participation showed Paul was in their heart and that warmed him. But the next verse shows that Paul saw something else in their ongoing participation in the gospel.

1:6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ.

One of the high impact principles of Christian thought is set down in this verse. The principle is that God is doing a work within the Christian community that He will continue to move toward completion until the

time of Christ's return, the coming of the perfect One. It is not just a series of tasks that he repeatedly orchestrates, like worship, or teaching, or outreach. It is a spiritual work in our spirits with a specific end in view, a movement toward maturity and completeness. It is not so much ministry done by us, though that is the by-product. It is a work He does within each individual and so also one that shapes our collective spirit.

We understand from Paul's other writings that this is the work of forming within us the character of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13; Colossians 2:1-3). It is the work of salvation, of which justification is only the beginning. He is shaping those things within us that shape our behavior. In the twenty first century we tend to take this verse as speaking of the individual process that happens in each Christian.

We see this verse according to this individualistic mindset. We see it guaranteeing that this maturity and completeness will be realized by us in this life. But in this context, he has been speaking to the Philippians as one, their collective participation in the work of the gospel as a Church. The "you" in this verse is plural, "y'all" we could say. The context establishes clearly that it is speaking of all the saints in Philippi. It describes the process that Paul has observed in them collectively and the collective work God has been doing in and through them as a local Church. It has gone on from day one when he set foot in Philippi. Paul is confident God will continue it.

Here this work is presented as one which God began, and this is the clear teaching of the Scripture (John 6:44; 15:6; Romans 8:28-30). It would not be going on apart from Him initiating it. It is a work that involves bringing everyone to belief in Christ, baptizing us by His Spirit into one body, and then moving us on together so that our character takes the shape of His (Romans 8:29). We are also told here that God will not leave off this work in us, of this Paul is confident. It is the work He is doing in the world, and He will never put it down. So each Christian can be certain that God is bringing the power of heaven to bear on the Church, so that each person might make progress through the contribution they make to one another's lives on their journey toward Christlikeness. They can be confident that this is His will for them. He wants no one left behind. Their prayer for fortitude to think and behave in a Christ-like way will be answered.

It seems very important to understand that this verse is addressed to a collective community of Christians as noted above. In this family this work will always be moving along. It is overstepping the boundaries of the Scripture to take this as a guarantee that everyone's sanctification, their conformity to Christ, is guaranteed in this life and will be brought about even against their will by the sovereign act of God.

The work is always moving ahead in the collective family of God, but a few factors are at work in the lives of individuals. Some make very little progress beyond belief. Some don't believe until their physical life is ending. A particular individual's conformity to Jesus Christ is influenced by their faithfulness to the truth, and though this is certainly within God's sovereign ability to control, the degree to which He intervenes and shapes our will is varied.

Paul expresses his confidence here to a group of people who were "participating" in the gospel and had done so since "the first day." For such people there is great potential. They are clear channels of God's Spirit. And so, based on his history with them Paul extends these thoughts which apply to all who are obedient and faithful to the truth, who do not become enslaved by false doctrine, idols, and immorality. These were all real dangers that Paul's writings repeatedly warned his readers of. They can impede progress toward our goal and rob us of the prize.

God continues to work in us collectively, seeking to bring maturity to His Church. That is the goal of much that He is doing until the day Christ returns to earth for His Church. That day will come only when this work of the Father is done. Understanding individual progress in maturity will remain one of the great mysteries of the faith.

1:7 For 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.

Paul had a high level of confidence in the people of the church in Philippi. This, along with his continued thankfulness for them reflect that he had a great respect and deep love for them. His memory of them was warm and affectionate. Theirs was a close friendship. This was a very natural thing given their experience together. They occupied a place in Paul's heart because they had yoked themselves together with him in the work he was doing, but also in whatever his circumstances were. Paul had the sense that even though he was imprisoned apart from them they were with him. His work was going on through people like them.

This great work was the defense and confirmation of the gospel. Once it was declared it had to be backed up with data, Scriptural primarily, although logic and reason are involved as well. People are asked to believe what God has logically set forth in written revelation. It must be defended to promote belief. The gospel also must be confirmed. It is confirmed in much the same way as it is defended but there is perhaps the added element of applying it in the practical arena of life and so accumulating the evidence of changed lives to confirm its truth. Changed lives provide a more pragmatic kind of evidence that the gospel is the truth. For this to happen there must be individuals who partake of grace, God's moment by moment enablement to do what He is moment by moment leading one to do. This leads to sweeping life changes over time, that others can't help but observe. The Philippians were joined to Paul in this process of grace, this moment-by-moment dependence on God and experience of God.

We rightly understand the partnership Paul is describing when we understand that it is because they were partakers of grace with him that they became such effective and cherished partners in the work of the gospel. This grace process enriches our lives in every way down to the kinds of friendships we experience. It provides outward evidence to every sense humanity has been created with, of an invisible power at work. That power is the power of the Creator, restoring lives through the truth of the gospel (Romans 1:16).

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

There is an affection that Christ has for His own that was dramatically demonstrated in the tone of his words to his disciples at the last supper. John provides the most extensive record of these words (See John 13-17), but it is Luke who captures the emotions of Jesus by recording His statement, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). That is an expression of deep emotion, literally, "with desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." John's record then captures a series of statements and actions that are the expression of this affection of Christ. His record culminates in the great high priestly prayer of Jesus for His own, the words of which are the ultimate verbal demonstration of the affection of Christ.

This deep affection of Christ for His followers should come out through His followers toward each other. It should be evident along with His desire to teach, correct, exhort, and in other ways develop them. These latter things should all be done in an affectionate manner. It is the mark of a mature and Christ-like leader who demonstrated a longing for the children of God with the affection of Jesus Christ. It is also the mark of a leader that can be trusted as speaking for God and with God. The verse that follows gives critical insight into how the affection of Christ is shown by His followers to each other in a way that stimulates their growth in His character.

1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.

What does one pray for such a people who are doing so much so well? When you pray for those, you love the deepest, how can your prayer serve and equip them for an even fuller, more blessed walk with Christ? Paul's prayer is very instructive in so many ways, which is likely why the Spirit led him to record it for posterity.

Our prayer for people should always look toward what they are becoming, the progress they are making in their journey toward Christlikeness. It should not deal just with present spiritual, emotional, or physical needs, though the need to pray for these should not be minimized in any way. The urgency of these can so occupy us that we forget to pray for the most important day in the lives of those we love. That day is the day when they stand before Christ to receive from Him a reward for their faithfulness to Him. On that day what we have become will be the critical thing, when to have crucified the flesh with its self-centered agenda will be commended. On that day it will not be a type of action or series of tasks that draws praise. It will be a pattern of thought that is rewarded, one that continually elevated the things of God and allowed Him in His grace and by His Spirit to prune the things of self.

To that end Paul prays for the Philippians, looking to the strengthening of their character and the continued invasion of their inner thought by the truth and grace of God. He is thinking of their immediate future, something he'd like to see develop in them. He is concerned with their more long-term future, the fruits that passing years would yield. He is also concerned with "the day," their ultimate destiny to give account for how they have lived this life. His prayer encompasses all these, and it is a great prayer for all who desire to prepare and train for their future.

Our impression of the Philippians from what Paul writes in this letter is that of a warm, affectionate, and relational people. Much of what Paul says to them, including this prayer, seems aimed at strengthening further this which is already strong in them. We always need to sharpen our strengths. In the end this is usually how God uses us. Our weaknesses we can strengthen, but our real contribution will usually be made around our strength. And so Paul will speak to how a loving, relational people can become more effective in their love for others. The truth is that our strength can become a source of weakness and blindness if it is not developed within the boundaries of truth.

The subject of Paul's concern for the Philippians is the quality of their love. Ultimately, love is the business God is in. It is His love that has shaped the mission He entrusts to us. The Philippian's love, like that of every local church, was likely to be challenged in two areas. There is the danger of becoming just an affectionate, supportive, and accepting people that stand for nothing. If we become that, we do not accurately depict the love of God. There is also the danger of having all the mannerisms of love, but underneath this veneer to have several factions within the church based on fleshly distinctions. That too is not a complete depiction of the love of God. Both these dangers are addressed by Paul's prayer.

Paul had come to understand that the complete love that is God and is His business lifts us to something beyond warm feeling for each other. His love is developmental, deliberately orchestrating in our lives that which will lift us to a higher plane of living. It shows itself through teaching, reproof, correction, training, and the like (2 Timothy 3:16-17). God is willing to conduct the unpleasant conversation with us. His love leads Him to execute judgment in the cases where wrong has been done. His love leads Him to discipline us for our benefit and that of His Church. So if we are to be instruments of God's love, we must be capable of loving as He does, engaging ourselves in this developmental work he is carrying on in us through each other. He is a person of warmth and affection and comfort. He is also a person of confrontation, who makes us face the truth about ourselves and our actions. If we wish to do what He does, we must receive and do both things and we must know the exact mixture the moment in front of us requires.

To this end of the Philippians imitating God, Paul prays that their love would "super-abound" in two things. Before speaking of the two things, we should linger on this idea of "super-abounding," which is the idea behind the wording of the original language. This is a way of saying that he wishes for two things to

be noticeably present in abundance as the Philippian's expressed love to each other. A more colloquial way of saying this is that Paul wanted their love to be always saturated and dripping with two things. Before moving on to a deeper understanding of Paul's statement, we can already say that our way of showing love will noticeably change over time if the Spirit is truly allowed to shape our thinking and behavior. This great Christian virtue of love will be expressed by us differently than the way it is expressed by those devoid of God's Spirit. The more basic manifestation of it, warmth, and acceptance, does not disappear or wane. But God's Spirit begins to intertwine two things with it that complete it. And when something is completed by God, it means He has lifted it from being a kind of resemblance of Him to being the exact replica of that which is His. What follows then is a challenge to develop a love that is more God-like. Love is more God-like when its actions are shaped and governed by two things.

The two things that Paul prays will come to characterize our love are "real knowledge" and all discernment." Acts of love that are dictated and shaped by real knowledge and all discernment are exact expressions of the mind and heart of God. Aside from the influence of these, our expressions of love might only be a human touch. This is not to say such are not useful. They are just incomplete. They have not come to be as effective and as efficient in achieving His will as they might.

The first of these, knowledge, reminds us that Christian love is unconditional, but it is not blind. It is Christ's love and so its expression is governed by what He knows to be true. It must be our ambition to love not just based on what we might know about a person. We must seek to understand what God knows of them. So our acts of love should be shaped by what we know to be true about God, specific persons and situations, human nature, pragmatic facts, and so on. The more we know, the more precise becomes our expression of love. But we must seek to enter what God alone might know are the person's scars or special needs.

The knowledge Paul speaks of he calls "real knowledge." That is the English rendering of the one word used here for knowledge, *ἐπίγνωσις*. This is the term used to distinguish actual knowledge from supposed knowledge, the true from that which only has the appearance of knowledge. There is much that passes for knowledge and there is a way of behaving that gives the impression that one has knowledge. This term refers to genuine truth sourced in the One who knows all that is, God. Truth becomes known to us through the Spirit as we spend years interacting with the plain written truth in Scripture, with people, with truth naturally revealed, and with God Himself. We must be careful because what we think we know beyond a shadow of a doubt can give way later to a more informed knowledge. At the same time, we must not be hesitant with regard to what can be reasonably stated as true.

To be complete, our love must also be shaped by "all discernment." The word Paul uses here is *αἰσθησις*. It is the only time it is used in the New Testament, and Paul chooses this word over more common expressions for discernment. In Greek literature it refers to that which is accomplished by the senses, namely the proper perception of the nature of something based on past knowledge gained. So to discern a matter is to select, classify and apply what is furnished by knowledge. The verb form of this word occurs in Luke 9:45. There it refers to the ability, or inability, to perceive the profound nature and truth of a statement made by Jesus. Those present were unable to sort out His meaning due to their inattentiveness to Scripture. In calling for discernment Paul's aim is that we reach God honoring conclusions based on passing through the grid of truth what our various senses take in.

Paul calls for us to have "all" discernment. Nearly everyone has a natural acumen of some type, some for people problems, some for material things, some for academia. Paul prays that we might be people of breadth and depth. Our discernment should be multi-dimensional so that we see with precision. It involves a working understanding of the things of the Spirit, along with life lessons and people lessons. It involves having a "grid," a mental understanding of Scripture so that things can be sorted out as to their essential nature as of the flesh or of the Spirit. This discernment is more than life experience, though that is helpful. Ultimately, Paul is talking about skill in discerning the voice of the Spirit.

It is easy to see that in general, as our knowledge and discernment increase, we will be more longsuffering in our love for others. We will understand more what makes them behave as they do. We will react less and extend grace more. We will also be equipped to address real issues with them so that our love affects life change. This is when we know that we are expressing love in a godlier way when it enables others to experience grace and truth. There is a great breadth that knowledge and discernment bring to love. At first glance it might seem that these would contribute only a narrowing of expression of love, but the opposite is true. While it is certain that knowledge and discernment give love a certain firmness, they also greatly expand its length, breadth, height, and depth (Eph 3:17-19). They undo the ignorance and arrogance of the bias and judgmental. They reveal the folly of the self-centered and the wounds of the self-absorbed. They bring to light the hidden fears of the self-assured and expose the false assumptions of the self-depreciating. Knowledge and discernment adorn love and enhance it so that it becomes far more than an emotion or a prescribed set of acts. They make it dynamic, a powerful change agent, even as it is in God.

In this verse then, we gain insight into why the love of God is so great. He is the one who knows all and sees all. If knowledge and discernment are important companions of love, it would stand to reason that the One who is perfect in these is also perfect in love. We also gain insight into the pathway towards being a seasoned, or veteran, or mature child of God. We grow in love to the degree that we do the hard work of growing in knowledge and the humbling work of discernment. Discernment is humbling because it always begins with rightly discerning ourselves. It is truthful awareness of self first. In his great treatise on love, Paul said that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Discernment moderates this arrogance that knowledge alone is sure to bring. Together they enable love at the highest of levels.

1:10 so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;

In praying that the Philippian's love would be adorned with an increasing over-abundance of knowledge and discernment, Paul has a certain result in mind. His vision for them is very purposeful. He expresses that in his prayer that they become those "who approve the things that are excellent." The result he prays for is that they become people who choose courses of thinking and believing that are superior in every way. In pursuing informed love, the Philippians would be enabled to embrace these excellent things, and so become people of great character.

The word "approve" seems to be saying more than just verbal approval and the affirmation of certain values. It speaks to an impact beyond that of strengthening their own character. The word Paul uses means to affirm by putting to the test. We would say to certify, to document, or to prove. In terms relevant to our times, Paul's desire was that the Philippian's be people who were a compelling and convincing documentary of such excellent things. They would distinguish themselves as an inspiring pattern and source of enlightenment for others. To others who might be searching, they would mark out the excellent way of life.

The word for excellent is the word διαφέροντα. It is a compound word, composed of the verb to bear or carry, and the preposition through. It came to be used of those things that prove better than others over time. As time passes it assigns a relative value to things. There are certain things that time "carries beyond" others and proves them to be of surpassing worth. They are the things that turn out to really matter, proven things that add the exclamation point to one's life for all of eternity. Paul held God's vision for people with respect to the Philippians. It was that they would be a documentary of such things as these. By mimicking the Philippians, others would be able to find their way to such Christlikeness.

The remaining words in this verse describe the pattern they would create for others. They would become people who were sincere, meaning genuine, and without contradiction. They would be without offense, blameless regarding those visible sins that destroy credibility. These terms refer to a quality of moral life

that set one apart and distinguished them in the eyes of others as people of God. Such people have more than the words of the faith. They have credibility that lends impact.

This position of influence is a wonderful and blessed position to occupy. In pressing for it, we must travel back to be informed by the previous verse. We find that Paul is envisioning and praying for a chain reaction. A particular kind of love would produce an excellence in them. This excellence then, would lead to lasting credibility and impact until the time of Christ's return. A series of blessings flow from our growing in love, a particular kind of love that is increasingly shaped by knowledge and discernment. The next verse puts the final touch on this picture of the achievements of grace.

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

A love that is governed by true knowledge and all discernment results in this kind of life, one that is full of the fruit of righteousness and so brings glory and praise to God. This last phrase is more than just a pious add-on. The glory and praise of God is the purpose of all things. Since this is the grand design of all that is, the journey of "informed love" allows us to live according to our design. That is the ultimate blessing. In that light, this last phrase is a watershed one. It makes the whole prayer of Paul's a great statement on how to achieve the ultimate in quality of life.

The righteousness that Paul always wanted people to be filled with was that which comes through Jesus Christ. He was not preaching the kind of righteousness which results in people simply cleaning up their own acts and performing prescribed routines. This is a very important distinction that he makes here, and it is apparent in all his writings. This righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ involves two important ideas.

First, the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ is a judicial status we enter through the declaration of God. When we believe in Christ's work on the cross, we are declared righteous by God, absolutely and completely forgiven for all our offenses committed against Him. Again, this is a judicial decision made by God, based purely on His loving and gracious choice. It comes to all who have had faith in His promise to provide salvation through a Savior, Jesus Christ.

Second, the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ is what we could call a practical one aimed at changing how we live out our years in this fallen world. Because we are forgiven our spirit's can be joined to God's, as they were meant to be. From the deepest part of our being come leadings from His Spirit that result in motivations for doing what He desires us to do in the moments before us. It is not a contrived righteousness based on our desire to be well thought of, or to look good. It is that which originates in God Himself and flows into our being through the Holy Spirit who is joined to us because of Christ's work on our behalf. We have only to listen for these leadings, and then follow them.

These two ideas summarize what Paul describes as the righteousness that is in Jesus Christ. Because of Christ, we can receive real knowledge and all discernment from God's Spirit. We then can live a life shaped by this "informed love." If we do so our lives will be filled with all that is right in God's eyes, because it is of Him.

Looking back on these verses we see that the Holy Spirit works in us so that we can be strengthened to love in a way saturated with real knowledge and all discernment. This "informed love" allows us to become those who execute the practical affairs of our lives even as He would and as He wills. The entire process is of Him and is crafted by His Spirit, yet it is also true that He brings it about in such a way that it is us doing it. The result of it all is recognized on the human level as love, and it turns others toward the truth.

1:12 Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.

The exact nature of Paul's circumstances is subject to discussion among Christians. We know he was a prisoner, and most scholars believe that imprisonment was in Rome. Some however believe it was in Ephesus, some in Caesarea. That debate is not important to these verses, it is only important that he faced extenuating circumstances that he was able to see had the effect of furthering the Gospel.

Paul's circumstances from a human perspective were not good. To Jews, many of whom were thinking under the terms of the Old Covenant, Paul's circumstances were that of a man living under the curse. The unbelieving, polytheistic Gentiles likely reached the same conclusion, led by their superstition. Paul likely wondered himself at times. But he is buoyed by the insights expressed in the following verses that the Holy Spirit enabled him to glean from his reality. His spiritual eyes allowed him to see his circumstances in a different light.

This may be the ultimate show of faith that one can have in this present life. To have such faith Paul first had to believe in the supreme value of the gospel, the ultimate worth of its message. Then he had to embrace the importance of its progress, which meant he had to have come to own God's love for all people. Then there was the matter of him trusting God enough to entrust Him with the day-to-day detail of his life and with the long term, eternal outcome of it. He had to be convinced of God's justice and of His ability to conform everything to its terms. All these acts of faith could only occur on the important foundation of faith in God's fundamental character. When this kind of faith is present, suffering discomfort, setbacks, loss, pain, inconvenience, and all the other intrusions of evil can be seen as worthwhile and even of God.

Whatever the exact nature of Paul's circumstances was, to a man of his vision and activity level, life in the most wonderful prison of our era would have been tortuous. Yet he learned to see it all through God's eyes and so saw the things that gave him joy.

1:13 so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else.

The reason for Paul's imprisonment would have provided for interesting conversation. It was most certainly bizarre to those who guarded him. They were used to violent criminals or political crimes that posed an actual threat to Rome. This was a Jew, but a Roman citizen, who was really in protective custody to keep him from those of his own race who wished to do violence against him. It was a curious case. It likely gave Paul much opportunity to dialog with those assigned to guard him. The subject of the resurrection of the dead, of forgiveness of sin and of repentance, and all the other truths associated with the gospel that Paul boldly spoke of, we know were of great interest to many of that day (see Acts 24:24-26). Therefore, this statement that Paul's imprisonment "in Christ" became well known through these circumstances is not surprising.

This mention of "the praetorian guard," has led many to believe that this letter was written during Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea. The palace built there by Herod the Great and called the Praetorium, was specifically named as the place Paul was kept during his stay there (see Acts 23:35). But the term praetorian can refer to a headquarters, a palace, or those associated with it. It is not specific to the palace at Caesarea. Yet it is an astute observation that bears consideration.

Of greater interest is the language used in the phrase "my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known..." The phrase "in the cause of" has been added in the NASB. The word order in the Greek text is "the imprisonment of me known in Christ has become..." The thing Paul is wishing to communicate is that his plight and Christ's story are now joined together among those in the palace, and a significant number of others ("everyone else"). To speak of his case was to speak of Christ, and this was

good for the gospel. This is one way in which Paul's circumstances had turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.

1:14 and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

Sometimes the loss of a key leader causes other leaders to rise once the initial shock wears off. This appears to be the case in Paul's circumstances. Other individuals Paul says, are by Paul's imprisonment leaning on the Lord more. This is the goal of any minister and ministry, to increase the ability of others to trust in God in greater ways for greater things. In this case they were demonstrating greater courage so that they were speaking the word of God without fear.

Since God's heart is the expansion and maturity of His family, it seems He will often remove a great leader to stimulate the rise of others. The result might be the loss of a great leader, but more leaders might be gained. More are matured in more places and so both expansion and maturity of His family are served. The imprisonment of such a leader as Paul was not without its problems, as the next verse will show. But it had an upside that could not be overlooked.

It is likely that when we stand in the presence of the head of the Church and look back at the ebb and flow of the mission over the centuries, we will see that the greatest hindrance to its progress was human fear. Courage is always what God needs us to muster. The presence of fear will be seen to have been the greatest cause of the squandering of opportunity and the loss of reward. Because God has promised always to be with us with all His power and resource, courage is a choice we make. It is a faith choice. Regardless of the discomfort we feel, we must rise to what the kingdom of God needs in the moment. God can do whatever is needed through us if we will rise. To rise we must choose courage in the face of fear. Dialog with any who have demonstrated great feats of courage, spiritual or otherwise, reveals that they have done so in the face of great fear. There is simply a "summoning" that we must do. That is not to say that it is a mind game. It is a casting of ourselves into the capable hands of the Holy Spirit. God will often orchestrate events, such as the imprisonment of Paul, to force this choice in us. He wants to take us up to the next level of maturity. This was happening in the case of many that Paul knew. He took heart in the growing strength his imprisonment was giving the movement.

1:15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will;

When a leadership vacuum occurs in any organization or movement, the best and worse in people is brought out in the ensuing scramble. Unfortunately, because of the fallenness of humanity, the worst also becomes visible when this occurs within the Church. It is perhaps what Jesus was referring to when He spoke of strong men seizing the kingdom of God by force (Matthew 11:12). There will always be fleshly individuals present in the Church who hunger for the influence and control of spiritual leadership (Acts 8:9-12; Galatians 4:17; 2 Corinthians 11:20). Paul was noticing this "jockeying for position" in the wake of his own imprisonment. We know he was concerned about it.

We should not take from these words that such actions are all right and can be left unaddressed. But like Paul, we must see that God does not stop working in such circumstances. He is not hindered by evil, and in fact can bring about good through it. We give up important ground if we let go of this truth. Paul never condones fleshliness or impure motives in ministry. But here at least, he will point out that a good result is being worked through a mixed bag by the great power of God. It may be that God's most profound exhibit of power occurs through His ability to work through and reverse the intentions of evil beings. He does so without being obligated to call evil good or leave it unpunished in the end.

Paul saw that some were preaching Christ out of envy and strive. Verse 17 will reveal more about what this means. Paul and His position of influence was the object of their envy. Here he calls it what it is. It

does not become anything else, nor can its results somehow change its essential nature. Such motives will be revealed and judged (1 Corinthians 3:8-15), but they should not cause us to brood and put us in turmoil.

1:16 the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.

Among those whom Paul saw emerging and preaching in his place were those doing it out of love. They loved Christ, Paul, people, the Gospel, and the mission. Their motives were pure. They were genuinely called. They also understood Paul's circumstances, specifically that his imprisonment was the outcome of his being faithful to his calling.

When God called Paul to be a spokesperson for the Gospel to both Jews and Gentiles, there were two implications. First, he was destined for conflict with the Jews, even as God's own Son was. God's love for the Jews and His plan for them demanded that they be confronted with the truth regarding the Gospel and the truth regarding themselves. This was Paul's calling. He was the man appointed by God to spearhead this proclamation. He had to offend them. Second, the revelation which Paul was entrusted with was incendiary. This revelation was a new and fuller understanding of what had been hidden. Specifically, what had been hidden was that Gentiles were from the beginning destined to become fellow-heirs of the promises made to Israel, fellow-members of God's family, and fellow-partakers of all that was embodied in Christ (Ephesians 3:1-13).

Paul had to teach this and proclaim it because no one else knew it. It was an unpopular idea among Jews that he had to stand up for. He had to defend its fine points in an uncompromising way because he was the only one who knew them. God was revealing all this through him. Others might be uncertain, he was not. Others might not speak up who had not heard, he could not be silent. He was appointed as the one to put forth the principles and premises upon which the work God is currently doing among all people was based. Many since have done this with great passion of the sort any with a call to teach should have. But this initial revelation was a matter of Divine appointment and commission, and Paul was the man of Divine choosing. He was to provide the rationale and content for the centuries that lay ahead. Without his work there would have been nothing for others to do and the gospel and the Church might easily have been sucked into the religious black hole that Judaism had become. Those who understood Paul's calling understood his imprisonment. Those who did not could pontificate endlessly on it, and they did so freely.

1:17 the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.

In verse 15 Paul named the motives of these as envy and strife. Here he characterizes them as being selfishly ambitious. There are many types of "gain" that people seek after besides financial gain. One of these is influence and power. There is no doubt that Paul's anointing and commissioning of God led to him gaining great influence and power. Individuals coveted that. When imprisonment confined him, it is easy to see how in a day when communication was slow, opportunists would move into the emotional vacuum thus created. They had been envious of Paul, now they could have what had been his. They had secretly chafed under his authority. Now they could be their own. They had desired to be sought after as he was, now they could rise above him. While he was "getting his," they could be where they belonged, at the helm.

Paul detected in them the worst of motives. They wanted to "pile it on," to add to his trouble. Their perspective, whether actual or intentionally embraced, was likely that Paul's plight was Divine retribution of some sort. This would explain the latter statement of this verse. It indicates that they were intentionally trying to damage Paul. So whether they were blind to reality and sincerely wrong or conniving types manipulating for an advantage, their intention was likely to mark out Paul as one who had

been rejected by God and one who should be abandoned by the Churches as a leader. They were kicking him while he was down. They were evil. Such people are present in Christian ranks. Some are genuinely children of God but deceived. Some are imposters. But both are evil. That is the reality of the matter, and it will not escape God's gaze and eventual judgment. The remarkable thing is that Paul's response acknowledges the evil but is still one of joy. It challenges us up.

1:18 What 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.

How should one who is being maligned by the misinformed, mislead, and by imposters respond? Paul's question, "What then?" is one that every Christian leader will eventually have to answer. Do we protect ourselves by responding in like kind? Do we "mix it up" and "set the record straight"? There are times when Paul did (2 Corinthians 10-14). But we see here something different. We see how he policed his own emotions in the matter. If the pragmatic result is a stronger, broader proclamation of Christ we should celebrate this. There seems to be intentionality in Paul's tone expressed in these words, "yes, and I will rejoice." Rejoicing was to him a matter of some urgency. It was not concocted or put on. It was what he demanded of his inner man.

People can come to the truth, even when the one proclaiming the truth has not. That is a remarkable thing. If it were not true, Paul could not possibly say what he is saying here. Too often we believe that things must be right for God to use them. We forget that He uses Satan Himself to bring about His own purposes. That is the only way in which the presence of evil can be justified. So we must celebrate people coming to a greater knowledge of the truth, even when we cannot embrace the one that helps them get there. We must not allow the evil one to tarnish a win for the kingdom of God because it came through a player that he got dirt on. We must celebrate what God is doing on the enemy's home court and even through some of his players. That is the genius and greatness of God on display.

We should not be shocked by pretense. There is some, after all, in everyone. We should not stay hurt when we are victims of it. In the end we cannot be victims of it because God is not. It is Him working His will through those who are dead set against his will. That is a position of strength, not of weakness and vulnerability. It is fascinating if we ponder it, and it is absolutely freeing if we embrace it. We should exult in our emotional position because we are in the end untouchable.

1:19 For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Paul is about to address now his own musings as he contemplated his circumstances. To him the prognosis was good. Because we are not certain of the history in this matter of Paul's imprisonment we do not know if this confidence he expresses in this verse was realistic. Like any of us, Paul did not know exactly what God would bring about. In the pure sense of the term deliverance, every Christian always knows they will be delivered from any circumstance life puts them in. The question is how that deliverance will come, by life or by death. Paul's words will reflect that idea. It appears however that he was expecting release from prison.

Paul names two things that would be instruments of his release. First there were the prayers of the Philippians. It has been the testimony of the great spiritual leaders of all eras that prayer is the work. From a theological point of view this is apparent. Christian work is by definition doing what the Father is doing (John 5:19-20). It is learning what that is, then asking for it to happen, then entering doing the pragmatic actions associated with it and experiencing God's guidance and empowerment in them. Prayer then is essential as a means of knowing what God is doing and of asking for the things needed in the practical arena to finish the tasks. Prayer is the communication in the partnership, and so is vital. Paul would be released through prayer.

A second thing Paul speaks of is the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Prayer communicates need and direction. The Spirit brings the power of God to bear on people, on things, on beings, on the seen and unseen, so that the thing prayed for that God wishes to do becomes a reality. Without the Spirit, Christian work would be like any other work, it would likely have come and gone like all of the great human efforts. The Spirit sustains and energizes it so that it has fruit that remains. Its trappings, meaning things like buildings, organizations, methodologies, and personalities, will not endure. But its process in lives will continue and through those lives make its way into other lives and so persist. These two things Paul knew were powerful. Through the prayers of people like the Philippians and through the Holy Spirit's movings to orchestrate God's plan in the matter of his own imprisonment, Paul knew he would be released.

1:20 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

As he often will do in this letter, Paul reveals something of his own personal thought processes that help us understand what made him who he was. Here he explains what he expects to characterize his own behavior as God's Spirit shapes the circumstances. That shaping would include an ongoing work in Paul. It was a work Paul was very passionate about. It was an expectation and a hope he had that he describes as earnest. In our terminology we would describe this as a passionate vision he had for who he was becoming. He had this high road he expected himself to walk through the Spirit. This matter of having a vision for who we are becoming and who we will be in the moment often is absent in us. We tend to develop vision for what we do and what we might achieve. But the matter of who we are and who we will be are far more important issues in God's eyes. We tend to leave them to find their own level. The result is that we become people of activity but not of character and depth. We can find ourselves achieving the milestones of tasks, while remaining essentially the same in terms of the fruit of the Spirit. It is not that the tasks are unimportant. They simply do not make up the sum of what God is doing, and few of them endure as the work that progresses in us will.

Paul's earnest expectation and hope, that which he passionately sought for himself is stated by him here. It is stated in multiple facets. First, he did not want to be put to shame in anything. This likely refers to shrinking back or cowering in moments where courage would carry the day. Second, in contrast to this, he wanted to be bold. He wanted boldness to trump the urge to keep silent, to simply fit in, to avoid conflict, to settle things down, to keep peace. There is this shrinking back in most all of us. We opt for comfort at the expense of truth. Paul recognized it in himself and did not want to fall into this pragmatic expedience. But this boldness was only what he wanted his manner to be. The third thing, his passion, was that Christ would be exalted (lit. made greater), in his body. It is a great ambition and very far-reaching to embrace this. It is to say, "By my physical presence I wish to present to the senses of others an experience of Christ that is a legitimate representation of His greatness." That such a vision is possible for one's life is remarkable, and it is through "the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." This should be pondered deeply by every Christian because it can be proven from Scripture that this is the vision God has for each one of His children. Rather than it being something that never occurs to us, it should be something we clearly see happening in each other. The beauty of this is that we can do it in our living or in our dying. We get to the end of our ability to do Christian work if it is defined by tasks. But if it is defined in this way, of giving the senses of others a heightened experience of Christ, we can do it until our last gasp for air. Paul clearly endorses this idea in his statement "whether by life or by death."

Paul's statement about boldness and his statement about exalting Christ must be embraced together. At various times Christians have pursued "incarnational living." That term is in vogue today. However, it is understood somewhat narrowly. It is most often seen as acts of altruism and mercy. It is understood as caring for the down-trodden and the homeless. It is seen as certain tasks and that is always a marginal way of understanding it. To be certain these are Christ-like actions. They are not primarily what Paul has in mind here. The context speaks of boldness, and altruistic acts seldom demand boldness. They are generally well received and well-spoken of even by the godless. True incarnational living involves the

collision of truth with half-truth and falsehood. It requires boldness because it is, in the final analysis, confrontive. It is done in love but not at the expense of truth. The glory of Christ was that He was full of grace and truth (John 1:14). We have not exalted Him with our bodies to the physical senses and mental processes of other, until we have shown His glory. Biblically that means being full of grace and truth. The grace part is well-received. The truth part always requires boldness. Gracious acts themselves make no statement at all about God. They can be done by the godless, by those who do not embrace Christ at all, by those with purely fleshly motives. They do not defacto exalt Christ until a declaration is made that squarely links them to the truth as God has defined it and Christ has declared it. Boldness is required to declare one's linkage and loyalty to Christ, because that does draw mixed reaction.

Historically, when Christians have taken incarnational living seriously, they end up losing a clear message of the gospel of Christ over time. Acts of social justice are equated with Christianity and then become Christianity. Historically when the truth of the Gospel is championed, incarnational living dies out. Christianity becomes a matter of being "right," and Christians fail to engage with culture and their faith often does not even shape their own behavior or character. They become bigoted, self-righteous, and even wicked.

Paul's vision for himself represents healthy Christianity. It is what we all are called to pursue. To boldly exalt Christ in our body is that for which His body was given.

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

This is a very concise way of summarizing Paul's vision for who he was determined to be in whatever circumstances developed in his imprisonment. More years meant more of exalting Christ in his being. Death was gain because it meant gaining a more perfect experience of the exalted Christ. It was not merely an escape from the discomfort and strain of his circumstances. It was the beginning of a more complete experience of who he was in Christ. It meant the ability to exalt Christ as Paul knew he was intended and designed to do. Death meant the gaining of this prize.

There are likely few of us Christians who have this attitude until we are faced with death. Life is fairly good to the average American Christian until we lose our health. Then suddenly we can comprehend more fully life's futile and incomplete nature, and we begin to love the thought of the perfection of Christ. Because Paul had grasped the idea that to exalt Christ in one's body is the essence of life, this concise statement of value was really his. It was not just a quaint expression of how he **should** feel; it was an accurate expression of reality to him. Death meant the gaining of all that was lost when Adam fell. It means living a life that exalted the Creator, and that is the glory and highest privilege of man.

1:22 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.

Life has deep meaning and purpose to the healthy Christian. Our attachment to Christ, our understanding of this world's fallenness, and our knowledge of the perfections of heaven do not cause us to simply put in our time here. Time is opportunity for the believer to be engaged in what Paul calls "fruitful labor." All is not vanity to the one who lives by the Spirit. Every moment has its design and every circumstance its intention in the sovereign plan of God. During life there are diverse means through which we can present to creation a demonstration of the excellencies of the Creator. From our mood to products, we produce it is all fruitful if it is allowed to bear the impress of His Spirit.

Fruitful labor is a joyous privilege. Many never experience labor that is fruitful in the way Paul is describing it here. Labor that is fruitful in this sense means that it yields a fruit that endures into eternity. Jesus said that His will was that we bear fruit and that it might remain (John 15:16). It is labor that impacts who people are and who they become. It is labor that has impact on unseen beings in unseen places

(Hebrews 12:22-24). It is labor that has a divine design and purpose with respect to an eternal kingdom that cannot be shaken. Each labor done at the Spirit's direction is like a brick in a building that will stand forever (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). When Paul speaks of labor that is fruitful, he is speaking of work that is like no other, perhaps similar in its demand and execution but dissimilar in its impact, its importance, its quality, and its unfading nature.

This kind of labor, though taxing as the word indicates, is a wonderful experience. Paul enjoyed it and in all of his sufferings got so much out of it that he really did not know what to choose in terms of the possible outcome of his circumstances. Death on the one hand meant gain. Life meant more of this fruitful labor. There was a tension even in the expression "fruitful labor." Both joy and sorrow can be read into it. It is the best existence we can know by actual experience. We know of a better one only by revelation. This creates the tension in us that Paul expresses here.

1:23 But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better,

Perhaps more than any other human being besides Jesus, Paul had experienced heaven. He was uncertain if he had been there physically. But his experience of heaven had been so vivid that he felt like he had been physically there (2 Corinthians 12:1-8). He had no doubt which existence would be better. Heaven would not simply be better, it would be "very much better." Paul uses three words together, each of which individually would convey the idea of more or advantage.

Because of this understanding, Paul describes himself as hard-pressed. His affection for people like the Philippians, the normal drive to experience more of this life, and the passion he had for the unreached people of the world made the delay of the gratification of heaven attractive to him. Yet there was no doubt which would be better.

The idea of being with Christ is what is stated here by Paul as being the thing which made heaven so attractive. We should ponder that thought because to those who had experienced the physical presence of Him, that was the thing that made the prospect of heaven so attractive. Their focus was not on the place as much as it was on the person of Christ. There is something about being with Him that makes you willing and anxious to cast everything else aside to get there. This sense of value that Paul felt was the product of years of practicing Christ's presence, living in communion with the Holy Spirit, experiencing His partnership in the highs and lows of ministry, and his experience in the presence of Christ during the time of the special revelations made to him (2 Corinthians 12). For all who have for various reasons did not have the same fullness of experience with Christ, they have Paul's greater experience to rest in. His witness is that being with Christ is far better than the richest experience of Christ on this earth.

1:24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

Thinking of the ministry he could yet have among the Philippians and people like them, Paul saw the necessity of the less desirable course his life would likely take. That call to serve the needs of the body of Christ is the attitude of Christ. Very soon in this letter, he will summon the readers to this emptying of themselves, this setting aside of one's own entitlements and taking responsibility for the welfare of the spiritual lives of others. When we think of our future it should always be with the spiritual welfare of others in mind. It is the greatest use of moments, months, and years to invest them in facilitating the process God is carrying on in the lives of people. Choosing such a life involves an initial sacrifice which will prove to be no sacrifice at all.

In choosing such a life we must remember two important things so that we can endure in the work and set a sustainable pace in the race.

First, the work is His. He initiates and empowers, recruits, trains, places, and sustains. He will involve us in all such processes, but we must not think that we have to shoulder the burden of responsibility for it alone. It is first and foremost His. Though we intensely involve ourselves in it, in the end it is His burden to carry.

Second, it is vast, beyond our ability to ever complete. It never will appear done to us, though he Himself will finish it. We must get use to the over-whelming feeling of it, and the sense that when we're doing it, we will always feel it is on the brink of disaster. It appears much more fragile than it is. His sovereign will and power sustain it.

Paul started his letter by describing himself as a bondservant of Christ. In this short statement he expresses his willingness to delay his own comfort and satisfaction in the interest of the work of his Master.

1:25 And convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith,

In Paul's letter to Timothy, he speaks to the fact that his death is at hand (2 Timothy 4:6-8). He also speaks in that letter of his first defense (2 Timothy 4:16-17) and being delivered through the Lord's help. Most scholars believe that Paul was released and continued the work of the Gospel for a period, so that the projection of this statement to the Philippians did prove to be true. His ministry led to the later stay in prison recorded in the Epistles to Timothy, which then led to his execution in Rome.

The Spirit impressed on Paul that he would be delivered, and he expresses that confidence here. Such a leading from within is hard to process and in the end, we may become convinced of something that is a product of our own emotions. It appears that Paul's reading of the Spirit was correct here.

Paul expresses two areas of impact he wishes to have in his relationship to the Philippians. He wants to help their progress in the faith and their joy in the faith. These two things are linked together. God wants us to make progress in our faith and this means that our joy becomes mature or complete. Our faith becomes complete as our lives are completely lived by faith. As our trust in God becomes so complete that each moment is shaped by His will as His Spirit interacts with ours, we are entering into maturity in our faith. There is much we must learn to trust if our faith is to progress to such a point. People like Paul help us in this journey of increasing trust.

This kind of living is accompanied by joy. Jesus said that He had come in order that our joy might be full (John 15:11; 17:13). He bore our sin so that we might be rejoined to our Creator and function as we were designed to function, in union with Him. This design provides for our joy. God is joyful Himself. In every glimpse we have of heaven, He is always surrounded by joy (Psalm 16:11). To be with Him is to experience joy it is simply who He is. Progress in faith means progress in joy. Fullness of faith means fullness of joy.

1:26 so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

This verse can be rendered in several ways that are legitimate in terms of the prepositions used by Paul. It is obvious, from what Paul has said in the previous verse, that he saw that his presence would strengthen and bring to greater maturity the faith of the Philippians. So another way of stating this is to say that he wanted to give them greater confidence in Christ. We know that Paul wanted to have God's people confident in himself as Christ's representative, but only to this ultimate end that he was a reliable source of truth about Christ. So here in this verse he wants their confidence in Christ Jesus to abound through him and specifically through him coming to spend time with them again. We would capture the meaning of Paul's words here if we understood them in the following way: "so that your proud confidence in Christ Jesus might increase by means of me, that is, through my being feed and enabled to come to you again."

1:27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

It was faith of the sort produced by the gospel that Paul wanted to marshal Christians to inspire and reproduce in others. There are many kinds of faith. This was the faith Paul wanted the Church to be occupied in reproducing. The most powerful thing we contribute to this mission is the credibility produced by authentic lives that display the character and presence of Christ. They are lives that reflect the values of the gospel. The gospel forgives, unites, and elevates humanity to a different plain of living. Our lives should demonstrate that.

One of the outstanding testimonies of the presence of God in people is when they are one (John 17:22-23). Unity is so powerful and speaks so powerfully to the inner being that it alone convinces them of the truth of the Christian message if it is present. Paul knew this well and so desires that the Philippians stand firm in one spirit. In many doctrinal and moral issues, we must stand firm, but we must not forget this that gives such impetus to the presence of truth in us. It is this unity that the Holy Spirit uses to speak to people from within, compelling them to acknowledge the truth of the gospel and the presence of God.

Paul begins the verse with the word “only,” and thereby prefaces these thoughts on unity with an air of urgency. It is a summons to focus on the cause, not peripheral matters, or the normal affairs of life. If other dreams and ambitions must get set aside, then so be it. Conducting ourselves in a manner that confirms, enhances, and adorns the gospel is the thing we must not leave undone.

Our unity is not to be merely cosmetic, and we aren’t to settle for that low grade of unity that consists of smiles and pleasant words. Unity is to be true of us at the level of our inner-most beings. It is to reach the level of our spirits and our minds. If it is not present it is because we have not yet given His Spirit free course in our spirit and mind. This is where He resides and what He wishes to transform in us (Romans 12:1-2). So this is not a call to put on a nice face and embrace the rhetoric of unity. It is a call to present ourselves so fully to Him that His Spirit can do His complete work in us on a matter or matters. When we have His thought, we will all have the same thought; though we might travel different roads to get there. When this is true of us the news about us will always be good to those with good hearts and a proper understanding of and submission to truth.

Reproducing the specific faith associated with the gospel requires “striving.” And it is such a huge undertaking with spiritual, emotional, and intellectual resistance, that it requires much simultaneous effort. At the deepest part of our being the Holy Spirit unites us. From there our minds can be marshaled to the task which then directs our bodies in the specific tasks the work requires. It is only this that should be our focus.

1:28 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.

As the great work of reproducing the faith that is sourced in the gospel is undertaken there will be opponents. There are beings who oppose Christ and so these inspire among humanity opponents of all that is good. It is easy to be alarmed by these. Sometimes we think that if something is right, we will know it because it will be accepted as right by the majority. In present day American thinking this becomes our natural mindset. We go with the majority. We can be alarmed by the sheer volume of those who reject the truth of the gospel and so shrink back from declaring its truth. We can also be alarmed at the rhetoric of our opponents. They can speak so arrogantly and confidently that we have no answer in the moment. Rather than pondering the matter fully and developing an understanding of the answer through the Spirit we can abandon the argument or fabricate our own answer, which nearly always implodes. In this way we discover in time that we allowed an inner kind of panic to carry the day. We can be alarmed by our

opponent's threats, and this was likely primary in Paul's mind given the climate of the day. Persistence in the work of the gospel could cost the Philippians their lives. This threat was real, but Paul did not want them to be alarmed by it. Such a threat, though hatched by evil, was ultimately under God's control.

The presence of opposition is a clear sign that accompanies the presence of truth. It is to provide a strange form of reassurance to us. This is not spinning reality. The fact that any new idea tends to arouse opposition does not adequately explain the long history of opposition to Christianity. The vigorous opposition is because the gospel encompasses thought that is foreign to humanity. Its origin is divine. As such it will be resisted and our experience in the world should cause us to expect such resistance, especially because the gospel confronts very personal things in us. The truth is foreign to a fallen world, and so the first reaction to it will usually be negative. The truth is also opposed by powerful spiritual forces and so we should expect that if we do not compromise the truth, it will be powerfully resisted by them.

Given these things we should expect opposition. In fact, if we did not have it, we would have to assume our declaration was so humanistic that it was nothing new to the ears of the hearers and constituted no threat to the beings in the unseen realm that oppose God.

None of this is to say that we deliberately offend and seek out negative reaction. We do seek to present truth in a compelling way. But the fact remains that because truth is foreign to humanity and opposed by evil beings, we will be encountering resistance as we live it and declare it. This is a sign of destruction to those who oppose truth. Their own position they take up against Christ is a sign that Christ will render judgment against them. The truth declares that enemies of the truth will be destroyed. Resistance is a sign of doom and acceptance is a sign of eventual salvation. Both signs are from God, and both will prove to be in their own way prophetic.

1:29 For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.

This verse is connected to the previous verse by the conjunction *οτι*, which is a subordinating or causal conjunction. It is generally rendered because, since, or for. It signals that this verse provides additional thought about standing firm (verse 27), unalarmed by opponents to the gospel (verse 28). We are to stand firm in the storm of opposition because such an experience accompanies what is by the choice of God our lot. That opposition is a sign, a positive one for us, a negative one for our opponents.

Something important has been "granted" to us. The choice of this rendering by the NASB is a critical one. The original word is formed from the word for grace and so conveys what we term today *gratis*, as opposed to that which is earned or purchased. But it implies not just that something has been given, but the conveying of a certain status as well. In this case we have been "graced" or favored with two things. The grace to believe in Christ, and that requires favor from God. We would not come to believe were it not for His grace acting in our behalf (Ephesians 2:10). But Paul speaks here of additional grace and status that is extended to us by God that enables us to suffer for Christ. We are enabled not only to believe, but to stand firm in the face of suffering. The same work of God that brought about our belief is there for us when we confront opposition. We need not be alarmed, and we need not think anything has gone wrong or is out of control. This is the plan, and it includes the power of God working through us against all the opposition. That is a privilege. This idea that it was a privilege to suffer for Christ was an understanding we see very clearly in the thought of the early Church (Acts 5:41), and like Christ they viewed this as important to teach (Matthew 5:10-12; 1 Peter 4:12-16).

1:30 experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me and no hear to be in me."

The Philippians had seen Paul cast in prison and had seen him beaten. One of their own was the jailer that night who had perhaps participated in the beating, but later had dressed Paul's wounds and become a believer (Acts 16). So they knew firsthand that Paul had suffered at the hands of those who were opposing the gospel. Now they were experiencing such things themselves.

In any suffering it is easy to suppose that God may have abandoned you, and that something is wrong. Paul wants the Philippians to be able to sort these conflicting ideas out and keep themselves on course. And so he reminds them of what his own lot has been, the continued presence of opposition and therefore suffering.

Philippians 2

2:1 If therefore 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,

Paul has already made one impassioned plea for unity, equating unity with behavior that was worthy of the gospel (1:27). Unity in other words, authenticates in a pragmatic way the presence of truth. It is the Church's certificate of authenticity, and in some sense Christ's as well (John 17:20-21). Beginning with these words, Paul makes another such plea. This plea for unity will be an extended one that will deal with each person embracing a mindset, the mindset that makes unity attainable among a group of imperfect, fallen, diverse human beings. This appeal begins with a sentence that in the original language extends through verse four.

Paul begins by speaking of four common Christian experiences. They are experiences that occur very early in one's journey of faith and they are felt very distinctly all along the way. They are experiences that Christians at all stages of development can identify as having occurred in their relationships with other Christians. These four experiences have also been evident in the things Paul has spoken of thus far in this letter. His words so far have been a testimonial to the ongoing encouragement of Christ, the ongoing consolation during trial that the love of others brings, the deep fellowship found in the partnerships choreographed by the Spirit, and the presence of sanctified emotions among Christians such as affection and compassion for each other. These all work in concert to produce quality living even in hostile circumstances.

The English translation of this verse starts with the word therefore, showing that what follows is linked to what has preceded. So there is a logical relationship between what Paul has just said about living lives worthy of the gospel and what he is about to say.

The word if occurs next. This word can have the effect of casting doubt on the statements that follow. But even in English we commonly use if to deliberately understate an idea. This has the effect of emphasizing the idea's obvious truth. So we might make a statement like the following to someone we know is a citizen of the United States; "IF you live in the United States, you like hamburgers!" We are not questioning their citizenship. We are expressing our belief that since one thing is true, then the other will be true as well, based on our observation of American behavior. The word we use is if, but the idea we're communicating is since. In the jargon of Greek grammar this is a first-class condition. It is a condition that we assume is true, with a logical consequence that follows. Paul's message through verses 1 and 2 is, "Since these things so obviously characterize our experience with Christ and have shaped who we are (verse 1), then be like-minded (verse 2)."

The first reality of the Christian experience is that there is continual encouragement in Christ. His example, His teaching, His love and power, and His presence are ever present. Each of these is inspiring. These shrink the significance of everything else that comes along in the course of our lives and assign proper value to all that is. The word encourage expresses the idea of one who calls out alongside us words

that spur us on. In the community of Christians, we can constantly inspire each other by word and deed with reminders of Christ. We will find inspiration not so much in each other, but in those reminders, we give to each other of our Leader and Lord. By example, power, and teaching He calls us to a whole different level of behavior, and He does it through each other.

The second reality is the consolation of love. This refers to the strength that we draw from the love expressed by fellow believers. The loving acts of other believers, specifically acts which bring comfort, get us through trial and over obstacles. The word comfort means to relate alongside, as in the relating of a story. The Philippians and Paul had been a comfort and consolation to each other. They related alongside each other telling the story of God's faithfulness and greatness, and so brought comfort to each other. Every human being has the need to be comforted and as the body of Christ meets this need in its members it positions itself to bring about life change.

The third reality of the Christian experience is the fellowship of the Spirit. When Jesus prayed for believers in what we have come to know as His High Priestly Prayer, He asked that they might all be one, "even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in Us..." (John. 17:21). This great union whereby we became joined to each other and to God Himself came about through the Holy Spirit. There is fellowship between all parties of this union, between us and God, between ourselves and others, between God and others through us, and between God and us through others. The word fellowship refers to partnership. It is more than conversation and companionship. There is the idea of cooperation toward a common goal or objective. In this case it is to achieve that which the Spirit is leading toward. Such fellowship packs enormous potential in terms of bringing about change.

The fourth reality of the Christian experience is our heightened capacity through our faith for affection and compassion. The words used here describe those deep human feelings that can become hardened and suppressed in a cruel world but can be freed up again in Christ. Through the other three realities these human traits have great godly potential. The human spirit is awakened by the Holy Spirit so that it bears more definitively the image of the Creator, and so reflects the divine desire for the welfare of creation. Deep, selfless feelings begin to take the place of self-serving ones, and consideration for the pain of others makes one willing to take on pain that is not one's own. Sensitivity, perhaps squelched in the interest of self-preservation, begins to come to life once again. It is exercised with proper boundaries. The same can be said of compassion. The expression of compassion by a Spirit-filled believer is of a different sort than the "do-gooder" variety that tends to be lavished indiscriminately and enables all manner of irresponsibility. As these emotions become more precise instruments of God, they clearly demonstrate the presence of Christ in a life.

These four experiences can be abundantly ours. They are what we could call the core experiences of the Christian community. They provide the Spiritual fare that leads to the fulfillment of the mission. They are the reason why the Church is so important in God's plan to make disciples. Nothing represents God's heart for each believer more than these four experiences. The pursuit of them will be Divinely enabled and blessed.

2:2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

The joy of those who have enslaved themselves to Christ and stake themselves in the field of His kingdom is to see the obedience of others become complete. This is clearly seen in statements like these by Paul (see also 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; 3:8), and perhaps even more dramatically in statements made by John (3 John 4). There is a joy that is unequalled in the human experience, and impossible to experience by any other means.

This experience of joy that is possible only through fully engaging with the Creator in accomplishing His work, is the joy Jesus desired to bring into the lives of humanity (John 15:11; 16:22,24; 17:13). Joy is inseparable from what honors God because it is a part of who He is, and He cannot deny Himself. And so when we push Christianity forward in the lives of others, when we speak of its inner workings, when we speak of its outward manifestations no matter what the focus of our analysis, one of the things we should find present is joy.

This mention of joy by Paul is already his fourth in this letter. He mentioned his joy in offering prayer for the Philippians (1:4). He mentioned his joy at the progress of the gospel even though it was progressing through some with impure motives (1:18). Then he mentions his desire to assist the Philippians progress and joy in the faith (1:25). So Paul viewed joy as a constant companion of a vibrant faith.

Paul's statement "Make my joy complete..." is in the imperative. That means it is a command. Literally it could be rendered, "Fill up my joy." But Paul is not suggesting that somehow his joy was something the Church had better take responsibility for, as if he were some despot. This command is joined to the next clause which expresses the purpose of the command. The purpose of the command is their single-mindedness. Paul's dream for them is that they fulfill God's heart for them (John 17:21), and so advance His interests. Paul's personal joy is linked to his Master's.

From a grammatical standpoint we have an imperative, "Fill up my joy..." followed by a subjunctive of purpose, which shows that the purpose of the command is not merely Paul's joy, but God's good pleasure. This is followed by three participial phrases that give fuller definition and description to same mindedness. So same mindedness is what Paul desires of them. He will develop what this mindset is as the chapter unfolds. Here he gives three characteristic ways this same-mindedness manifests itself. People who are of the same mind maintain the same level of love. Their love does not ebb and flow in response to circumstance or people. There are no favorites and no outcasts. They keep themselves from seasons of self-centeredness. Their single-mindedness also unites their inner beings. They are united in spirit. Literally they are "together-souled." It is not an artificial unity but one they have conviction about from within. Their entire being is subjected ultimately to the authority of Christ. That is where they want to end up, functioning in the center of His will. They are intent on one purpose. They have "one thinking." We could call it a corporate mindset or focus, but it is primarily a way of processing. It processes decisions and courses of action in harmony with the leadings and urgings of the Holy Spirit, testing each thought against the grid of Scripture

Seeing this like-mindedness in the Philippians would fill up Paul's joy. He was a bond servant of Christ (1:1), by his own choice. He found joy in the accomplishment of His master's will. Seeing these join themselves to Christ in this same way, as His bond servants, would be a milestone in his own service to Christ.

2:3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself;

It is good to remind ourselves that in these instructions Paul is talking to the collective Church of Philippi. This is not only to be true of us individually, though it must start there. We should look to produce this in each other, and it should become what we could call our corporate mentality.

Fleshliness and disobedience, no matter what the actual deeds, begin with self-centeredness. This is the root of all sin and the essence of our fallenness. There is not a bit of room for tolerance when it comes to self-centeredness. It cannot be managed; it must be put to death (Colossians 3:5; Romans 8:13).

Paul names two things that are not to be motivators for our actions. One is termed "selfishness" in the NASB. Strife is the term used most often to render this word. Instead of continuing a quarrel we should be the first to let go of it. We should break such cycles by initiating actions of reconciliation. Strife is our

response to hurt, or perhaps to those who we perceive as blocking our wishes. It is an act of self-preservation or an act of self-advancement. We strive to settle a score, or to stave off a perceived threat. We must embrace the power of the Spirit to end such courses of action on our part.

The second motivator we must purge from ourselves is “empty conceit.” The term is literally “empty glory.” That is a very descriptive term for self-centeredness. There is little in fallen man that can be construed as worth glorying over when it is fully understood. This is especially true if we are viewed considering the surpassing glory of what we once were, and of course, in light of the glory of our Creator. Presently, ours is an empty glory. There is an appearance of glory that is found to be hollow. We do things out of empty conceit when we do them to make ourselves look good or to meet that insatiable need in ourselves for praise and affirmation. Doing things for “empty glory” includes all those pursuits we engage in to make ourselves compare favorably to others. They will prove to have been empty pursuits when we stand before our Creator.

There is an unwritten rule among humanity that these motivations are okay, if they are done with a loosely defined moderation. We have all agreed to a take-turns-meeting-one-another’s-needs emotional economy. We shape behavior not so much by any standard of right or wrong. Instead, we chose our behavior by some ethereal standard that determines what we “deserve,” or by the more pragmatic standard of what works for us. Behavior is not so much a matter of right and wrong, but of determining whose turn it is to be indulged! This has become an important part of the rule of the family of humanity. Essentially, we are managing our selfishness in a way that works for everyone. This is a system capable of great abuse and excess. It is also realistic, because apart from the Holy Spirit it is our only option. We simply have no way of changing who we are.

Paul is calling us to a different rule in the family of God. It is never anyone’s turn to be indulged. Instead, we are to do nothing from such motives as these. We are to adopt a totally different rule in the family of God. We are in a different family from our earthly one and we are to live by a different standard.

The new rule begins with “humility of mind.” This term is a compound word that utilizes the word for poverty and the word for midriff. The latter was supposed to be the seat of the emotions and cognitive functions. Our present mindset in God’s family begins with this, an acknowledgment that our thinking and feeling must be God-centered not self-centered. God-centered thinking is light. It harmonizes with the truth, the way things really are. Self-centered thinking is dark. It is based on the way we might wish things to be or hope them to be. Humility of mind begins with a very important acknowledgment. It is the acknowledgment that truth has been lost, therefore our perceptions regarding most everything are wrong. There is no future in continuing with the same mindset we naturally have. We must switch over to a mindset shaped by truth. We must realize the poverty of our beings apart from God and not seek to push forward and exalt what in the end will prove to be worthless.

Instead of self-obsession, we are to regard each other as more important. This does not mean we are to regard others as less fallen. We all have the same disease. It does mean that we are to regard their welfare and progress in the faith as more important than our own self-preservation or self-promotion. If the truth of God is authentic, we have no worries about what we are worth or what will become of us. We can entrust this to the righteous judge (1 Peter 2:21-25). It is in His hands. To take it into our own hands will only mean that we are less secure. This is the life of trust or faith in God to let go of these things and rest in His hands. Leading others to this life of faith is of greater importance than enforcing a “right” of ours or projecting some view of us which will prove to be untrue anyway when God is done. It is far better to entrust the matter of image to Him. When we do, we have entered into humility of mind, and we are able to regard others as more important than ourselves. This is the essence of Christlikeness; a point Paul will bring home very soon in this letter.

2:4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

In the original language this verse concludes the long sentence started in verse 1. The significant thing about this is that we remember that Paul was stringing together inter-related thought centering on the idea of making his joy complete by being of the same mind. This verse adds phrases that further explain like-mindedness.

This verse speaks to the issue of what we are to be looking out for or preoccupied with. The natural way of living is for each person to give attention only to what concerns them. That is instinctive living. It is what Paul called living according to the flesh (Romans 8:5-17). It is a way of living that Adam and Eve started when they ate the forbidden fruit. In acting against the command of God they thought of none of their offspring, nor did they think of harm brought to God. They did only what they thought would be good for them. This persists as the key symptom we carry of our fallenness. Through the Holy Spirit we can rise above this, and this is the goal of God's plan of redemption.

The term rendered "look out for" is one that is used of giving attention to something and focusing resource and effort on it. It describes our ability to set an agenda and behave with an objective in view. It has in view the fact that we can behave and carry out action that benefits us and improves our experience of life.

Paul says very simply not to be self-centered, thinking only of what will make things good for us. Think about "the things of each other," and this means their things, their needs, their dreams, their physical, emotional, and spiritual health. A life lived in this way, with these things of others in view might be more rewarding and fulfilling, but it is more importantly right. This is the call of God to us. It is the way of life chosen by Christ and we are the beneficiaries.

For unity to happen in the Church there must be this death to self. Paul will describe this death Christ died long before He entered His physical suffering or even before Bethlehem. That is the death He seeks in us so that His life might be revealed through us (2 Corinthians 4:7-12). It is the kind of life that John described as the life that was the light of men (John. 1:4). That life reveals the nature of sin, our fallenness, the extent of our fallenness, and the loftiness of righteousness and good.

2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

In the words of verses 3-4 Paul has captured Christlikeness. An attitude is composed of a value judgment and a course of action logically based on that value judgment. Christlikeness is an attitude. It is based on a value judgment, specifically that others are to be regarded with great value (verse 3). This basic value grows into an attitude when we embrace the action of looking out for the interests of others instead of just our own. God has called us to an attitude that Paul has described briefly and which he will now illustrate from the life of Christ.

God is calling us to do that which He Himself is willing to do, and which is His very nature. It is not that He has become this. It is who He has always been and will always be. It is not adopted behavior to Him, it is natural behavior. It was IN Christ Jesus because He was God. It was His very nature. It is possible in us because we are created in God's image and through belief in Christ inhabited by His Spirit. We must however embrace this attitude. We have choice and responsibility in the matter. A command such as this is essential because action is required on our part.

2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.

Paul begins in this verse to describe the change Christ underwent in terms of His mode of existence when He was incarnated in human flesh, and the attitude that required. Paul wants us to have the attitude that made Jesus willing to undergo such a change. In speaking of this change, Paul makes one of the great statements in all of Scripture on what is called the hypostatic union, the union of the Divine nature and

the human nature. Christianity embraces this doctrine as essential to the faith, that in Christ undiminished deity and perfect humanity were forever united in one person. The result of this union was that the Son of God became a man named Jesus, who was the Christ.

This idea baffles us, yet we believe it together and continue to grapple with its mysteries and implications. God could certainly take on the appearance of a man, so that He looked to the human eye just like a man without being one. Some have put forth this idea. In fact, the first major heresies about Jesus Christ involved compromising His humanity. Were this the case, that He only appeared to be a man, Jesus would have been much easier to explain. Or if He was a man, but had an extra portion of God, a kind of super-spirit, it would perhaps all be easier to comprehend. But He was undiminished deity and perfect humanity, and if both ideas are not kept intact there comes to be difficulty with all of the statements of Scripture that are the Holy Spirit's witness about Him. If He was not fully human, how could He qualify as our substitute and so fulfill all the types of the Old Testament? If He were not fully divine, how could He be a lamb without blemish? This is just a taste of the complexity that surrounds the matter of a precise understanding of Jesus identity.

In this verse Paul sets forth Jesus' divinity. Jesus existed in the form of God. We cannot soften the word form and say that Jesus only looked like God. Scripture is clear that God is spirit (John 4:24) and has no form in this sense (Deuteronomy 4:13-15). Nor can we say that this simply means Jesus, like God, was a spiritual being and so was like God in this sense. The rest of Paul's statement shows that by saying Jesus existed in the form of God he meant nothing less than that Jesus was equal with God in essence. He was using the word form not in the sense of mere appearance, though that is a legitimate use of the word. He was using it to describe things that are of the same essence, a part of the same whole, sharing all the essence of the whole.

In His former state of existence, Jesus' experience was the same as that of the other persons in the trinity where there is corporate experience of all the prerogatives, rights, and privileges that come with being God. This included the ability to be present everywhere, and therefore to see all, and hear all, and know all. It included the ability to do all that He was willing to do. The trinity is difficult for us to comprehend, the actual experience of three persons being of the same essence. We embrace the idea of the trinity not because we fully understand it, but because it is the only way for us to harmonize all of the statements made in Scripture made about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is a mystifying thing to try to comprehend Christ's experience with the Father and the Holy Spirit. But here in this statement Paul is affirming that He was in essence God. Before the incarnation the Son had an existence that was appropriate to His essence, and that is Paul's point.

The primary thing Paul wants the Philippians to imitate here is the attitude of the Son when His existence was appropriate to His essence. So Paul delineates that attitude. Though we don't know exactly how this worked in such a triune being, Paul lays out what the Son's thinking was. We don't know if this attitude developed, or if it simply was. This attitude was that the state of being He existed in, where He enjoyed and exercised all the powers and prerogatives of God, was not something He could not sacrifice. The words Paul chose to convey the idea that the Son did not regard this existence as valuable plunder to be seized. Though He did not change His essence, He could and would be willing to change His existence, much the same as we might change our own standard of living willingly. And so the Son, in eternity past, confident of who He was, was willing to alter His own experience of that essence.

That attitude is what Paul wants to capture in these verses, and he wants his readers to mimic it. There could have been specific rank issues in the Philippian church which are not specifically named. If there were not it would likely be the only Church that had ever existed where there were not such issues! The church in Philippi likely consisted of slaves and free, Greeks, Romans, Jews. There were plenty of differences that could lead to factions in the Church. At any rate, Paul knew that the humility required to advance the eternal matters of the kingdom of God had to be inspired in people and so needed a theological base. And so he will show in the verses that follow how the Son's attitude led to Him taking

what we could describe as seven steps downward to the depths of human existence. Paul wants to show that no one has stooped lower than Christ, His quality of life having been downgraded seven times! This was all voluntary, to advance God's plan of redemption and so to bring about restoration of the welfare of humanity.

2:7 but emptied Himself, taking on the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

This verse and the one that follows describe the Son emptying Himself. The verb used in Greek is *ἐκενόσεν*. So this teaching and doctrine is referred to in theological circles as the *kenosis* (from the Greek word *κενόσις*), meaning the emptying of the Son.

This subject has taken some movements within Christianity in different directions. It has led some to wrongly teach that Jesus was less than God. It has led others to teach somewhat imprecisely on what exactly changed when God became a man. It is a very difficult area, and it will remain somewhat mysterious to us. We will never get this unique being, the God-man, as precisely pigeon-holed as we would like.

The question of what exactly is meant here by the idea that the Son in some way emptied Himself is worth giving thought to. The goal is simply to develop as much understanding of the hypostatic union as we can and to be content with it having a mysterious element to it when we are done.

Paul uses the term emptying three other times in his writings. In Romans 4:14 he says it is possible to empty faith. He does not mean that it is possible to empty faith of its essence as the exclusive means of justification. He means that in the perceptions of humanity it can be emptied by casting the law alongside it as if the law also were a means of justification. So faith is emptied by what is wrongly cast alongside it. It is made to look like less than what it is. Its uniqueness is errantly called into question.

In 1 Corinthians 1:17 Paul says it is possible to empty the message of the cross. He does not mean it can be emptied of its essence as God's work on our behalf that provides the exclusive grounds for salvation. But in the perceptions of humanity, it can be emptied, by casting alongside it an emphasis on human works like baptism and things like the clever words of preachers. The cross is emptied by what is wrongly cast alongside it. It is made to look like less than what it is. Its uniqueness is errantly called into question.

In 1 Corinthians 9:15 Paul says it is possible to empty his boasting in preaching the gospel free of cost by adding the element of salary to the equation by paying him. This is not just a perception issue, but an actual emptying of a claim or negating of a claim by the introduction of something else. His pride and joy in delivering the gospel free of charge is emptied if he accepts pay for his services.

So looking only at Paul's usage of this word we can say this. The term emptying can be used of an actual emptying or a perceived emptying. In both cases the addition of something alongside is what causes the perceived or actual emptying. Something is added that creates either a real or a perceived downgrade.

Emptying when applied as Paul does here to the Son, captures what came about in Bethlehem as a result of decisions made within the Godhead in eternity past. These voluntary decisions had three important effects with respect to the existence of Christ, not His essence. First, human essence was cast alongside the Son's divine essence. The emptying was through what was added. There was nothing subtracted from His divine essence. Second, to be truly human changed His experience of His divine essence. He willingly accepted what can only be described as a downgrade in His experience of divine attributes such as omnipresence and to some degree omniscience. These were no less a part of His essence but by becoming human His experience of them took on a self-imposed limitation. Third, the taking on of humanity changed how He was perceived. It cast doubt on His identity and therefore on His experience of His divine essence. He did not experience the worship and respect of all. In fact, as the ensuing words will

indicate, the perception of Him by humanity was generally that of one who was to be despised and rejected. These three effects are what Paul is capturing in describing this emptying of Christ.

So the Son emptied Himself not by giving up any of His essence, but by adding human essence to His divine essence. This taking on of human essence involved real sacrifice on His part of the full experience His divine essence entitled Him to. We must remember that this act of service by Christ provides for Paul the evidence for his argument that the Philippians are to serve each other's interests rather than just their own. As Christ had been willing to lay aside His right to have an existence appropriate to his essence, so they should be willing to sacrifice their personal rights and have in mind the welfare and concerns of others.

The phrases that follow in this verse further develop this idea that Christ emptied Himself by virtue of that which He took upon Himself. He let go of His right as God to have everything and everyone serve Him. Instead, He determined to serve the purposes of God and in doing that to serve the needs of humanity. In the matter of humanity's salvation, He became their bond servant. There are three words used in this verse and the next to speak of the roles Christ assumed.

The first term used of the roles Christ assumed is form. It is the same word used in the previous verse where it is said that He existed in the form of God. Clearly in that verse this means that He shared the essence of God, being equal with Him. Here when it says He took on the form of a bondservant, it means that He emptied Himself of His divine right to be served and became the servant of the Godhead. He did this to reveal God to humanity and to serve the desire of God to redeem humanity. The Son did not only appear to be a servant. He became the member of the Godhead to execute the practical deeds and suffer the bodily pain that the plan of God called for. He took on the very essence of a bondservant.

This statement is followed by a phrase that uses a second term similar to form but distinct. It is rendered by the English word likeness. It is said that He was "made in the likeness of men." The term is a noun, from a verb which means to assimilate and become like. It is an accurate description of what Christ did in becoming a man. It allows for the fact that He did not lay aside His divine essence He became man, but He was unlike any other man in that He was also God. In that sense He was like man. It is right to say that the divine One assimilated humanity and the result was undiminished deity and perfect humanity united forever in one person.

Thus far we have seen three steps in the condescension of Christ as He considered others more important than Himself. First, He emptied Himself of His personal rights as God and so accepted a role that would eternally limit His experience of Divine privilege. For having become a man, He remains forever one, although a perfect one. The second step in His condescension is that He took upon Himself the form of a servant. He served the plan and desire of God the Father and so became a servant of God in humanity's behalf. The third step in His condescension is that he was made in the likeness of man. The One whose essence was divine assimilated human nature so that He was fully man while being fully God. It had huge implications for Him for all of eternity in terms of how He would experience His divine essence.

Paul says these things and will delineate four more steps in the condescension of Christ. It is a dramatic humbling and an inspirational example for us as we relate to each other. No one has stooped lower than Christ.

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

The condescension of Christ, His emptying of Himself, did not stop with Him becoming a man. Paul cites the fact that after this emptying, in which He took on the essence of humanity and so limited His experience of His divine essence, He then humbled Himself further. Not only did He become a man, but He accepted a very low form of human existence. Paul delineates three more steps that Jesus took

downward, having become a humble man. He became an obedient man, then a man who obeyed so that it cost Him His life, then accepted the insult of death on a cross. Each of these final three steps in Christ's condescension represents a very significant sacrifice on the part of Jesus.

For God to become a man involved a significant emptying of Himself. For Him to then humble Himself and accept an existence on what we would call today, the low end of the socioeconomic scale makes the magnitude of it all even grander. If there was a compelling reason for God to become a man, would it not be just and fitting that he become a man of honorable position? Would He not still be good and just and righteous though one who commanded honor? Who would have found fault with Him assuming such an existence? But He purposefully chose to humble Himself and our joy is to ponder all that is revealed of Him by that choice.

His humility evidenced itself in the fact that He became an obedient man. He was obedient to all the laws He as God had made for man. He was obedient to all the institutions He as God had ordained to keep order in a fallen world, most notably parental authority (Luke 2:51), and human government (Matthew 17:24-27). In the end He even subjected Himself to the whims and injustices of human government and religious authority (John 10:15-18).

His obedience was such that He never compromised it. He was obedient to God even when it became evident it would cost Him His life (Luke 22:39-46; John 8:28). He was obedient to divine principle even when He could have saved His life by compromising it. In the humility of this absolute obedience, we see the unchangeable nature of the divine essence in that God can do nothing that contradicts His own character and essence. He was obeying the laws and order He had established. These were who He was and so He was capable of nothing else and could do nothing else if He was to reveal Himself with precision and accuracy. This is not to say that the obedience of Jesus was, from the human side, effortless. Gethsemane shows that it demanded faith of Him. But His obedience to the point of death does reflect the unchangeable nature of God.

The death He willingly embraced was particularly cruel, humiliating, and unjust. It was not the death of a noble, selfless man, but that of a criminal. By God's own laws it was considered the death of one outside any favorable status with Him (Deuteronomy 21:22-23; Galatians 3:13). To die in such a way was to be used, to be made a spectacle to passersby by those who wished to make a very public statement about their own power and authority, as the sign hung by the Romans above His head indicated. It was to be stripped naked and put on display for the public to deride and abuse. It was cruel and unusual, depraved, and ruthless. It was a statement of the fallenness of man, both those with no knowledge of Yahweh and those whom He had embraced as His own, to whom He had revealed Himself fully. There has never been a death so dishonorable.

This condescension of the Son makes a very definitive statement about what it means to be Christ-like, and this is the message Paul wishes to bring to his reader's hearts. He has identified seven steps in this condescension of Christ He emptied Himself, became a bondservant, became a man, humbled Himself, became obedient, obeyed to the point of it costing Him His life, obeyed through the torture of crucifixion. When this is contemplated it makes the things we hang on to and the things we refuse to compromise seem very petty. That's Paul's point. It is a great theology of Christ that Paul lays down. But we must not miss his point in laying it down, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus."

2:9 Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

It is an honorable calling when we are led to lay aside our need to "be somebody" to advance the Kingdom of God in the lives of others. While Jesus was humbling Himself and much of humanity derided Him, God was bringing about something different, both for Jesus and for humanity. This Jesus was "the Christ," the anointed ruler of all that is. In the humblest of ways imaginable this king was taking back His

kingdom from the evil one who had laid claim to it and enslaved it. His decision to Himself be how creation was redeemed, confirmed His right as its owner and sovereign ruler. He very forcefully gained that kingdom through gentle sacrifice of Himself. The result is that in all God's creation there is no one greater than Jesus.

This verse describes action taken by God the Father in connection with action taken by God the Son, all of which God the Holy Spirit is active in. It should be understood to the degree we are able in this way. None of this action should be regarded as independent action taken by individual members of the Trinity. They always act in concert with each other and in perfect unity. The fact that the verse begins with the word therefore should not cause us to think that God the Father was reacting to the independent action of the Son, or that He made sure the Son obeyed fully before bestowing the title of Christ on Him. Everywhere Jesus was presented as the Christ beginning with His conception. However, the experience of the honor associated with that title was not known to Him while He was living out His humiliation. It became a part of His experience once He completed the initial earthly portion of His incarnation after He gave His life as the appointed sin-bearer. That important portion of the Triune God's plan being complete, it was then time to begin the experience of honor that the title Christ conferred. God the Father declared it to the world through the resurrection (Acts 2:22-36; Romans 1:4-5). God the Holy Spirit orchestrated worship and honor among humanity in the Church. The word therefore that starts this verse captures this sequential nature of the mission of the Christ.

Following the word therefore we are told of two important things God has done with respect to Christ. First, He has highly exalted Him. The term highly exalted should be carefully noted. It captures the expression of the original language well. Jesus has not just been elevated, honored as we might honor any good person. He has been elevated above. His position is a unique one that all of Scripture brings out (Revelation 19:11-16). The second thing we are told God has done is to confer a name on Him. The name Jesus is the English rendering of a Greek word which is itself a rendering of the Hebrew name we render Joshua, which means Yahweh saves. The name was assigned by God through Jesus' earthly parents. Both the rendering of this name in Greek, and subsequently other languages such as English, have caused us to lose the entire impact of what is being said in these verses.

The question is, is it the name Yahweh saves that God is talking about here, when it says that God has given Jesus a name which is above every name? That is possible. It is possible that He is saying that due to His role as humanity's savior, God's Son, known by the name Jesus, is the most honored being in all of creation. There is another possibility. The name that is above all other names is Yahweh, the name God gave Himself, a name so reverent that He told them not to take it in vain, or flippantly. Could it be that through the resurrection and subsequent revelation absolute attestation to His deity was given? The result is that He has been shown to be not another individual acting for Yahweh and named after Him, but Yahweh incarnate in human flesh. Every knee will bow before Jesus, because that name reveals His identity rather than just being a means of identifying Him. Verse 11, when understood from the point of view of language use of the day would seem to affirm this.

In all of this discussion about names, we must bear in mind that it is not the name that makes Jesus unique. It is His essence. The emptying of Himself, and His humility have confirmed God's distinguishing Him as creation's savior and ruler. It is these things that confirm the essence of Jesus the Christ, the anointed ruler over all creation. His personage is none less than the incarnation of Yahweh Himself carrying out His covenant promise to save. This is what God has now made plain and is the mystery of Christ (Colossians 2:1-3).

All of these interactions between the Father and the Son from eternity past which brought about all that is now true of the God/man, are being explained in terms that our intellects can grasp but that only to a limited degree. We have the mystifying elements of eternity, the trinity, and the hypostatic union at work behind the things these verses describe, and these overwhelm our finite processes. The bottom line is that Jesus, from His humiliation at Golgotha, has risen to the highest position that could ever be. We

know and worship Him as Jesus Christ. Christ, meaning “the anointed one,” is the greatest title that could be bestowed by heaven’s standard.

2:10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth,

These verses state the end to which all these actions on the part of the triune God are working. By a kind, gentle, yet firm, unbending and unthwartable plan carried out at times with devastating vengeance against His enemies, God is bringing into submission all that opposes His rule through the Christ. The Son, who is the one anointed by God as the visible ruler of all, became a man known as Jesus, and so all things are destined to finally be brought to recognize and be subjected to Him. Paul presents this in the imagery of His world where people knelt in the presence of one, they recognized as their ruler. Though we have left this practice in the western world today, so awesome will be the glory of Christ when He is revealed again that this will become our custom once again. There are three basic realms of power in God’s eyes. There is the power that is the true sovereign power, above every other power and from which every other power derives its authority. This is the power of heaven, shared by myriads of angels, but ultimately resting in the Triune God. There is the power of earthly institutions that God has vested authority in for the purpose of bringing order to a fallen world (Romans 13:1-7). They are to be respected and obeyed, but ultimately, they are accountable to God. Then there is in the spiritual realm the power of darkness led by Satan, who is said to be its prince (Ephesians 2:2; John. 12:31; 16:11). All the powers that exist fall into one of these categories, but all function only with God’s permission and in the end will not be found to have thwarted His purposes.

Christ’s authority will be acknowledged in all these realms of authority. This does not mean all will be saved. But all will ultimately be forced to acknowledge their own defeat and accept whatever the confines of their eternal lot are.

This has been God’s plan from the beginning. We do not know the exact boundaries that lie between what God initiates and what beings of their own free will initiate. But we do know that the purposes of God will ultimately stand firm, not compromised, or eroded in the least. Every act will be recompensed and every wrong made right by the sovereign righteous judge of all. Paul quotes a classic phrase from the Old Testament (Isaiah 45:23), in which God is declaring this great truth. It is an important thought for Christians to hold in their minds always. If this is the end to which all is being taken by the Almighty Sovereign of the universe, of what use are our feeble efforts in advancing our interests and enforcing our rights?

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

This verse completes Paul’s summary of the existence of Christ, from eternity past to eternity future. So complete will be the victory of Christ that every tongue will confess who He is. This statement of identity, Jesus Christ is Lord, bears examination. It was an important confession that those of the early Church saw as significant. It is said that no one can make such a statement except by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). What exactly was that statement in the language of the day?

To a large degree the religious terminology of the day was shaped by the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament. Greek was the trade language used throughout the Roman Empire and so widely spoken and understood. This version of the Old Testament was the most widely used version of the Old Testament Scripture used within the early Church. This is illustrated by its frequent quotation by the New Testament writers. In that version the Greek term *κύριος* appeared as the term used to render the Hebrew word *Adonai*, which had been substituted for the personal name of God, *Yahweh*. So it is not an overstatement to say that *κύριος*, which we render in English Lord, was the equivalent of *Yahweh*. Jesus

is Lord from that point of view could be construed as a statement of Christ's divinity. There is more evidence that this is precisely what is occurring here in the minds of the readers. This particular verse as written by Paul appears to be quoted from Isaiah 45:23. That is a record of statement made by Yahweh Himself, that every knee would bow before Him and every tongue would confess Him. Paul is equating Jesus with Yahweh. It seems then that this confession, Jesus is Lord, was not merely a statement of Jesus' authority. It was nothing less than a statement of His divinity. It expressed a faith that had concluded that Jesus was none other than Yahweh incarnate in human flesh. That belief could only come about through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

As in the previous verse we have a statement of a kind of universal acknowledgment of this reality. Scripture however says nothing about the universal salvation of men. In fact, in the last glimpse the Bible records of the future eternal state we see the continued separation between the evil and the righteous (Revelation 22:15). This could be because the wicked have only admitted the power of Christ when forced to, rather than by faith, God's condition for salvation. It could also be that while they admit to His power and authority, they are unwilling and unable to live in subjection to it, though in essence they certainly will. Their existence will be only that which He assigns and permits. Such an existence is true in the present as well and such an existence does not qualify one for salvation. The difference will be that then confession will real in the sense that their eyes will see it and they will believe that Christ is the absolute sovereign, over all that is. Their experience will also confirm it. But it will not result in their regeneration, because that work among men by the Holy Spirit will be over. Instead, they will be people confirmed forever in their unregenerate state, isolated from relationship with God.

Paul then affirms Scripture's teaching about the grand purpose of all things. When all that God has planned has been accomplished the result will be that God the Father is glorified (Psalm 46:10; Isaiah 45:4-5, 20-25; Habakkuk 2:13-14; 1 Corinthians 15:28; Ephesians 3:10). He will be seen to be who He revealed Himself to be, absolutely good and absolutely powerful (Psalm 62:11-12), transcendent above all He has created, and immanent present and active in His creation (Psalm 77:19-20).

The subject of God's glory is a critical one in the Scripture and is critical to our personal lives as we face our myriad of personal choices. It is the theological foundation for the attitude Paul is asking his readers to adopt, the attitude which then gives rise to the kind of community that is to exist in the body of Christ. If God is both powerful and gracious (Psalm 62:11-12), and if when He made Himself visible, He was seen to be full of grace and truth (John. 1:14), then when His glory is fully made known it will be creation's finest hour.

There are some important tensions however which we must realize in this matter of God being glorified. It will not result in bliss and happiness for every person. The fact that God will be glorified means only that He will be seen as just and without fault. His subjects will receive what they justly deserve, and that will be devastating and painful for some (see Nahum 1:1-12 on this side of God). The presence and existence of misery for the wicked is an important part of God being glorified. That is where we experience some sense of tension. That tension would be removed however if it was revealed that the deeds being punished themselves were a massive injustice that caused untold pain and suffering to millions and yet was perpetuated by the willing participation of millions. There could conceivably be conclusive, very moving evidence presented by God of this, and that would cause all to conclude that the eternal suffering of the wicked was just. We believe that this is what God will bring about, and that His revelation of the full wickedness of the wicked will close every mouth that would detract from the great glory of His character.

2:12 So then, my beloved, just as you always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

Paul turns his thinking on the actual condescension of Christ to more of its practical implication in the lives of his readers. The central idea here is what Paul refers to as “working out” our salvation.” What exactly is he commanding us to do?

The term rendered “work out” means to work fully or to complete something. That is its usage throughout the New Testament. It is a compound word composed of the verb “to work,” and the preposition “down.” In terms of etymology then the idea is “to work down.” The idea of “working down” provides a modern-day illustration of what this word had come to mean in the language of the New Testament. We use the term “work down” when we are doing something like moving a large pile of rocks. As we “work down” the pile we move closer to completion of the job. The idea being conveyed to the Philippians is that a work has been started, but there is much left to do, which they are being called on by Paul to bring to completion. What confuses us is that the work that needs to be completed by them is identified as “their salvation.” This is bothersome to us because we use the term salvation almost exclusively of justification. When we speak of someone being saved, we are referring to the moment when they believed in Christ and so were forgiven of their sins. And so by that usage of the word salvation, Paul is suggesting that there is work which we do that brings our forgiveness to completion and we need to get on with it. Not only that, but we should be fearful to the point of trembling as we do the work because we might fall short!

Our present-day use of the term “salvation” as a synonym for justification does not harmonize with the New Testament usage of the word, nor does it reflect an accurate theology of salvation. Paul’s command here reflects the Scriptural idea that justification in the plan and provision of God would initiate a process of sanctification that would conform us to the image of Christ. God’s goal in justification is to establish grounds for a relationship with Him so that we could then go on to experience His work of making us holy. The full work of God, from the moment He chose us in eternity past, to the moment we stand in His presence rescued from evil, clothed in new bodies, He refers to as salvation. From this point of view there is considerable unfinished business in our lives, a pile of fleshliness to “work down.”

Paul wants us to give attention to all that the Holy Spirit is seeking to do by way of bringing about change in our thinking patterns. His words to the Philippians are the same message he gave to the Romans when he told them not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Romans 12:1-2). It is the message to engage with our Creator whom Jesus has given us access to, and to live out His heart and mind for our lives. We see in the example of Jesus’ condescension the immense change in our fleshly way of looking at things that God wants to bring about in us. Paul did not want the Philippian church, or any other one, stuck at ground zero. He wanted them to “work down the pile” of self-centeredness, of empty conceit, of self-absorption. These are terrible messes in our lives.

When viewed alongside the humility and self-effacing attitude of Jesus this unfinished business should arouse a sick feeling in us. That is part of the fear and trembling that Paul is referring to, although the primary meaning of it is brought out in the next verse. But this thought of the lingering fleshliness in us should give rise to a genuine and intense anxiety about what our own sin could make of us unless we root it out. Now it is true that grace is the rule by which God deals with our sinfulness. He has given us Christ as the payment for sin’s penalty. He has given us freely His own Spirit to attack the root of our sinfulness within us. So our fear need not be over Him not loving us or forgiving us. But we should be absolutely frightened of the mess that sin can make of our lives if we do not by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the flesh. There should be this urgency in our pursuit of what is left for us in God’s salvation process. We should long to see the remnants of sin purged from our lives and his Spirit more fully shaping who we are in each moment. It is in this emptying that we accomplish the work of God and move it toward completion.

This pursuit of the full work of God’s salvation is what Paul longed to move others into. He did not want them obeying for his approval, to be known as a “good” church. He was concerned about what they were doing in his absence. Their obedience, if motivated only by their relationship to Paul, would not go far

enough. They had to want to be free of what sin had made of them. In the next verse we'll see they needed to be right where God Himself wanted them, not just where Paul wanted them. Paul was pushing them forward from mere respectability to authenticity in their salvation.

God's desire is not merely that we be respectable in the eyes of others, but that we be complete in His eyes. This demands a whole different mindset toward sinfulness. As long as we view it as simply bad, and as making us look bad and inconsistent, proper "management" of our sin will be our goal. We'll even accept concealing it, so that ourselves and our church do not look bad. But when we learn to see it as dangerous and when it scares and sickens us to think of what it can do to us, we'll want to eradicate it. We will not tolerate its secret presence. This is the kind of zeal Paul wished to promote in his readers against sin and in favor of all that we see in the character of Jesus. Salvation is not a white washing. It is a new creation of us by God that He longs to get on with in our lives. It happens as we are willing to work down the pile that our fleshliness has created in our lives.

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

Paul continues to build on the idea that we need to apply diligent effort to the ongoing work of God's salvation in us. This is not primarily because we will benefit from it, though we will. It is not just because of the disasters our sinfulness is still able to work in our lives, though these are significant. The primary reason we should give ourselves to this is because it is God who is doing it.

In our present culture we have largely lost the significance of the innate right of God, or that that matter even that of any earthly ruler. The privilege of democracy has purged this from us. Our leaders and rulers work for us and are charged with representing our will within legal boundaries. In the case of imperfect, fallen men who rule us, this accountability is appropriate. In the case of our Creator, it is neither necessary nor are we remotely capable of it. His power is absolute, His integrity impeccable, His will perfectly just, and His motives pure. He has the right as Creator to will certain things in terms of our lives that please Him and he does. If they please Him, we can be certain that they will be good by their very nature. This is the reality that is God. We have a good, all powerful, sovereign person who rules the entire universe. The desires of such a one need to be served, and more importantly, will be served.

It is because of this that we need to do all that we can to expedite His work of salvation in our lives. He wants something made of us. He wants certain things done through us and by us for Himself. It all fits with what He is doing overall.

Paul's call to us can be summarized in the following way. By His Spirit work down the pile of what is left of the flesh in your lives, what has not been impacted by His Spirit. Do this because of who He is and because it is something He wants you to do, has asked you to do, and has equipped you to do. In the end this means it is the most urgent matter you have to tend to, at it is why you should give yourselves to it with fear and trembling. It is no small matter.

2:14 Do all things without grumblings or disputings;

Very soon after people get self-absorbed nothing is to their liking and there is no person who can live up to their expectations. The church at Philippi and every church in every place is normal in this sense. It is easy when people begin working together for the unity of the Spirit to be brushed aside along with Christlikeness when personal interests are threatened. We are still people who need affirmation and we do not learn overnight to draw it from Jesus. So very often our need for symbols of success like titles and influence, compliments, and recognition, even command and control work their way into our way of doing things in our Church. Because we all bring these ways of getting our personal needs met into the Church, grumblings and disputings begin to flare up around us. We tend to do all things with grumblings and disputing. We maneuver ahead of time to take things our way and if they do not go that way we

complain in the aftermath. It is a normal part of human existence, and it is offensive to God (Proverbs 6:16-19). Grumbings and disputes are like gauges on the dash of the Church that tell us the level of our spiritual health and power.

Grumbings and disputes arise because we impose our will on the Church. They end when each person allows Christ to be the head, and call whom He might to shape, influence, and lead in the affairs of the Church. Paul is calling the Philippians here to the attitude of selflessness that was in Christ Jesus. The presence or absence of grumbings and disputes is the gauge that reveals the degree to which the attitude of Christ Jesus is prevailing in us. Where fleshliness prevails, grumbings and disputes break out (James 4:1-2; Galatians 5:16-21). To the degree these are allowed to exist a church's spiritual character is evidenced, its expectation of its members communicated, and the permissible level of Christlikeness and maturity understood. It can all sink to a dastardly level. This is critical ground for leaders to watch because of what it reveals about both their congregation and them.

2:15 that you may 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.

If a group of people can do the things God has designed and called His Church to do without the fleshliness that leads to disputes and grumbling, their identity is authenticated to those who watch them. While that does not guarantee a positive response to the truth, they proclaim it does make for a more effective proclamation. There are six things in this verse that Paul says will happen if we do all things without grumbling and disputing. He will mention a seventh thing in the following verse.

First, we prove ourselves to be blameless. Blamelessness in the Scripture does not mean sinlessness. It means that we are practicing the faith as we should. When we are blameless, we are following the lead of the Holy Spirit in our decisions and courses of action, and we are responding to His conviction about our sin with confession and repentance.

Second, we prove ourselves innocent. Again, this does not mean sinless. Innocence used of a righteous person's conduct refers to being acquitted of all the false charges that come from the mouths of the unregenerate and the unfaithful. Wherever there have been men and women of faith, the enemy has always raised up a Horonite or an Ammonite to do His work of accusing (Nehemiah 2:10, 18-19). The devil is the great slanderer by name and so there will always be this activity going on against God's Church. We will be proved innocent in these trumped-up charges when our work together is free of disputes and murmuring.

Third we prove we are children of God. Our conduct reveals our spiritual genetics. We show that God is not only with us, but He is in us. As John characterized us, "His seed abides in us" (1 John. 3:9). There is an essential identity revealed when the Church is able to free itself of the normal infighting and bickering of human organizations. So typical is this of people that when it does not exist it proves the people involved are not normal humans.

Fourth, when we work down the pile of fleshliness so that we do things without complaining and disputing, we show that we are children of God above reproach. The charge of being hypercritical will not stick. To be above reproach does not mean people will not accuse you of evil. God Himself is slandered by evil people and evil beings. Being above reproach means that legitimate charges cannot be made. When it is used this expression is talking about visible evil practices. There is no member of the human race but one who is above reproach in the absolute sense of the term, from the divine point of view.

Fifth, we will demonstrate the crookedness and perversity of the rest of humanity. There is good and bad news in this. The good news is that it is what God wants us to do and it is what He is choreographing in our lives. The bad news is that it will create a reaction, a response, and an outright attack from the evil one and all who consciously or unconsciously align themselves with Him. Without saying a word, we will

be accused of being judgmental and intolerant. We will be accused of being unloving. There is a tension that is created between good and evil whenever good makes itself visible. It is a tension that is felt in the deepest part of a human being and the eruption can be sudden, violent, without provocation, and even deadly.

Sixth, we become like light. This is similar to the previous thing mentioned but does have a very positive side. We become a source to those searching for truth. They can learn the true nature of all that is, most importantly the true nature of the One who has been so slandered that he is seen as impulsive, whimsical and with no feeling for creation. While we create a reaction that may be painful for us, it brings incomparable hope to millions who are lost in the maize evil has made of the world.

This is the way the affairs of God's church are to be conducted. The leaders must not tolerate it drifting into a series of grumblings and disputes. The leaders themselves must rise above such bickering. When they are slandered, they must respond in a measured way so that they do not create a culture of reaction and retaliation. There is ample illustration from the time of the Exodus in the life of Moses that provides sobering thought in this whole area.

2:16 holding fast the word of life so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain or toil in vain.

Paul knew that he was loved by the Philippians. He calls on the relational equity that he has with them in this verse to help motivate them to regard each other as they should and to rise above the grumblings and disputes that could negate God's work in and through them.

Before doing this however, he mentions a seventh thing that comes as things are done without grumbling and disputes. He names a simultaneous kind of thing that is accomplished which is that in doing this we are holding fast the word of life. To hold fast means to heed the lesson of something and take appropriate action. It is used of making an astute observation and taking action that is fitting (Luke 14:7). The generation of Israelites who left Egypt died in the wilderness because they fell into grumbling and striving with their leaders and so with God. The words of God's covenant with them became a word of death because they did not hold it fast in faith. They simply did not trust it (Hebrews 3:12-4:7). God's direction is always the word of life how to enter the experience of His presence and blessing. It is a treasure to hold fast because of this. It is direction to shape one's life by. We do so when we keep ourselves from grumbling and disputes and take the course in such situations that Jesus Himself modeled of trust in the righteous Judge (1 Peter 2:23). So critical is this principle that Moses was kept from the promised land when he himself is said to have "broke faith" with God (Deuteronomy 32) and adopted a bitter spirit toward those he was leading (Numbers 20:2-12). God saw that as a lack of reverence for Him, and in the end that is what it is.

Paul was not looking toward a day when he himself could take credit for the Philippians progress in the faith. The credit for that in the end would be God's. He was looking for a day when things like the beating he experienced in Philippi and the violation he accepted of his rights as a Roman citizen there would prove to have been used by God to push forward the work, He wanted to do there. He looked to see the prize they would receive together.

A leader must be careful in doing what Paul does here, using the equity of personal relationship to motivate people in their faith. But good spiritual leaders do it by the Spirit's leading. In the end we must be motivated by the greatness of our God. But this is high spiritual ground that we do not walk until we have developed substantial maturity. Just as we seek to have our own earthly children mimic our behavior long before they understand the intricacies of why we do what we do, so we often follow the more mature spiritual people in our lives and rise to a higher level of understanding later. Early on, a leader's praise, their need for assistance in the mission, even their disapproval may be more tangible than that of

God Himself. There is an idea that says that we learn to follow God by following His people. There is more than a little truth to this. Paul uses his own potential feelings to motivate the Philippians.

2:17 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.

A drink offering was always a complimentary offering, added alongside the main sacrifice. It seems that it was that which completed the pleasantness of the occasion to God. The previous verse spoke from Paul's perspective, as one who had toiled to produce something in the lives of the Philippians and would rejoice in that His own life story would be more gratifying if it rose to maturity. Their maturity would enhance his experience of the day of Christ. This verse conveys a different perspective. Both perspectives are true. Both emphasize different aspects of the same reality.

Here Paul's perspective is that the main event is not his own mission as an apostle which they compliment. Instead, they are the main event. The service they render to God is critically important. From that perspective his own life has been like a drink offering. It has been complimentary to their service. To scrutinize what they do is to find the influence of Paul. From that perspective his own life he hopes, and his example contribute to the overall quality of what they offer to God.

From either perspective Paul rejoices and want them to rejoice with him. The partnership with them is the thing he is drawing on here. His idea is this, "Let's continue to enrich one another by the things we sacrifice for Christ." Many see this verse as euphemistic, alluding to Paul's own suffering and death. That may be the case. But he viewed the Christian life as one of being an ongoing sacrifice (Rom 12:1), whether lived by an apostle like himself or by one of a more normal calling. Whether the Philippians were viewed as those who validated Paul's efforts, or they were the main thing, and he simply complimented their service to God it made no difference. Either way his sacrifice was a joy for him and could be for them.

2:18 And you too, I urge you, rejoice and share your joy with me.

In a life of Spirit-led sacrifice there is great joy. Paul received great joy in pouring himself out on behalf of the faith of others. He shared that joy with others even when absent. He believed strongly in the verbal expression of it, like is reflected in this letter. If there had been occasion for them to be together in each other's physical presence there would likely have been times of celebration, laughter, and embrace. One cannot help but notice the tone of joy that characterizes this letter. Some have mistakenly taken this book as shallow because of that. Its happy tone belies the depth of its thought. To be joyful as a prisoner required a noble focus, and the fruit of that noble focus is everywhere the thought of this letter.

Paul urges the Philippians to embrace this life of joy and to minister joy to him. This is an interesting command on Paul's part. It tells us that for all that was good about this church they must have been somewhat methodical in their faith. It is a problem for those who "grind it out," and to their perseverance they must add the expression of joy. We reflect Christ fully not simply by perseverance, but by fullness of joy in it (John 15:11; 16:22, 24; 17:13).

This command also reveals something about the nature of this joy. Motivation for it must always be present, otherwise to tell someone to rejoice would be to ask for a kind of cosmetic optimism. Everywhere in Paul's writings we find that things like joy and contentment are the fruit of the Holy Spirit's ministry within us (Gal. 5:22; Phil 4:11-12). There is always ample cause for joy in what is now true of us because of Christ. That is how we are able to obey a command such as this, by switching our focus from what is seen to what is unseen (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). In whom we are in Christ, in what is ours through Him, and in what is coming about through our circumstances because of Him, there is always reason for joy. Paul the prisoner calls us to be thinking of such noble things here.

This joy, to persist and prevail is passed back and forth between people. We fed off of each other in this. Paul has shared his own joy with the Philippians. Now he wants them to minister in this same way back to him. The things he has shared should lift their spirits, and then they should be enabled to reciprocate. By this word of instruction, we get a glimpse of how the Christian community sustained a healthy momentum. That momentum was generated because Paul did not let himself interpret his welfare and overall status by his immediate circumstances. Leaders that apply the faith their own lives set a pace and constantly bring a freshness to those they lead. The people around them do not hear the same old mechanical perspective. They hear a new slant on it, a fresh look at something old that renews zeal and brings the greatness and vastness of God's power and goodness back into focus. Their leadership is a catalyst. It stimulates that which then returns and ministers to them.

2:19 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.

Paul was so captured in his affection for Christ that he was restless for the things that were of concern to Him. People like the Philippians who were still learning the faith were of special concern so that he could not endure if he did not know the condition of their faith. Paul's plans were always made in conjunction with the Holy Spirit's leading. And so when he hoped to do anything it was in the Lord Jesus, according to what seemed to be His heart. The heart of Jesus was that Timothy go and check on the welfare of the churches, likely several different ones. Timothy could well have been doing the actual writing of this letter since he is named in its opening verse as being a co-sender with Paul. By this time in Paul's ministry, Timothy was recognized as one of significant influence. Paul anticipates that his own spirit will be lifted once Timothy returns with word on the condition of the faith of those in Philippi. This is the joy that he anticipated in the previous verse that they could minister to him as he endured his plight as a prisoner.

2:20 For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.

This is the beginning of a highly complementary statement about Timothy. We do not know all that happened in terms of those that Paul had been seeking to carry on the work of ministry through. Paul's later epistle to Timothy gives the same impression, that most had proved unreliable (2 Timothy 4:9-17).

Anyone who has experienced life on this planet know the feeling Paul is describing of kindred spirit. This is a rare thing to find even among those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The term used is literally like-souled. It is used only here in the New Testament. Paul uses it because there seemed to be in both their beings something that made them think alike and see things in the same way. This may be a place in Paul's writings where we catch a glimpse of a personal weakness, or at least of his humanity, though that is speculative. But to speculate, it could be in these words that we are seeing that Paul could be very devastated when people did not sacrifice as he did or follow through as he did (see also Acts 15:36-40). There is a hint of frustration and anger here. It is easy to impute a deficiency where there is simply a dissimilarity and to mistake personality differences for spiritual ones and so to feel terribly violated on a personal level by lack of faithfulness in others. It is reasonable to assume that Paul had to struggle with these things as all leaders must. The feeling of being alone is common among those that God calls to His work.

Paul cites Timothy as one who will be genuinely concerned for their welfare. The word he uses to convey this authenticity is a word that describes one who is of legitimate birth. Particularly in the wake of people disappointments, one can feel that they have been surrounded by bastards! Everyone in ministry has had that perspective and has been refreshed by the Lord through a friend and faithful worker like Timothy.

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

What the Bible is speaking of when it speaks of the lust of the flesh is summarized well here. It is to seek after one's own interests rather than those of Christ Jesus. While other sins more classically come to mind when we think of the lust of the flesh, this is the real essence of the problem of humanity. Here, Paul is almost certainly speaking of individuals who have been born again, but who are not entering into the full experience of salvation. While it is certain that this is a great contradiction, we see in all of Paul's letters that it is a reality. Paul experienced it even among those who shared ministry with him (2 Timothy 4:9-17). It is certain that we will see it among the rank and file.

This behavior pattern we fall into is against all sound logic. We know that the interests of Christ are eternal and ours involve only the moment. We know that everything in our world is passing away, everything that our desires relate to. We know the principle of stewardship, that the things of this life are set before us as a test that determines in some way things that relate to eternity. Yet we cling to what we should discard and fail to seize what is clearly the treasure of eternity. It is the mystery of lawlessness that explains this that Paul observed in his peers.

Our challenge is to become like Timothy and Paul. The difficulty of that is not only that it goes against our instincts. It is also that such a life we will likely pursue alone a fair share of the time. Paul may be overstating the issue here. Godly, but weary men often do (1 Kings 19). Paul had experienced such extreme lows (2 Corinthians 1:8). It is never true that we are without peers in our concern for the kingdom, but it is true that those who truly share the interests of Christ are a small remnant within Christianity, and we often aren't aware of their presence.

Paul's primary point here however is the quality of character that Timothy had. He stood out as unique in Paul's mind. Other men were quite useful, as he will say in his next thoughts regarding of the Philippians own, Epaphroditus. But Timothy stood out in terms of his character, commitment, and ability. In him Paul wanted the Philippians to know that they were seeing the best, one who was capable in every way to guide and lead in the most complex issues. He will go on to state more about Timothy's worth.

2:22 But you know of his proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the Gospel like a child serving his father.

Timothy's value was not simply in what we call potential. His worth and value were proven. Life and ministry had tested or assayed his character. It had been proven to be the genuine article. Two elements are mentioned here that were true of Timothy and so were proof of his value.

First, he was one who was willing to serve. It is one thing to desire the title and affirmation of leadership. It is another matter to believe so strongly in the furtherance of the gospel that one simply serves. It is not thing to pick and choose what you wish to do, it is another thing to be willing to do whatever needs to be done. It is one thing to seek God's power in bringing about what you want, it is another to believe so in Him and His greatness that one simply serves Him regardless of personal gain or loss.

Second, Timothy proved his value by being teachable and submissive. He conducted himself like a child serving his father. He was submissive to the leadership and direction of Paul. This is essential in spiritual leadership. There are many who in theory claim they are willing to submit to God. But their inability and unwillingness to work under human authority becomes evident and severely hampers their value.

Because these two elements were present, Timothy could be dispatched by Paul on the most sensitive of missions and be completely trusted to represent Paul's and Christ's interests without compromise. These two elements allowed him to gain enough experience so that his own judgment in spiritual matters had developed. He had arrived at the point where at a young age he was a solid spiritual leader in his own right, not just as a representative of Paul. His own connection with the head was vibrant and vital.

2:23 Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me.

It must be that some critical date was approaching in terms of Paul's legal issues, a hearing of some sort which we lack details on. Paul anticipates that he will soon know more about his situation, and this would seem with what follows to be a reference to the legal matters that kept him imprisoned. Timothy would stay with him until the outcome of that hearing was known. Others have worked diligently at trying to patch together a history of Paul's imprisonments and his various hearings such as this one and the one referenced in 2 Timothy 4:16-17. In his various letters there are hints of ongoing legal process, and it is a significant lifework to pull together the picture of what occurred in Paul's imprisonment(s). Sever seem to have done that well and we rest in their work of speculation.

2:24 and I trust in the Lord that I myself also shall be coming shortly.

Paul has already expressed optimism regarding the impending decision on his imprisonment (1:25-26). He was anticipating release and the ability to give attention and effort to the work of strengthening the churches. His confidence was in the Lord in this matter. But given this hope and this confidence that he himself would soon visit, there must have been considerable urgency behind his concerns in this letter, though they are addressed in a very joyous tone. He must have been quite concerned about the developing classes or factions in the church at Philippi. He must also have sensed a significant opportunity to deepen a strategic opportunity, a financial partnership that could further the work he was given to. So in spite of his confidence in his own ability to go there, he still plans to send Timothy and Epaphroditus.

2:25 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;

The initial occasion for this letter is that Epaphroditus had come from Philippi to deliver a financial gift to Paul (4:18). It is in this way that he was their messenger and ministered to Paul. Paul's letter is a Thank You! note for that gift. No doubt as Paul and Epaphroditus talked, Paul became concerned about some attitudes developing within the Church and so the letter he writes addresses these concerns as well. He would send the letter with Epaphroditus when he returned to Philippi. He will speak of a few more details of Epaphroditus visit with him in the ensuing verses.

Paul recognizes Epaphroditus in three areas. First, he calls him a brother. This was significant because this is how the Jews referred to each other. They were siblings in the family of God. We don't know the ethnicity of Epaphroditus, his name is not Jewish, and it is likely that he was a Gentile. Paul's heart was to break down Jew/Gentile barriers and he set the tone for this on every occasion.

Second, Paul refers to him as a fellow worker. He recognized his sacrifice for the work of the gospel and with this affirms it. Many are those who agree with the work or sympathize with the cause, but it is an important milestone when one begins to work for the cause.

Third, Paul calls Epaphroditus a fellow soldier. We understand our present role well when we refer to ourselves not only as workers but as soldiers. The unseen powers of darkness are our enemies. They marshal the disobedient to their cause, but flesh and blood are not the enemy per se. Satan and his demons are (Ephesians 6:12). Many Christians begin the work of the gospel, but because they do not fight

the battle the soon become discouraged or lose interest in the work. Church ministry is about training people in both serving and fighting.

2:26 because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard he was sick.

There was an element of homesickness in Epaphroditus, but it was not a self-centered desire to be re-connected with the familiar. In times when news traveled slowly, and somewhat imprecisely, Epaphroditus was concerned that they had wrong information back home about his health. They had rightly heard that he was sick. The next verse will describe that sickness. He was not sure they knew he was now well. He was concerned about their imprecise concern and prayer for him. So he was longing for them likely in the normal relational sense in when we miss those we love when we're away. But this was intensified to the point of requiring him to return home because of their being preoccupied with an undue concern for his health. Paul thought it essential that Epaphroditus return and so uses the opportunity to send this letter to them with him. The letter would convey thanks to them for their gift, it would communicate the reality of the need for their continued financial support, and it would address what Paul thought might be rising storms within that congregation.

2:27 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, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

Early in Paul's ministry he experienced the power of God working through him to heal those who were sick (Acts 14:8-10; 19:11-12). We don't know if Paul was an instrument in Epaphroditus' healing beyond normal prayer. It seems likely if this were the case it would be specifically mentioned. It seems like time passed God's work of healing returned to its more normal state of happening in response to prayer (James 5:13-15). We should not take this as an indication God heals less. It is just that at times healing is attached visibly to the actions of certain individuals as a means of authenticating to the world their message. Our more normal experience is to see God heal in response to our special prayers and our persistent prayers. The fact is that in all human trouble and weakness, including sickness, we should turn in prayer to Him. As in all matters we will see Him answer according to His will. This normal experience of healing is more likely what occurred here in the case of Epaphroditus.

Epaphroditus is said to have been sick to the point of death. We do not know what the sickness was beyond that. Paul simply says that the Lord had mercy. It is the mercy of God always when we are not consumed by natural dangers. The presence of evil has so impacted creation that we are always at risk. Death will be the experience of all at some point, but God's mercy gives us time. Paul is personally grateful in this case because the death of one so dear would have greatly added to the sorrow of Paul's prison experience. It would have meant the loss of a strategic person in terms of the work at Philippi, and this would have given added concern to Paul.

There are times God grants relief. There are other times we seemingly bear the full weight of suffering and trial, to the point of death. The criteria lie beyond our comprehension. We only are assured that God will bring us safely into His kingdom (2 Timothy 4:18) and wipe away every tear (Revelation 21:3-4).

2:28 Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly in order that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you.

We see in this verse again the selflessness of Paul. As a prisoner it would have been completely understandable to want Epaphroditus to stay. He was, after all, sent by the Church at Philippi for this purpose, to minister to Paul. But Paul is more concerned for them, that their anxiety be relieved. He is in fact, eager to meet their need in this way. It does the man of the Spirit good to see others rejoice. In ministering to others, he himself is ministered to. There is no experiencing God's encouraging grace when

we are self-focused, determined to retain all that is ours. It is when we let go of what is dear that we fully experience the flow of His grace to us. We cannot minister to the needs of others but what our own needs are ministered to, and this is founded on one of the great principles of the kingdom (Luke 6:38). Where there is an eagerness to give, there will be a great experience of God's encouraging and strengthening grace.

2:29 Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard;

Paul gives two commands here regarding Epaphroditus. The first seems curious, to receive him in the Lord with joy. This would seem to be something they would naturally do without being commanded, since he had special value to them, and they were concerned about his sickness. The previous verse indicated that this concern of theirs was anxiety, so much so that Paul is concerned about relieving it. Why then would he feel the need to command what would seem to naturally happen? The answer to this seems to be that Paul wanted to be sure that their celebration and their giving were as intentional and intense as had been their anxiety. When God frees us by moving His hand it is easy for us to move quickly on to the next thing and not grow in trust of Him by reflecting on that demonstration of His power and goodness we have just experienced. Celebration and thanksgiving build trust. Paul does not want to leave these important things to chance. They were to receive Epaphroditus in the Lord, reflecting on the Lord's doings in his return to them in Philippi. They were to do it with joy, an inner consciousness of God's presence and goodness in the whole matter.

The second imperative used here by Paul is that Epaphroditus and all men who lived as he did be held in high regard. The reality of human behavior is that we shape our actions after those of others. There is a conscious choice on our part to behave like someone else. And so we become like those whom we have regard for. Throughout the New Testament the writers acknowledge this and so guide us in whom we are to mimic. We are to mimic Christ (Philippians 2:5), Paul (1 Corinthians 4:16; Philippians 4:9), the leaders in our churches and other churches (1 Thessalonians 2:14; Hebrews 13:7). This command is another way of identifying those who should be emulated.

2:30 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 had depended on the financial support of the Church at Philippi, but that support had not come to him. It had been deficient in some way and for some reason. He will allude to this again in chapter 4 (verse 10), and there will be opportunity to speculate there as to what the issue may have been.

Through the work of Epaphroditus this lack was made up. Whether this is a reference to him making a difficult journey to Paul's side, guarding the gift all along the way, or a reference to additional work he did once there, keeping a schedule that wore him down physically and lead to his serious sickness is unknown to us. Either scenario, or both are likely. At any rate, Paul wants all to acknowledge the value Epaphroditus had placed on this work of Christ and to hold all such men in high regard.

All Christians are not to be equal in our eyes in this sense of choosing whom we mimic. We are to have special regard for those who live the life and make the sacrifice.

Philippians 3

3:1 “Finally brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.”

To rejoice in the Lord is to celebrate. It is to celebrate who He is in character. Our rejoicing will be authentic and transformational when it is rooted in this, who He is. His character has opened His heart to us so that He has become our Savior, and so we celebrate all that He has done for us. Because of who He is and all He has done we rejoice in who we have been made to be because of Him. And because of who we have been made to be we celebrate what will become of us. Celebrating “in the Lord” means all these things and because of His infinite nature there is always more to celebrate as He becomes known to us. This celebration of ours can never reach a logical end. It does end, and in many cases never gets started due to our ignorance and sluggishness regarding all He has made known of Himself. But there is always legitimate reason to rejoice in the Lord, and we can enter this celebration to the degree that we know and focus on the truth about Him. This is to be something we intentionally do.

Paul realizes he is repeating himself in his teaching to the Philippians. This does not seem to be a reference to what he has already written in this letter, but a reference to what he has either written before to them or spoken to them. There are certain things that we must repeatedly hear, and good leaders understand this (2 Peter 1:12-15).

3:2 “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;”

Paul uses very strong language, terms of contempt, to describe those dangerous people that the Philippians needed to avoid. All the terms apply to the same group legalistic Jewish teachers whose teaching perverted the truth of the gospel. They were arrogant. They believed that Jews were morally superior to Gentiles. Gentiles, to experience salvation, had to embrace certain rituals of Jews such as circumcision. This arrogance of the Jews had the potential of creating schism in the body of Christ both doctrinally and relationally. Paul picked up on this developing danger from Epaphroditus and wanted to speak strongly against in this letter (Philippians 2:1-5). He employs three terms here as labels for those who would lead the church astray. They are each strong and that is intentional. The Spirit wished to convey to the Philippians the necessity and urgency of taking action to distance themselves from those who would mislead them.

The term dogs were used by Isaiah of false prophets and teachers (Isaiah 56:10). The Jews used the term in a derogatory way of Gentiles to express their exclusion from the family of God. This terminology was very much in vogue in Jesus’ day, and He makes a powerful statement against this attitude of exclusion (Matthew 15:21-28). Here in an intentional switch Paul uses the term of the Jews who were seeking to establish spiritual superiority over the Gentiles. Paul himself was a Jew, but he turns their own derogatory term back on them. Now, why would God inspire such a thing and place it in Scripture through the pen of Paul? It is an attempt to paint a picture to the Jews of the reality of their spiritual condition. It is a dramatic statement.

To the term dogs, Paul adds the term “evil workers.” It is one thing to be an evil doer, quite another to be an evil worker. The one simply falls into a bad pattern. The other inspires a bad pattern of living in others. The one may be making a mistake. The other has justified the mistake, provides an excuse for it, and so gives permission for others to follow in it. These who were so pious in appearance and who could produce so much guilt, were of the enemy, sowing weeds among the wheat (Matt. 13:25). Their zeal they were not subjecting to the judgment of Scripture and God’s Spirit. The result was that their ideas were neither spiritual nor true. To not deal in truth is to deal in the lie. This is a switch that can occur very subtly when ideas and attitudes are not scrutinized in the light of truth. It has devastating results. And so it did in these who were propagating the pride and fleshly indulgence that God hated, all the while claiming to be the true children of God.

The third term Paul uses is rendered by the NASB “false circumcision.” It is not the normal word for circumcision. It is the word for “cutting.” There are several significant things about this choice of words. The original Hebrew word for covenant meant to cut. These Jews falsely viewed themselves as under the covenant. Because of their rejection of Christ, they were not. This rendered their circumcision of no spiritual significance. It was merely a cutting of flesh, what Paul called mutilation elsewhere (Galatians 5:10-12). The cutting of oneself was a common act of worship among the pagans (1 Kings 18:28). It had been prohibited in the worship of Yahweh (Leviticus 21:5). And so in using this word Paul captures the absurdity of Judaism’s holding on to Yahweh and rejecting Christ, an impossibility Jesus had addressed in His own life on earth (John 8:31-59). Their embrace of the rite of circumcision, due to their lack of faith had become just more ritualistic cutting. Ironically, theirs was now a pagan attempt to gain merit with God. They had become by their own standard and terminology, “dogs.” That was the stark reality of it all.

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,”

Circumcision was a symbolic statement that men were called to make under the terms of the Old Covenant. It expressed their faith in Yahweh and so their membership in the covenant community. Like all symbols this one had its shortcoming, namely that anyone could bare in their bodies this sign without any accompanying faith. Yet it was the God-given symbol of membership in the Covenant community. So widespread was the practice of circumcision among the Jews that embracing it became synonymous with belonging to Yahweh. And so those who were part of the covenant community were referred to as “The Circumcision.” Paul is clarifying here, as he did elsewhere (Romans 2:25-29), that membership in the covenant community, both New and Old, was not gained through circumcision. It was gained through faith. He clarifies who is a part of the New Covenant community by borrowing this common term for the community of those under the Old Covenant. His point is that the faith life is the identifying mark of life under the covenant, not observance of an outward ritual. This faith life is observable under the New Covenant era in that it is characterized by three experiences. They are common in all cultures where the Gospel has been proclaimed during all eras since Christ. These experiences do not have merit in themselves, any more than circumcision did. They are the common way in which one’s faith is made visible under the New Covenant.

The first of these three experience is that of worshipping in the Spirit of God. Jesus had proclaimed that this would happen because of His presence on earth (John 4:21-24). This phrase refers to a worship that grows from within at the prompting of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Such worship is not confined to being in a certain place. It is not confined to certain times and seasons. It is continual and ongoing. It simply springs up within as an offering of praise, thanksgiving, submission, or dedication to God. It is worship enabled by the Holy Spirit as well, whether prayer, an act of service, a thought or thoughts expressed to others originating in Him. The ability demonstrated in such worship is distinct because it comes from God Himself through His Spirit into ours. It is worship that is controlled by the Holy Spirit, and it bears His thought and His tone. None of this is to say that the person’s own senses or thought process or body are less involved. The fact is the naturally processes are likely heightened so that this worship is beyond what just those things can produce. The worship orchestrated, enabled, and controlled by the Holy Spirit is the greatest that occurs on earth.

The second of these three experiences of the faith is glorying in Christ Jesus. To glory in something means to consider and acknowledge it as weighty, significant, and of great value. The one who is God’s child is so only because of Jesus Christ. Their understanding and awe of that grows the more their understanding of truth grows. They know the immensity of His actions in their behalf, and they know their own moral incapability. Their privilege is to travel beyond self-obsession to being given to the things He has given Himself to. All else is shrinking in value and significance compared to the immense value of what is His. Their treasures and values are finding their new rank of importance under this ever-increasing discovery of Him (Matthew 13:44-46).

The third of the three experiences of the faith Paul describe as putting no confidence in the flesh. The term “flesh” refers here to our spirituality as fallen beings apart from the energizing of the Holy Spirit. It is a pseudo-spirituality. It usually involves routines and rituals that we embrace to prove our goodness to others and to God. It is typically external in its focus, a whitewash job that covers our sins and shortcomings. It is what has given birth to all the world’s religions with their prescriptive action plans whereby people can supposedly atone for misdeeds, and curry God’s favor. This is our default spirituality, the sort that we can and do slouch toward even as believers so that it contaminates the Christian faith. This is the kind of contamination Paul was seeking to prevent in Philippi.

The Gospel teaches that as fallen beings there is evil within us that corrupts all the supposedly spiritual action, we generate independent of God. There comes to be something self-seeking present even in the most selfless of these actions. It is an error to think that by such contaminated spirituality we can please

God. True Christianity is a different approach revealed by God our Creator, the very one religious practice aims to please. Those who practice the faith as modeled and taught by Christ realize the realities of what Adam's fall has brought about within them. They put no confidence in this pseudo-spirituality. They have no confidence regarding the purity of their goodness, or in their ability to offer the unblemished sacrifice that pleases God. Instead, they have confidence in the work of Christ on the cross. They have confidence they are forgiven through it. They have confidence God has placed His Spirit within them because of it. They are growing in the moment-by-moment pursuit of the Spirit's leading by which they then produce actions of the Holy Spirit that are pleasing to God.

These three things are expressions of those who have embraced the truth of the gospel taught by Christ and explained by the apostles.

3:4 "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;"

Paul wants to make sure his readers understand two things well. First, the kinds of things he is talking about that compose a false spiritual confidence, a confidence in the flesh. Second, and perhaps more importantly to the original readers, he wants them to understand the inadequacy of Judaism. Its proponents were persuasive and could produce great guilt in the hearers. They could do so through the Scriptures, interpreted apart from the Gospel. They could produce long lists of does and don'ts, all of which appealed to the egos of those who could perform them well.

Paul wanted those in Philippi to be well-insulated against this persuasive group, members of the "false circumcision." It is now clear what he meant by using that term in the previous verse. He meant those who thought that by observing the rites of the Jews one could earn standing as a child of God. Theirs was an "adoption by merit" kind of scheme. He wanted the Jews to let go of Judaism and embrace Christ. He did not want those who embraced Christ to let go of Him and embrace Judaism, to let go of a spiritual circumcision (Colossians 2:10-13), to gain one that was merely an outward show.

To the end of providing specific examples from his own life of the kinds of things that could give one a false confidence in the flesh, Paul launches into the description of his own "achievements" in Judaism. His intent is to show that by such standards he himself had impeccable credentials. There follows a list of the things that were being wrongly construed as being of spiritual merit to God.

3:5 "circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the Law, a Pharisee;"

Many of the Jews in Paul's day and to this day have believed that by virtue of their ethnicity they had an innate moral superiority. This was the product of their own prideful thought. God had made it abundantly clear to them that they were a stubborn, rebellious people (Deuteronomy 9:1-7, Hosea 4:16). Paul wanted the best of them to realize that this thinking of theirs was the kind of "confidence in the flesh" that they had to discard if they were to move forward in the way of faith. And so, he recites the things he himself valued back in the day when he was thinking as they were. He had lived by the book the Law. From birth he had followed the course it prescribed. If such things were a basis of merit, he himself was "home free."

He had been circumcised on the eighth day of his life, just as the Law prescribed (Leviticus 12:3). The sign of the covenant was so placed in his body by his parents. He was in this sense branded from birth as being of the family of the covenant, Israel.

Paul goes on to speak of the tribe he was from, which had certain significance from a human point of view. When God rebuked Solomon and told him He would take much of the kingdom from His offspring, He told him that for the sake of David and Jerusalem, He would give Solomon's offspring one tribe besides

the one he belonged to (1 Kings 11:9-13; 26-39). That tribe turned out to be the tribe of Benjamin (1 Kings 12:21-24). The ten tribes went on to pursue a sordid course of idolatry for several centuries before Yahweh scattered them. The two tribes maintained at least a semblance of the order of life prescribed by the Law for sporadic periods of time, although they too eventually fell under Yahweh's discipline due to disobedience. But being of the tribe of Benjamin was likely a reason for a nationalistic and religious pride of sorts. Paul describes it by the next phrase, "a Hebrew of Hebrews." They were among the ones who carried the tradition and could still to some degree define their roots in Paul's time.

Paul then focuses on the real essence of what the Jews regarded as spirituality, the Law. The fact that he was a Pharisee marked him as one who honored each word and letter of the Law, who was a champion of it, who embraced a standard of behavior that went beyond it, if only outwardly. If one looks simply at the externals, and that is key, the Law can be a source of great confidence and can actually inoculate one against a sense of conviction and need. It has done so to thousands over the centuries who have not pondered its deeper implications, or the roots of sins like adultery and covetousness. Paul is saying by this, "I too could have a false confidence in my own spiritual ability. I too could be offended by a gospel that states that I am incapable of saving myself." This was and is the type of thinking a child of God must constantly root out, and Paul modeled it well.

3:6 "as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless."

With this verse Paul completes his recitation of the things that had in the past given him a reputation among his peers as a true Israelite, an authentic child of God. Though it was a false image, it was the one he had of himself, and others had of him as well.

This image was enhanced by his opposition to the movement started by Christ. As a young man he decidedly took up arms against those who named Jesus as their master (Acts 7:58-8:3). He had great zeal to stomp out this movement in its infancy (Acts 9:1-2).

The fact that Paul was entrusted at a young age with this mission (Acts 9:1-2), shows that he had been watched by the Pharisees and found to be "one of them." In their own twisted way, he was blameless. When he speaks here of "being found blameless," he is not talking about examination under the scrutiny of God. He is talking about his rise through the ranks, his achievement of human commendation and institutional status. Such recognition is readily available, and it is relatively easy to achieve. To a degree it is legitimate to mark out, respect and follow those who live such a life (Heb. 13:17). But we who become so respected must not allow this marking out to delude us and blind us to our own fleshliness and depravity. It is righteousness that is found in the Law. That is, it is a righteousness that is defined by deeds. It can conceal some terribly ungodly thoughts and attitudes of the heart. These we must recognize in ourselves as revealing the reality of our identity. Our only true confidence is in Christ and the realities that come to us through the news of the gospel. This is the shift that had occurred in Paul's thinking and that is reflected in the transition to the next verse.

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

Paul has listed some things that were assets to him, not in terms of eternity but in terms of the desire of the flesh for status, recognition, and comfort. Here he makes an important statement about how he chooses to view these things since he has learned the truth of the gospel. He considers them loss, or what we could term liabilities.

The word rendered by the NASB with "I have counted," is a word which Paul will use a total of six times in Philippians, half of these usages occurring in this and the following verse. It is a word that describes a

mental judgment made and sentence passed about the relative value of something or someone. It is the word used in 2:3 when we are told to “esteem” one another as better than ourselves. It is used in 2:6 when we are told that Christ did not “regard” equality with God a thing to be clung to. So Paul uses this word to describe intentional analysis that one makes, against the natural human instinct. Then analysis leads to a course of action that is extra-ordinary. He uses the perfect tense to reflect this the decision was made and it has resulted in a set of conditions that the context shows existed to the time of Paul’s writing these words. It describes a way Paul chose to live and it shaped the rest of his days.

When we speak of one’s “potential” in the things of God we must understand that this is the primary thing that governs it, the willingness to make a series of judgments that result in the persistent pursuit of eternal rather than earthly things. Our potential can be found in our willingness to set aside normal human pursuits, perhaps even noble ones, for the sake of that to which God might call us. It is a question of liabilities and assets all right, but the light of truth radically alters those labels. The means by which we “count”, and our willingness to “count” and deal with the implications is everything. Assigning appropriate value to things, to people, to projects, to leisure activities, to experiences, will in the end determine the value of our lives.

3:8 “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 in order that I might gain Christ,”

Jesus Christ is Lord over all that is. This is the fundamental Christian belief (Colossians 1:15-19). All things find their value therefore in Him in the sense that what He wishes to do with someone, or something is that which eventually will be. What appears to be of great significance and importance now, even something as big as the planet itself, will be of no significance when His plan for it is finished. It will be discarded. And so, in the previous verse, Paul has said that for the sake of this sovereign One, meaning for His benefit, he himself has counted as a liability things related to this world that he would normally consider assets.

In the statement of this verse, Paul goes further, as if what he has just stated is in some way deficient, not definitive enough. He states that there is one thing that is of such great value that it surpasses the value of all else. It does not simply surpass the value of what is of benefit to us personally. It surpasses the value of everything that is. This one thing is knowing Christ Jesus. The initial aspect of this is referred to later in the verse as “gaining” Christ.

In the language and terminology of Scripture, knowing someone involves not just recognition of their face, or an understanding of pertinent information about them, but of a relationship with them and intimate understanding of things that escape the casual observer. One who knows someone in this sense knows what they would think and how they would respond in a situation they have never observed them in, because they’ve simply come to know their inner being. This kind of intimate knowledge of God is portrayed by the Scriptures as belonging to the privileged of the privileged (Exodus 33:11; Numbers 12:8; Deuteronomy 34:10; Jeremiah 9:24).

Such knowledge of God is not gained through one experience but is something that comes through the persistent searching out of what is known of Him (There are also elements of God’s sovereign choices and callings that enter into this matter as well).

Paul captures the ongoing nature of this journey in knowledge by using the present tense to describe his action as being continuous. Literally he says, “I am counting all things to be loss.”

So there was in Paul’s life one thing he treasured above all else, and it was growth in intimacy with God. This is an important thing to identify with precision. It was not a growth in doing things God might want done or in involvement in godly causes. One can pursue the tasks of Christianity and not ever experience

a real friendship with the Creator at all. Or one can give themselves to God's work and become absorbed in its sacrifices and demands and feel out of touch with the Head of it all. But in pursuing the Head Himself, one will come to do the work, and the work will be kept in proper perspective. The burden of the work will not overwhelm because one will find continual joy in what they discover of the One they serve and in the company of Him. In this relationship there are all the elements we find in human relationship, but they exist in God to a boundless, inexhaustible degree. There is companionship, support, understanding, resource, pleasure, anticipation, camaraderie, adventure, even romance. There is always wonder and mystery because He is the infinite One. It is always one-sided because He gives and gives, and this is one of the key things we discover. So the precise thing Paul pursued was relationship with the Creator. This in turn involved Paul in all that the Creator was doing but knowing Him was the main thing to Paul. It was of surpassing value. Compared to this all of life's other treasures were "rubbish."

This pursuit had led Paul down a very different road than he had started on. Things that he had pursued with discipline, that had consumed him, things like education, preserving tradition, distinguishing himself above others, he let go of as ends in themselves. They became things that God might or might not bring about in Paul, but God Himself became the thing hearing from Him, imitating Him, conversing with Him, sensing His heart in each moment. All things were now viewed by Paul through this lens of coming to know God. That meant letting go of some things, but more importantly it meant holding on to all things differently. Paul calls this losing all things and counting them rubbish. There was something of surpassing value that now assigned a relative value to everything else. There was a halt to certain pursuits, a Sabbath rest Paul proclaimed against them, and every person should follow Paul in declaring this "time out." He simply let go of all his flesh cried out for him to do to gain significance, praise, and pleasure. There was tangible loss when He did that cannot be minimized. It is suffering and Paul calls it that. The loss extended far in terms of the things he had gathered. But it was all rubbish when cast alongside of what he was now free to reach out and grasp.

The experience Paul describes here of knowing God is not forgiveness of sin, what he termed justification. It was salvation in its more completed sense, that which God wishes to bring into the life of every person. It is primarily what Paul described with the term sanctification, being made holy or set apart. We have come to see that as ceasing from doing certain things and doing others. It is to us activity. To Paul and more importantly to God, it is relationship. The activity is present, but it is sustained by relationship with God not by power mustered by the flesh. When the activity wanes, the cause is essentially relational, as is the remedy. What we call "ministry" is designed to occur rather naturally as we interact with the Creator and that always involves pondering the truth about Him, ourselves, and the world.

Paul speaks of "gaining Christ," and it would be easy to take those words as suggesting that one earns forgiveness with Christ through the kind of sacrifice Paul made. It isn't that Paul earned his forgiveness. There is, however, in each of us a certain change of mind that must occur before we can be born again. It is usually a change of mind with respect to our own need for forgiveness. There was a day when Paul felt he was righteous, in no need of a Savior. He was confident of his own righteousness. He let go of confidence in his own flesh in order that he might receive the forgiveness offered by the sacrifice of Christ. Gaining the imputed work of Christ is what he is speaking of here, and once that work becomes vicarious in terms of us personally, we are reconciled to Him and have opportunity to gain deep and intimate friendship with Him. There is much gain for us in letting go of the prideful illusions of our own righteousness. There was a great work of grace done in Paul's life on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-20), so that his mind was changed. He saw his own supposed "goodness" for what it was, ignorant refusal to face what the Law had been clearly telling him about all His moral imperfections. In that moment he gained Christ, and their relationship began. He continued to let go of his own prideful ways and so continued to gain more intimate knowledge of Christ. This gaining now set his agenda.

3:9 "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."

This verse continues Paul's thought on how he has counted all things as loss, and how he has suffered the loss of all that was once dear. He names in this verse the third thing that he views as of value that surpasses what he has let go of. The first was "knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." The second was "gaining Christ." The third is being "found in Him." The verse goes on to describe exactly what is meant by being "in Him."

To be "in Christ" is a matter of what a person is depending on to give them merit with God. Most of humanity depends on what could be called the law principle. They believe that they have been sufficiently "good" enough with respect to various standards of morality and character to be accepted by God. They believe they have either already done this or will earn such status in the future by means of what Paul calls their own righteousness. This describes how Paul once lived. His good deeds were many, some of them summarized in verses 4-6. He viewed himself as having a righteousness of his own, derived through obedience to the law.

At some point in the experience on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9), or more likely in its immediate aftermath, Paul realized that this smug confidence in his own righteousness was actually offensive to God. He was faced with a choice at that point. Was he to continue flaunting his own marginal, twisted zeal and goodness? Or would he accept God's testimony about his own life and about Christ, cast all his arrogance aside and embrace the truth? He chose to leave behind his old way of thinking. So from that day forward he counted his supposed moral ability as a liability. He believed the truth that Christ's perfect moral credit was now extended to him. God graciously does that to all who believe in Jesus Christ.

Having done this Paul knew that in God's eyes he now had righteousness. It was not of his own doing, accumulated by works prescribed by God's law. Rather, it was Christ's merit and standing with God, extended to him and all who would simply believe in Jesus. It was not a righteousness derived from the law. It was derived through faith in Jesus the Christ. This is what it means to be "in Christ." It is a term that describes how God views all who believe in Christ. We are forgiven through His death and credit for His life of perfect obedience is extended to us. We are no longer seen as just ourselves, naked before God. We are seen by Him as being "in Christ," all of us who have placed our trust and confidence in Jesus. We have been adopted into God's family as siblings of God's only begotten Son. As Christ is perfectly righteous in God's eyes, so are all who have come to believe in Him.

3:10 "that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."

Having perhaps deflected momentarily from his earlier statement of the surpassing value of knowing Christ to make a very clear statement about the all-important issue of gaining righteousness, Paul now returns to develop the idea of knowing Christ. We know that the Hebrews, when they spoke of knowing someone, could be expressing a casual acquaintance or a relationship of deep intimacy. That is true in the English-speaking cultures of our day as well. When someone says they know someone, the context, their tone, or additional words they add clarify the relationship they are describing. It appears that the Hebrew's use of this expression of knowing someone had a similar range of meaning, and even broader. The word describes mere recognition of someone (1 Kings 14:2), but also is the term for the intimate sexual relationship of husband and wife (Genesis 4:1, 17, 25).

In this verse Paul clarifies what exactly he is pursuing when he speaks of counting all things to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus. To know Christ is to enter the experience of the power of His resurrection. To know Christ is to share in his sufferings. Both experiences come because in knowing Him and being in His company we are being conformed to His death. So three experiences are identified that make up the experience of coming to know Christ. What exactly is each of these three?

We know that it was God the Holy Spirit who raised Christ from the dead (1 Peter 3:18). Paul's passion was that he himself and all of Christ's followers enter the experience of this power of the resurrection, which is the power of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:19-20). This is what it is to know "the power of His resurrection." It is a life that brings freedom from old sins and old habits (Romans 8:11). It is a moment-by-moment experience of the presence of God. The Christian life is meant to be this, an experience of God's power. If it is not, then it is not the Christian life that is being lived. It is certain that it is only us who hinder our own experience of this power. In fact, we are the only ones that limit it. We do so through neglect, by living life on autopilot and simply going about our business oblivious to what God may wish to do. We do so at times by deliberate choice, entangling ourselves in evil thoughts and actions that God can have no part of. We make choices in terms of our time that have the consequence of a continuing ignorance of the things of God. And so when we speak of wanting to know His resurrection power, we must remember that our experience of that power will reveal the degree to which we really want to know it.

To know Christ is also to fellowship, or to share with Him, in His suffering. When we think of the suffering of Christ our minds immediately are drawn to thoughts of the events that culminated in His crucifixion. However, the suffering of Christ Paul has in mind is most likely much broader than that event. This is not to minimize His trial and crucifixion, which are the epitome of the torture and injustice depraved humanity can inflict on a person. But that experience had a specific purpose to fulfill in the plan of God that we have no capacity to share in. The sufferings of Christ that Paul has in view are likely those experienced daily by Jesus as He confronted sin and unbelief, as He gave Himself to the spiritual growth of others. Jesus' sufferings included the grief He felt over looming spiritual tragedy (Luke 19:41-44; John 13:37-43), over evil's impact on people's lives (Luke 13:11-17), over the spiritual slavery imposed by ignorance of the truth (Mark 6:34), over the stubborn, unrepentant heart of those who masqueraded as God's family (Matthew 23; Mark 3:5). They included the agony of being maligned slandered, and object of negative conversations carried out in ignorance (Luke 11:15; John 11:47-53). This is a deep, inner agony, a continual sadness and preoccupation, a nagging pain from personal injury. These all were willingly borne by Christ so that He could bring about the realization of something different, so that in His final suffering and death He could provide for our reconciliation. That is a work that stands done. However, it was not the complete work that God wishes to do. He wishes not only to justify us, but to sanctify us. That means to bring about His own character, thoughts, and actions in humanity. The sufferings of Christ on the cross provided the basis for this but did not bring it about. Our suffering does (Colossians 1:24-29). We share the sufferings mentioned earlier that he bore daily, and as we do His family is made a little more like Him. To do what He wants to do He searches out and uses those who will share in His daily suffering. Through these he brings about His life and glory (2 Corinthians 4:7-12).

There is a third element Paul mentions that has been a part of this pursuit of the knowledge of Christ. It is something that was occurring and coming about in him along the way. Paul was being conformed to Christ's death. The term for conformed expresses the idea of being "with" something in such a way as to be changed into the same form. In speaking about being conformed to Jesus' death Paul is not speaking of the event itself, although already he had endured false accusations from the Jews and the consequent legal consequences with the Romans. He was writing from prison and so he was walking a path like Christ in the way that he would die. But I suspect he was speaking of the mentality of Christ in His death. It was demonstrated dramatically in Gethsemane, described in some detail by Paul's companion Luke, in his gospel (Luke 22:39-46). It was expressed by Jesus on that occasion by these words, "yet not my will, but Thine be done." (Luke 22:42). That's the essence of the perfect life. The willingness to pour one's life out to bring about the purposes of God is the sense in which we can be conformed to the image of Jesus' death. That is a powerful idea. There are those moments for each of us that are Gethsemanes, and together they shape the extent to which the matters of God's heart are known and embraced by us. God entrusts those only to those who have proven themselves good stewards of lesser things. Such persons are given more of Him and so know Him better, but at the same time are more shaped by Him and

consumed with the work He has laid before them. Their ambition is to do with their lives what He wants done and to let go of everything else. It is all rubbish by comparison.

Knowing Christ is described by Paul as the pursuit of these three values. It is to pursue the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. It is to endure the pain that the evil orchestrates to distract us from God's agenda. It is to submit the cry of our own ambitions to the desires of Him for our lives. These are the things that are going on within every person who is living the life modeled by Christ. It is dying a little each moment so that the life of Christ is made visible in us (2 Corinthians 4:10-12).

3:11 "in order that I might attain to the resurrection from the dead."

This is the aim or goal that leads Paul to do the things that he has spoken of in verses seven through ten. The sacrifice and the suffering are all so that this might be attained.

There are several words in this verse that must be noted because they are different than what we would expect to find given the English renderings. The phrase "in order that" is the NASB rendering of two words, the word for "if" and the word for "how". The King James Version rendered these two words with the phrase "if by any means." Paul did not choose one of the more normal ways of saying "in order that." The words he chose seem to convey more uncertainty, as if the outcome was too illusive to state with certainty. But it is likely not Paul's intent to convey uncertainty. His choice of words was more a means of restating his single life focus. By all means available this destination was his consuming passion. The expression also conveys a humility, because the means that are used by God to bring about His salvation in people are mysterious and unknown to us. It is clearly His work, unique in each person and to some degree unpredictable. It is powerful and beyond us and in the end our salvation is a wonder.

A second important word in the verse is rendered in the NASB "attain." That English word conveys to us works and merit. However, there are two things that should mitigate this understanding in our minds. First, the word is most often rendered "arrive." The implication of it is more indicative of a journey and a destination rather than work and compensation. Second, Paul often speaks of salvation as a reward or prize. This is because in God's plan of salvation Paul rightly sees much more than forgiveness and entrance into heaven in mind. Paul saw the salvation experience as everything from the victory over sinful ways in this life to the reward for faithfulness in the next life. Many of its experiences, while provided for by grace, are entered into through our diligence (2 Peter 1:5-11). By all means he sought to lay hold of everything made available in God's gracious provision of salvation. Our experiences of salvation, using that term in the same broad sense Paul does, varies greatly from believer to believer. These verses are expressions of Paul's desire to experience it all.

The term resurrection here is slightly different as well. In fact, the exact word is the normal word for resurrection with the preposition "out" placed at the start of it. The resultant compound word occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. Paul appears to want to stress and emphasize the idea of separation, the idea of rising out from among the dead.

Now, how are we to understand this word? What exactly is this resurrection Paul is hoping to attain to? There appear to be two possibilities. The first is that Paul is speaking about the physical resurrection of believers as opposed to unbelievers. Both will be raised from the dead, though apparently at different times. But the unbeliever will not escape spiritual death, called second death (Revelation 20:11-15). This is the view that most commentators have embraced. The difficulty with this interpretation is that from both a logical and Biblical perspective that event is ordained by God, and we will arrive there apart from the very things Paul has spoken of that he has embraced sacrifice, self-denial, suffering. In all of his writings he urged these, but never as a means of escaping the second death. The following verse will state that whatever it was Paul wished to attain with this behavior, he hadn't attained it yet. It is difficult to believe that Paul thought he had not been delivered yet from the power of the second death.

The second possibility is that Paul is talking about the spiritual resurrection of believers, the resurrection to newness of life. He has in mind the same truth and is using the same imagery that he spoke of in his other letters (Romans 6:4-11; Colossians 2:12-3:1). Clearly the full experience of this resurrection comes to us only as we do the very things Paul Himself has done (Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:1). If we lay aside the old self, or in the imagery that Paul has used here, if we suffer the loss of all things for the sake of knowing the power that raised Christ from the dead, we will experience that power and it will distinguish us, raise us out from among the spiritually dead. We will experience more of Christ than do fleshly believers (1 Corinthians 3:1-3), who love the things of this world too much and desert the more urgent matters to which God would have us attend (2 Timothy 4:10,16).

Both perspectives on what Paul is speaking of here when he expresses his desire to lay hold of the resurrection out from among the dead can be supported from an exegetical and logical point of view. It seems that the second view captures the message of the context best, particularly the thought that will follow in the next verse. It also captures what Paul typically taught in his other writings with respect to the full salvation experience that God's grace has made available to us.

To sum up then, Paul has spoken of suffering the loss of all things willingly, for the surpassing value of knowing the resurrection power of Christ. He has spoken of becoming like Him in His death. He has done this all with a view toward entering the full experience of the renewal power of the Holy Spirit.

3:12 "Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus."

This verse clearly shows that Paul is speaking of a level of spiritual experience of Christ in this present life when he speaks of resurrection out from among the dead. He describes it here as becoming perfect. We would understand that as becoming mature or complete. He did not regard himself as having arrived at that point yet. He was pressing on, continuing what he had started years earlier, anxious to arrive at more of what he had already experienced. He was not yet complete.

It is of significance to ponder Paul's words regarding why Christ had laid hold of him. We know that Paul was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 15:15-16; Ephesians 3:1-7). This was the work which he was called to, to which he felt compelled to be faithful. This work was that which God had clearly stated He would achieve through Paul (Acts 9:15-16). But this work, as urgent as it was and as historically significant as it was, was not the primary thing Paul saw himself as needing to focus on and be occupied with. The primary objective of God in Paul's life was making Paul complete and mature in Christ. That is always his primary objective. His "grocery list" of tasks that He leads us to be engaged in will easily be completed by us if He is free to do this greater work within us. God's sovereign power would allow Him to complete this inner work forcefully in whomever He wished. Instead, He is pleased to bring it about through influence, as if by our own will, so that it is to some mysterious degree dependent to some degree on us. This is the mysterious nature of His grace, as it weaves its way through our own faculties and participates in our most intricate decisions. It is such that God is greatly glorified in it and will be for all eternity. He has staked His own reputation on this mysterious partnership with us. Recognizing that this is the real order of things as God has designed them, defined, and ordained them, is essential in terms of ordering our own lives. They are not well ordered no matter their degree of structure and discipline or level of achievement if they are not dominated by this objective to become mature and complete in Him.

Now, In Paul's mind what specifically was involved in being complete? He provided a concise statement of the signs of completeness and God's provision for bringing it about in his letter to the Ephesians (Ephesians 4:13-15). There we see that completeness involves unifying faith with knowledge. It is the perfect union of knowing and trusting and it is what Christ modeled to perfection. In His case it was to know the Father intimately and to trust Him perfectly in every moment. In our case it is to know Christ perfectly and to trust in all that we come to know of Him in each moment. The inability or unwillingness

to unite what we know with faith is what leads to our spiritual struggles (Hebrews 4:2). This is the lesson of the Old Testament, demonstrated by Israel (Jude 5). The lesson of the New Testament, demonstrated by Christ is that knowledge of Christ united by faith and trust brings us to Christ-like completeness where we are no longer children, prone to spiritual instability (Eph. 4:13-14). So spiritual completeness, the “perfection” that Paul has spoken of that he regarded himself as lacking, can only come about as we pursue knowing Christ, the very thing Paul has identified as his own number one concern. Were we to know Him intimately and then trust Him completely we would arrive at fullness of spiritual life and complete our resurrection out from among the dead. This was the illusive quest that Paul was on. We must increase what we know and then increasingly trust it and let it shape us.

3:13 “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,”

Paul did not regard himself as complete. He did not believe he had laid hold of all that Christ had laid hold of him for. Not yet! There was more. Again, this was not primarily an issue of his own character being incomplete. He saw enough of himself to understand what was missing of Christ in Him.

Paul’s description of what he does about this deficit is concise and useful. To move forward spiritually we must be capable of rightly processing the past. Paul says that he forgets it. This likely applies to both his sins and his triumphs. But there is a danger of us being too shallow with this statement and making Paul out to be someone who gave no thought to failure and took no time for remorse, who invested no energy in thanksgiving or in celebration. His writings viewed indicate that this was far from being the case. Forgetting in the sense Paul uses it in means to lay aside sinful ways, to deal once and for all with guilt, to refuse to be shaped by bitterness. It does not mean to forget the lessons of the past taught through successes and failures. We should not develop an emotional inertia due to our past either by resting on our laurels or brooding over our failures. Anything that keeps us from reaching forward is not of God.

It is likely that when Paul speaks of forgetting the past, he is speaking of his old pattern of amassing fleshly achievement as merit with God and as a means of gaining status with and position over other people. Those things he now considers loss. The actions were gone, but the real battle of removing those patterns of thinking was a job he viewed as incomplete. He was forgetting them, or more realistically, he was forsaking them. There is this constant process of letting go that the Holy Spirit orchestrates in us. There are behaviors we must let go of, but the real challenge is to let go of ways of thinking. These are what short circuits the sanctification process in us.

We forsake best when we grab hold of something else. Paul’s statement of reaching forward is at least as important as his statement regarding the past. This reaching forward involves thinking as things will be when God sets them right one day. When we, by our knowledge of God and His plan, can do this we are then enabled by faith to shape our lives by that economy. It is in this “reaching forward” that we order the present rightly and become more mature and complete in Him. Reaching forward is an activity of uniting faith with knowledge, taking what we know to be true and filling in the blanks of the unknown with it. One cannot do it long without having their perspective radically altered regarding their past, present and future. It is the essence of the faith life, a way of living that is God’s heart for humanity in a fallen world.

3:14 “I press on toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

This is the goal of it all, the sacrifice, the experience of Christ in the day to day, the forgetting, the reaching forward. It is all about the goal. That goal is the upward call of God. What is this “upward call of God”? We know that all individuals will be raised from the dead. This will not be a matter of merit. It simply will be. But believers will be raised before unbelievers (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; Revelation 20:11-15). The call to believers is an upward call, but we must think through what Paul is communicating by this term.

First, we must divorce ourselves from our up and down terminology that says heaven is up and hell is down. By that terminology this is a call up to heaven. But if the call is to heaven is what Paul is working hard for, then works are linked to our call to heaven. By that way of thinking it takes a Pauline type of effort to go to heaven, and he himself was not confident of making it. So Paul's teaching on eternal life being through faith apart from works is undermined and collapses if he himself sees heaven as a prize to be laid hold of through good works. So this upward call must have to do with something other than the privilege of entering heaven.

Second, it is called a prize. A prize is a reward that distinguishes someone as having performed at an elite level. It is given to those who win. We know that the resurrection of believers is simply an event. It is scheduled in the sovereign plan of God. It will happen to all believers regardless of their faithfulness in this life to Christ. There is a sense in which it is a prize, as a certificate of participation in the Olympic games might be considered a prize on a personal level. But such a certificate is not a medal, not the prize that the athlete strives and trains for. Participation in the resurrection is not what Paul has in mind here.

Third, it is clear from when Paul spoke of his own experience in the resurrection, he looked forward to commendation from the Lord as one who was faithful (1 Corinthians 4:1-5; 3:10-15; 9:24-25; 2 Timothy 4:7-8). He was not seeking just to make it through the gate.

It would seem best to say that the call "upward" is not just a heavenward call, as some translations render it. The upward call in the language and culture of the Bible was a call to honor (Luke 14:7-11; Proverbs 25:6-7). This was a prize Paul sought in the present life, to be considered faithful and so to be entrusted with more responsibility in the noblest of works. There is no call more important or cause more honorable than the one that comes from the Lord of the universe summoning us to serve in the present. The "upward call" was also a prize Paul sought in death, to be commended by the Lord for the quality of his work. There could be no greater honor imagined than to stand in His presence and summoned upward, in the present language of our Olympics, to a spot on the podium. This upward call, in both its present and future aspects, was everything to Paul.

The upward call Paul says is "through Christ." We are only adequate for the present work of the Gospel because of Christ's work on the cross. We will only come to be commended by Christ as our judge through Him. On the day appointed for Him to finally reward faithfulness, His own glory will be great as He, in grace, bestows honor on the faithful. His grace will be magnified in that act because it will be clear that none of it could have come about in us except through the work of Christ. Yet He will share His wealthy with us and that is amazing grace.

3:15 "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."

Because Jesus Christ is divine in essence, he is infinite in each aspect of His character. This means that there is no end to the process of absorbing His character into our beings. The process of becoming complete is never complete, so it is proper to speak of being mature and at the same time to say that we are not mature. Paul thought of himself this way. He was mature. Yet this was not to say that Christ was done forming His character in him.

Paul viewed a few the Philippians in the same light. The words of our English versions could be altered to capture his thought well and still stay within the boundaries of the meaning of the word rendered "perfect" in verses 12 and 15 in the NASB. In this verse he calls on those who are "perfect" meaning mature, to have a certain attitude. In verse 12 he has clearly stated that he did not regard himself as "perfect," meaning complete, lacking in nothing. Both statements are accurate. We may be mature, but we are never done.

Mature people continue down the path to greater maturity by maintaining a certain attitude. The attitude is that they are not yet perfect. There is still more for them to know of Christ, still more for them to enter of His power, still more to experience of His suffering, still more of themselves to die to. If one has this attitude, the Spirit can and will reveal the areas of our lives to which this openness does not extend. We must be watching for different attitudes in ourselves. They certainly exist in all of us and evil that remains in us has such corrupting power that when tolerated it can quickly come to dominate us. That which is different than counting all things loss for the surpassing value of knowing Christ must be clearly recognized for what it is.

3:16 “however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.”

When Paul wrote these words, he was encapsulating the lessons demonstrated through the lives of his ancestors, recorded as examples for us to learn from (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6,11; Hebrews 4:11). He is referring to the pattern of thinking and living modeled by Christ and followed by the Apostles. The word “attained” is a verb that means “to be beforehand.” It is to precede or be a precedent. So in this command Paul is primarily referring to a pattern of the faith we are to imitate, as the next verse will indicate. This is not to say that this is not a summons to avoid slipping backwards in terms of our personal spiritual temperature. But that condition occurs when we stray from the pattern of sound words (2 Timothy 1:13). It is critical that in our practice of freedom we stay within the boundaries represented in this pattern.

We must not allow ourselves to let go of the things that push us forward in becoming like Christ. Ultimately, these are attitudes. Our minds are the battlefield. That which we have come to know through fellowship with God and His people we must doggedly hang on to. We must avoid inventing our own way and having to learn lessons over.

In the twentieth century Christians used a term of themselves when they did not keep living by the same standard they had attained. They called it “backsliding.” It is a term that appears in the King James Version and was used extensively by the prophet Jeremiah to describe Israel. The Hebrew word comes from a root that means to retreat or to turn back. In many of its uses it could be understood as apostasy. Ground is always given up in retreat, casualties suffered and moral lost. When a Christian turns away or turns back they are terribly vulnerable and generally bring great pain on themselves. Paul calls us to staying on high ground. What we have attained by God’s grace, and established over years of collective experience, we must retain.

His words in the original are very simply. “Unto that which you have attained, to the same live.” It is quite often the case that we do not need more knowledge, or even more power. We only need to apply and make further use of what we have. This is especially true of our service to God, who will not allow into our lives that which is beyond the resources He has entrusted to us for our use. There is hope, dignity and joy in rising to the moment. Allowing the panic of the moment to take us back to the life we have been lifted from is always enslaving. The latter is the lesson of Israel, and the cry of the Lord through the writings of the Old Testament prophets is for our learning in this matter.

3:17 “Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”

Paul had not arrived, but he was mature. He was looking for the areas in which he had attitudes other than those that would honor Christ. That made him a good example. It gave him the confidence he expresses here in offering himself as an example, literally a pattern. He calls his readers to “mimic” him. We do not have to be error free to qualify as examples. We only must be mature enough to model a righteous response to our own failures.

Paul and Timothy, together with the apostolic community knew there was a pattern of living that the Christian community needed to adhere to. As a tentmaker by trade, Paul knew the importance of patterns. Christ could and would accept anyone, regardless of past lifestyle. He accepts varying personalities and is the maker of them all. But there are certain habits His Spirit draws us to that need to be embraced and others that need to be dropped within the diverse Christian community. There are striking similarities that appear across cultural lines and in divergent personalities, as one Spirit choreographs in everyone the sanctification process. This common pattern is what we are to pick out and then pay attention to.

The word Paul uses that is rendered observe is one that describes close observation. Our English word for a rifle scope sounds similar. Such a scope provides us with a good illustration of what we must do. This pattern of life should be our target and we should place our crosshairs on it.

Paul knew this was critical to their spiritual health. He was properly humble in every way, but he was not hesitant to call people in mass to imitate his way of life. Leaders must be confident enough of their own habits and character that before God they are free to do this and are led by the Holy Spirit to do so. It is a disastrous era when there is a lack of those offering themselves as examples for others to follow. A timid leader in this matter, who is so self-conscious of his own shortcomings, is exercising a kind of fleshliness that is as damaging as the more classic forms. We must practice the self-examination and the self-discipline we need to become examples, or we must relinquish leadership. There is no place for other options in this matter. The call to leadership appears first as a call to follow the Master. That produces a lifestyle that serves as an example. Where there is no example, the initial call has not yet been obeyed.

3:18 “For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ.”

A miserable reality of spiritual leadership is spoken of here. It is that there are influential people whom Christians must be warned against. It seems that the average person is deeply suspicious and cautious when they process the truth of God. They attribute false motives to those who are blameless and demand many lines of proof for what is clearly from God. But error is more palatable to them. They accept untruth and those who traffic in it without a whimper of protest (2 Corinthians 11:4, 20). Whether this should be blamed on Satan or if it is simply a result of the fallen human condition is not easy to tell. It is likely both. The result is that when a leader does what Paul does here, he is doing what leaders must do. But he will confront a reaction. He will be surprised at those who rally to the defense of those who are serving their own flesh. Many such people will never see their error.

Paul has pain at this contradiction that fleshly leaders bring about in Christianity. We don't know who he is speaking of, but he describes them as many. This is not an isolated phenomenon. The problem will be more fully described in the next verse but lay in how they walked. This is a term that Paul often uses to describe the intentional choices we make as believers, the course we choose to follow day in and day out. It goes back to the pattern we imitate mentioned by Paul in the previous verse. This pattern becomes our walk. So these are individuals who had chosen a pattern other than the one Paul and the apostolic company had modeled. It had been this way for some time. Paul had often told the Philippians about these individuals so that they knew exactly whom he was speaking of here. Paul had tears over their error. They had made their choice likely despite persistent warning from him. Such tears are important for a leader to have, a genuine, sincere, deep regret and grief at the error of fellow leaders. It is impossible to have absolute certainty, but these had been considered part of the church at one time, people of a certain character who then left the way. There seems to have been a progression in their waywardness to the point that now Paul was having to state a very painful but obvious conclusion.

Paul calls them “enemies of the cross of Christ.” At God's direction, and with full apostolic approval (Galatians 2:1-14), Paul took the doctrine of the cross very seriously. Its purpose and its potential could

not be eroded even slightly by adding works, however small, to the equation of salvation. The adequacy of the sacrifice of Christ and the adequacy of faith apart from meritorious work had to be protected. Paul, again at God's direction, labeled even the slightest departure from this doctrine as intolerable, a matter of grave consequence (Galatians 1:6-10; 3:1; 4:9-11; 5:1-12). The error there in the case of the Philippian church was likely a doctrinal one, a mixing in of elements of Judaism with the gospel. This has the effect of devaluing the work of Christ on the cross, suggesting that it alone does not save but assists in salvation. That is a deadly idea in Paul's mind, and it must be so to ours. There is a time for tolerance and peace, but also a time when lines need to be drawn. Paul did not hesitate to draw such lines though it was not pleasurable. It is when it is painful to do that a leader can be more confident of his motives.

3:19 "whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their mind on earthly things."

By strength of personality these people had influence. Influence is not a sign of God's presence or pleasure. We must remember that. Paul makes four statements about these pseudo-spiritual leaders. Three of the statements have to do with their motives. Paul is not afraid to impugn their motives. We easily shy away from that, intimidated by the fact that they are nice people or good people. We are also convinced that we cannot know someone's heart, and that is likely being overstated in our culture. It is more likely that when trained in the things of the Spirit over a period of years, He gives us insight into the motives of others.

Paul says first that their end is destruction. Without knowing more about them it is hard for us to say if he was referring to consequences they would confront in this life or in their final judgment. It could be that they were Christians living disobediently, who would be destroyed in this life by the evil one who was using them. That is what he specializes in. It could be that they had been around the truth, had been prayed for and ministered to, but when the moment of decision came, they had turned away from the truth of the cross. In that case they would experience the destruction of the second death, an eternal state of destruction. In either case Paul is not hesitant to speak to where the path they had chosen to walk would lead. Whether believer or unbeliever their work and influence in this life would come to nothing when God addressed it.

Paul is not afraid to say that their god is their appetite. He makes here the first of three statements about their motives. Every person has an appetite, a whole set of needs and desires that develop because of processing life independent of God and His truth. That desire to be independent of God's control is what we inherit from Adam, the germ that infected humanity now of the first sin. In each person there comes to be a set of desires that develop as, independent of God, they ponder life's options. The wise person, made so through the work of the Spirit of God, recognizes their sinfulness and the fruit of this willfulness in them. Most do not and become driven and directed by the array of appetites that sprout up in them because of inherent willfulness. They are essentially, by this process, idolaters. Something other than God they have allowed to control them. This condition can exist in believers and non-believers alike and it must be guarded against (1 John 5:21). Paul can discern this condition in these people because of their response to the cross of Christ. It is not rocket science and does not require great mystical connection. People water down the cross and add their own conditions to it not by listening to the Spirit and submitting to the clear statements of Scripture. They do so because they are fleshly, and fleshliness cannot be made into anything but a lack of submissiveness to God. It is an absence of a clear, precise connection to the source of truth. Imprecision with respect to what is true can always be traced back to fleshliness. There is a level of fleshliness that is to be expected in recent converts. But that condition is usually marked by submissiveness to those who are more mature. They are not enemies, they are babes. If they are submissive, they will learn to walk the path. These that Paul is addressing refused to submit and so by that reveal that their real god is themselves.

The second statement made by Paul regarding their motives is that their glory is in their shame. There is a strange reversal that happens in the inner being that reaches a tragic level in some cases. It is that we can, with great passion and supposed sincerity see wrong as right, good as evil, foolish as wise, and so on (Isaiah 5:20-21). It is the tendency of all humanity, and we must guard against it through the Holy Spirit and deliberately confronting ourselves with the truth. If we do not, we come to the tragic point spoken of here by Paul where we fill our lives with pursuits that should and will bring us shame and do so in a confident, brash, braggadocious way. There is no way of knowing all that Paul saw in these persons that led him to make this statement. But what we know that they opposed the work of Christ on the cross in some way is enough. That will be a thing that brings them shame for all of eternity and marks them out as having been fools. This is the blindness that the god of this world fosters and it creeps through the spiritual senses of all who oppose the Spirit's conviction regarding truth. It is the greatest tragedy that can come about in the experience of human life. In full bloom the darkened heart becomes the motivator for a most twisted and degrading system of values.

The third statement made by Paul regarding their motives is that their minds are intentionally set on earthly things. In other words, they may be speaking of spiritual things, but it is all just jargon and rhetoric. That is an awful think to have to conclude about someone, that they have an agenda that does not relate to the things of God but is all about earthly gain. Paul says that they set their minds on earthly things. It is a direction they have made a deliberate choice to take. Their lack of sanctification is no longer just a matter of weakness of will. It is willfulness. This mindset is all it takes to unleash within us powerful spiritual forces. As in the case of the Pharisees, we may still have an impressive religious look. In fact, that seems most often to be the case. But it is all fruit with a worm in it.

These are people that can be of influence in the Christian community. We can look at such a development and be appalled at how it could happen. The reality however is that we need to look no further than ourselves to see the germ. It is what sin is and what it does, and we all must be on guard.

3:20 "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;"

When Pharaoh asked Jacob how many years he had lived, Jacob replied, "The years of my sojourning have been one hundred and thirty" (Genesis 47:8-9). It is the mark of people of faith that they view themselves as citizens of heaven and aliens and travelers here on this earth (Hebrews 11:13-16).

In the language and imagery of Bible cultures saying one's citizenship was in heaven implied several things. First, one traveled to a foreign place for business or survival reasons. There were no pleasure trips among the average people of those times. Second, the culture of this world is alien to them. They don't fit and they feel it. Third, their real roots and their passions are tied to their native land. They have an innate love for it that shapes their dreams of the future. Fourth, they survive in the alien land, they aren't fully vested there. Their goal is to bring something back not to build an empire there. Fifth, they are noticed. They stand out. They encounter reaction, often negative. They feel resistance. A number of other observations could be made about this idea, but these suffice to show us that we must not associate our temporary visit to earth with our current western mindset that such journeys are for pleasure, entertainment, relaxation, and indulgence. We must take care of business and push back the urge to fill the ache and void within by settling in. Our focus must be to lay hold of the which will better our life back home. To pursue truth and obedience, and to impact the lives of others through love is the treasure we seek on this earth.

Now, how do we get to the land of our citizenship? We await our Lord Jesus Christ. He will come again. That was and is the Christian hope and expectation. It is essential to the practice of the faith. Remove this idea and you remove the hope of the future that Christianity holds out. Remove it and you effectively reduce Christ and His teachings to the level of all other human theory, because He clearly promised this

rescue and this citizenship (John. 14:1-3,18; 17:24). The return of Christ for us is a clear teaching of Christ and the apostles and is an essential of the Christian faith.

Paul speaks of us awaiting a Savior. Jesus has come into the earth once as the sin bearer. As such He provides how we can be saved from the penalty of sin and its inner power over us. We await His second coming, when He will rescue and save us from the presence of sin. It is currently all around us and oppresses us. He will rescue us from that and give us new bodies which sin and its curse have no power to corrupt and destroy. So we have been saved, we are being saved, and we await the day when that salvation is completed, and we experience it fully as citizens of heaven.

Paul's word choice includes two ideas that should be noted. First, he says we eagerly await. All the evidence of Paul's words indicate that it is right to face that eventuality with joy, excitement, and anticipation. We are also to anticipate the event in our lifetime. One gets the message clearly from Paul that he was expecting and watching for the increasing birth pangs spoken of by Christ that would precede His return (Matt. 24). Whatever one's theology on the order of events that surround Christ's second coming, there is no doubt that Paul believed it could come about in his own lifetime.

The second idea that is present in the words Paul chooses is the idea that Jesus would come from heaven. This aligns with the words of Christ that at death He would ascend to God the Father (John 14:28; 16:5, 25-28). It aligns with the words spoken by the angels at the ascension of Christ (Acts 1:10-11). It aligns with the testimony of Peter and the rest of the disciples (Acts 2:32-36; 3:11-26). The Christian's doctrine should be crisp and precise on this point as it was then. Christ did for us and by that death paid the penalty for our sin. That His death did this and that He was the Son of God is proven by His resurrection. God has exalted Him and He is the appointed ruler of all that is. As such He will return to the earth from heaven when it is time in the plan of God for Him to exercise His right to judge evil and visibly rule over creation. We are sojourners in this world who are awaiting the unveiling of that Kingdom.

3:21 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.

All Scripture reflects the hope of this verse that believers will be raised bodily from the dead. At various times schemes of thought have developed that make our future resurrection spiritual only, defining our future existence as that of a spirit. But the writers of Scripture, when speaking of the resurrection, clearly viewed it as God clothing us with a new body. There is much about this we do not know. But we do know that we will be physically raised from the dead and clothed with a new body.

Besides the plain statements like this verse in Scripture, we have the testimony of logic in this matter. That logic is present within this letter to the Philippians. Paul has stated already what he would experience at the moment of death. He said that to be absent from the body is to be present with Christ (Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:8). This can only mean that at death we continue to exist as spiritual beings in the presence of Christ. There is no need for a future resurrection if it is only spiritual. We will already consciously be in the presence of Christ. A bodily existence is God's design for us, of a different kind than evil brought about. Adam experienced it, at least to some degree, and forfeited it in choosing to sin.

When Adam sinned, something occurred consequently in our physical beings. Again, we don't understand the intricacies of all this. But something occurred and the most obvious symptom was that we became subject to physical death. The body wears out and eventually dies, and that is the experience of every human. Adam's fall did not just impact his spirit, where he became separated from God, though that was profound. It impacted his body, and it became immeasurably weaker. Humanity entered a very humble state. Meant to rule the earth, we came to be ruled by it to a certain degree. It has become very different from how God designed it, though this was all certainly within the scope of His plan.

The solution to this predicament has been sought by humanity ever since. From the explorer's search for the fountain of youth to the current anti-aging strategies, to the rising suicide rates, we have shown our frustration with our "humble state" of existence. The solution is a Savior. That has always been God's plan. From the seed of the woman, He would raise up one who would crush the evil one who deceives man and keeps him from his destiny to rule the earth. Paul speaks here of this Savior and what He will do for each of us who have believed in Him when He comes to the earth. When Christ comes to earth he will transform our bodies. The word rendered "transform" is a word used only by Paul. It means to change the form of something. It does not necessarily involve changing the essence (see 3 of the words 4 other usages in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15). This is consistent with the idea that we will be bodily human beings, but our bodies will be different. Paul goes on to state what this new form will be like.

When our Savior, Christ, transforms us, He will change our body to be like His. It is called the "body of His glory." Our bodies will become like His resurrection body. We know that after His resurrection Jesus had a physical body. It resembled his earthly body in that He could be recognized, though he wasn't necessarily (John 24:13-35). The nail prints were visible as well as the wound from the spear (John 20:27). Yet that body was clearly different in that it could appear suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, and disappear as well. This was Christ's resurrection body, which was seen and touched by the apostles. He could be "held on to," which indicates that it was not a purely spiritual body (John 20:17). Jesus clearly stated after the resurrection that He was a bodily being not a spirit (Luke 24:36-43). So it is a physical body, though it is called a spiritual one by Paul (1 Corinthians 15:44). This apparent contradiction is likely resolved in understanding that Paul uses the word spiritual to describe a restored moral standing that makes itself visible in the new body. It is a body that is dissimilar to the present one in that it bears no scars from Adam's fall.

The body of His glory could be a reference as well to a physical brightness that will be inherent in our new bodies. This could be a display of the image of God in us in an unmarred way. When Moses met with God, he is said to have glowed for a period of days (Exodus 34:29-35). When Jesus was transfigured, His face is said to have become different, with His clothing becoming white and gleaming (Luke 9:28-31). It is possible that the reason Adam and Eve knew they were naked is because this glow was lost, and bodily detail became suddenly visible and more distinguishable (See also 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 in this light).

Christ brings about this transformation of our bodies which seems like a prospect that is too good to be true. It is possible because of the great power that is a part of His essence which Paul says is such that He can subject all things to Himself. There is nothing that He cannot exert His will on so that it winds up bringing about His will. The presence of evil, its sordid history, and its eventual end, reveals this about Him. He has only to exert that power, which He has chosen not to fully do just yet. He has it scheduled. There is a time when He will exert that power, and we will bear the results of that redemptive power in our physical bodies. That event is the final stage of our salvation, the state of being He wants to bring us into (2 Corinthians 5:5). When we ponder the term salvation and being saved, we must see it as all of the things that God brings about in us to get us to this state of glory.

This is the end toward which we have been chosen and appointed, watched over and cared for, shaped, tested and tried (Ephesians 1:3-24; James 1:1-3; 2 Peter 1:3-11). This is the hope which we have that is to shape our response to the events of this world. The next chapter closes Paul's letter, and his closing exhortation is based on this great future event that we have to look forward to.

Philippians 4

4:1 “Therefore, my beloved brethren, whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.”

Five times in this short verse Paul uses a term that expresses his affection for the Philippians. Two of those times it is the word *αγαπατοι*, rendered beloved in the NASB. In addition to these he speaks of longing to see them. Then he speaks of them being his joy. It is clear throughout the letter that they had brought joy to his life by their willingness to shoulder the burden and concern of the kingdom work with him. Next, he calls them his crown. This is likely meant to express his pride in them. They were those whom he could point to as ones who had embraced the truth and bound themselves to being shaped by it. They were Paul’s crowning achievement in this sense, or more accurately, those in whom he had seen the full work, of the Spirit as he thought it should be. This word also described the crown given as an award in the public games. The Philippian’s faith was rewarding to Paul and would be part of his eternal reward from the Master.

That Paul went to such lengths to express his affection reminds all who are spiritual leaders of the importance of those we lead understanding our love for them. People respond as they become confident

of a leader's love. The message of the verse in terms of the grammar is very short and simple; "so stand firm in the Lord." That is a message leaders love to give because it is quickly seen as the message of the hour in every era. It needs to be delivered continually, but with words that give the followers the sense that the leader's arms are wrapped around them, participating in this great challenge.

This standing firm is more than a call to stability, to paying bills on time and reporting to work on time. The word "so" reflects this, showing that Paul has in mind them adhering to a specific lifestyle, the one he has modeled which he called them to in verse 17 of the previous chapter. It has always been critical to the ongoing health of the movement that people embrace the teaching and lifestyle modeled by Jesus Christ. His life is to be viewed by us as a pattern that we are to mimic. Otherwise, the heart and soul of Christianity is slowly eroded. This was Paul's concern.

This standing firm that Paul calls them to comes on the heels of him reminding them of the moment when Jesus will give them glorious new bodies. It is that hope that inspires our faithful, persistent obedience. It is not the short-term thrill of the hour that the apostles sought to gain.

4:2 "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord."

We know nothing about these two individuals but what is written here and in the next verse. Paul had received word, likely through their messenger Epaphroditus, that a quarrel of sorts was developing between these two women who had been such a critical asset to the mission. There is ample opportunity for such things in a church. People meet new friends in the Lord's family, they share dreams, and they develop partnerships. That is as it should be. But since they are all in process, there are ample imperfections and ample opportunities for disagreements to erupt, even among good, committed people. In the Lord there is ample opportunity as well for such things to be weathered, to be resolved, and to be healed. They must be handled "in the Lord." By that Paul means in submission to the conviction and leading of the Holy Spirit, in submission to the truth of Scripture allowing it so to speak to the issues, and in submission to the leaders of the Church.

The Lord has a will in such things. Sometimes it is for us to be wronged and defrauded (1 Corinthians 6:7). But if both parties submit themselves to the Lord in the matter, neither can lose in the long term. More importantly the cause of the kingdom will not suffer loss.

Paul calls the two to live in harmony. Harmony involves complimentary differences. Those differences are easy to construe as faults, as spiritual deficiencies, or as intentional wrongs committed. It only takes a few moments of leaving the Lord out, of brooding, for bitterness to be sown and the relationship to splinter. We must see that as not being an option. Harmony is a mandate except where leaders agree that doctrinal error or moral sin has been committed and there is no repentance or submission to greater authority. The undone work for the kingdom is overwhelmingly greater than personal losses, damages, and loss of face." is the command we must all rise to in moments of conflict. "In the Lord" is where we find the emotional resource to obey. At the moment of initial pain, we must consciously and intentionally go to Him, and submit to Him.

4:3 "Indeed, true comrade, 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."

Factions were developing in the Church at Philippi. Paul's exhortation in the opening verses of chapter 2 together with his brief but thorough and weighty statement there of the condescension of Christ, hinted at his concern. Now he gives this direct word of instruction to someone whom he felt needed to assist Euodia and Syntyche so that they would live in harmony.

It is uncertain who Paul is addressing these words to. He views them as a true comrade. The word used for true is the word that is used of one who is of legitimate birth as opposed to illegitimate. So this person was a credible comrade who had proven the authenticity of their calling in Church leadership. It could be addressed to Epaphroditus, the one who carried the letter, as a way of conveying to him publicly authority in this matter. Or, more likely it was an unnamed bishop regarded as the main leader in the Philippian church, the one who would receive and read the letter from Paul. The key thing to note is that when disputes break out, very often the parties need help to work it through and restore the relationship. These women had been Paul's fellow workers with proven value to the mission. Paul did not want them lost to the kingdom. His words convey a serious tone, but a very affectionate one as well. He is entrusting this to his "true comrade." He is asking him to be his hands and feet and mouthpiece since he himself is confined to prison. Paul's charge regarding Clement and the rest of his fellow workers conveys a passing of the torch. He is entrusting them all to the shepherding care of this unnamed person.

4:4 "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"

With this verse Paul begins to communicate truth that has to do with our emotion life. Our emotions are an important part of our being. Their intricacies and complexities make us distinct in God's creation. It stands to reason that in remaking us in His own image God would want to reorder our emotional lives.

Now the area of managing our emotions is mysterious to us. In current American culture we largely view emotions as something over which we have little control. They simply happen. So part of our reality today is that in many cases our emotions are ruling us, rather than us ruling our emotions. We make major financial decisions, relational decisions, career decisions, and spiritual decisions based largely on emotions. Controlling emotions is certainly tricky business, but we seem largely disinterested in it. If they seem out of control, we typically turn to medication. While that can be helpful, and in some cases essential, it may keep us from viewing emotional control as the cultivation of a critical life skill. Paul seems to view it as just another area of our lives we need to bring under the Spirit's control.

In the Christian community we find it very difficult to distinguish between the Holy Spirit's voice and the voice of our own emotions. It seems that none of this was as big an issue in Paul's day. In this verse for example, he uses the imperative mood in the Greek, issuing a command to rejoice. This use of the imperative is itself very instructive to us. Paul repeats the command, assuming that the ability to rule over emotions was resident in the readers through the Holy Spirit, and that they knew this, that they could and would respond. It seems clear that God's intention is to develop in us the ability at every turn to rule ourselves well, and this includes our emotional life.

Several times now in this letter Paul has spoken of rejoicing. By his own example he has seemed to be urging the Philippians to engage more in it (1:18; 2:17-18). Here that subtlety gives way to this command that he states twice. We are aware of rejoicing as a spontaneous activity. And there are times when our rejoicing "in the Lord" is spontaneous, when we are reminded of who He is by some experience, and it naturally brings us joy. Paul called himself (1:18), and now his readers to intentionally rejoice in the Lord, to lead themselves into this activity, or perhaps more precisely, submit to the Holy Spirit's leading them into rejoicing in the Lord. This is His will. It is the direction He is always leading us in. If we do not follow, we are resisting Him.

But this command is not to schedule rejoicing so that it happens as some other discipline might happen at certain times of the day. It is to rejoice in the Lord always. Rejoicing is to be a mentality, an outlook and a course of action that accompanies everything we are doing. We should cultivate a preoccupation with the Lord's goodness, His power, His covenant love, and unwavering commitment to us. Our minds should automatically drift to all the treasures He has already lavished on us (Ephesians 1:3-12). Always in our focus should be what He has prepared and is preparing for our future (John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 2:9).

To command someone to rejoice is not equivalent to telling them to be happy. Though the word means to be glad and there is overlap in rejoicing and happiness, they are distinct. This distinctness can be thought of in this way. Happy is an adjective that describes an emotion. Rejoice is a verb that describes action. Happiness is an emotional state of being. Rejoicing is a series of actions, or at least a series of thoughts. Happiness relates most often to something related to me my wonderful circumstances, my fat bank account, my great vacation. Rejoicing in the Lord relates to what is true about Him, that then relates to me. We may randomly find things to be happy about, but we can always find in the Lord things to rejoice about. There will be seasons in our lives when, apart from the Lord, there is nothing to be happy about. In those times we can still rejoice in the Lord and millions in terrible circumstance will be joining us from around the world in such worship.

When we rejoice in the Lord, we rejoice in things that relate to His essential character. The fact that He is unchanging amid all else that changes, that He is sovereign over all that is out of our control, that He is impeccably good and just amidst all that is evil and unjust, all of these will surely lead us to rejoice in the Lord if we meditate on them.

4:5 “Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.”

To forbear is to be moderate and gentle. “Forbearing” is the meaning assigned here to a Greek word that A. T. Roberson, the noted Greek scholar, says is impossible to capture with any single English word. Aristotle described this quality as not being unduly just. It is being gracious as opposed to demanding, even-keeled as opposed to volatile. It is one who avoids extremes. Forbearing people put aside or delay the enforcement of personal rights. They process emotion in a way that manifests itself in patience and gentleness. It is developed in us through our own intentionality and the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not instinctive in fallen humanity. Our spirits become open to it as they are intimately connected to Him and as our minds reflect on the forbearance of God with respect to us personally. God’s grace, when reflected upon in this way produces a graciousness in us. We become like Him in that we do not have to have what justly belongs to us right now.

When Paul says it is to be known to all men, he is making a statement about our individual and collective reputation. Forbearance, gentleness, reasonableness is to be practiced individually and collectively in the management of our emotions. It should be a spirit that others sense in any local church. So in church leaders the graciousness, forgiveness, patience and gentleness that go with forbearance must be evident (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 3:2). Then the leaders must teach it, model it as a value and in a forbearing way demand it. It is in God the distinguishing mark of his dealings with humanity (2 Peter 3:9; Romans 3:25). In us it is to be clearly present as the people of God.

Paul adds to this exhortation the reminder that the Lord is “near.” We are blessed by the fact of the immanence of God, that He is present and active within His creation. But there is likely more being said here than that.

In the Old Testament the nearness of Yahweh is an expression of a favored and privileged relationship. The Lord is “near” in the sense that His children are specially valued by Him, bound to Him in an intimate way, the objects of His protection and care. Yahweh’s nearness is an expression of His Covenant love. It speaks of His intimacy with His people and His readiness to act in their behalf (Deuteronomy 4:7; Psalm 65:4, 145:18; Isaiah 50:8). The nearness of God was an expression of strength (Psalm 73:28).

Jesus spoke of His nearness in this way (Matthew 28:20; John 15:1-15). But he added two important ideas to the concept of His nearness. First, He informed them of the coming experience of the Holy Spirit, who would always be in them (John. 14:15-21). This experience of Yahweh was new. They would enter an organic unity with God through this special work of God. Second, He informed them of His return to earth

(John 14:1-3, 16:16). In this sense He would be near. He also spoke of His physical return to earth. He gave specific signs of this return, saying that when we observe these signs, we can be sure that He is “near, right at the door” (Matthew 24:32-33). This coming of Christ became the conviction and hope of the early Church.

In Paul’s words, “The Lord is near,” we have an Old Testament idea of Yahweh’s strength and protection being ours with a New Testament twist added. The new element is that the Holy Spirit is now living in us, binding us together as one people and as one with God. Also inherent in it is the idea that the time of our final redemption and the advent of God’s kingdom on earth through His Anointed One is near, meaning close at hand. So we find that there has been and will be a progression in the experience of Yahweh’s presence. The atoning death of Jesus enabled a unity with Yahweh through His Spirit. The earthly Kingdom of Christ will enable a still greater experience of that nearness. The new heaven and earth, where the dwelling of God will be with men (Rev. 21:1-4), will be the ultimate and perfect experience of this nearness of God.

The assurance of the Lord’s nearness is the theological underpinning that allows us to be forbearing. In being forbearing we become vulnerable. This vulnerability is in fact what keeps us from forbearance. “If we do not defend our rights” our reasoning says, “who will?” The answer to that fear is that the Lord, the righteous judge will. He is always nearby, and we are to develop the practice of committing ourselves to this righteous judge as Jesus Himself did (1 Peter 2:23).

There is no exhibit that so demonstrates our lack of trust and intimacy with God as our lack of forbearance, or gentleness as the NIV says. Life threatens and we become fearful that we alone are concerned with our welfare, and we leave the bounds of moderate emotion. Underlying this fear is the mistaken belief that God is above His creation (transcendent), but not active in it (immanent). An informed faith teaches us otherwise and enables us to behave as Christ behaved for the advancement of God’s interests.

4:6 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

“Anxiety in a heart,” Solomon said, “Weighs it down” (Proverbs 12:25). It alters who we are and what we are to become and accomplish. Whenever it is present within us, we should examine ourselves for sin (Psalm 38:18). Anxiety can be a by-product of our being out of fellowship with Yahweh (Ezekiel 12:18-19). It is also true that without specific sin on our part anxiety is present in us, a consequence of our fallenness and separation from our Maker. Intimacy with Him provides consolation (Psalm 94:19; 1 Peter 5:7).

There is no anxiety which renewed confidence in God will not ease. Whether it is anxiety over a decision, over bodily needs, over financial or spiritual need, He is sufficient. His power directed by His faithfulness, goodness, and kindness, reminds us that He is capable, willing, and eager to involve Himself in the matters that concern us.

The command here is to be anxious about nothing. But that is not the end of the command. That is just the prohibition. The statement sets forth the alternative to the kind of faithless meditation and preoccupation that brooding is. The will of God in those times is that we make requests known to God. That is an important thing to delineate that is stated specifically in the text. “Praying about it” stops short of communicating what God is telling us to do here. He is commanding us to make known our requests to Him. The other activities mentioned are how we do that. They can be understood as one, prayer-and-supplication-with-thanksgiving. That is an activity we are to take up when anxiety sweeps over us, but only as a means of making our requests known to God.

These three terms work together to define a kind of “requesting” that God seeks and the kind that impacts us as we do it. The first term, prayer, is the generic term for addressing God. The second term,

supplication, emphasizes more the kind of prayer that repeatedly seeks action from God, or in some way makes specific request. The third term, “with thanksgiving,” states something we are to intentionally include in our praying. When we engage ourselves in looking at and stating all God’s grace and kindness has provided, it has a way of putting present needs in proper focus. Thanksgiving alone can reduce our level of anxiety. But it is also something that is proper with respect to God. It shows reverence, ministers to Him, and moves Him. It is one of the few things we can do for Him, that He cannot do for Himself. He orchestrates this in us, and we can be certain we are listening to Him when we engage ourselves in it. We will do much for our own anxious state of mind by giving thanks. Through it we are reminded of His goodness and faithfulness, and we regain perspective on the present. We may be troubled, but we are also blest. Trouble has a way of clouding our vision and obscuring from us the reality of all that is right and good.

Anxiety is a common emotion in fallen people living in a fallen world, where our resources are always inadequate. It does a very destructive work in us if we do not nurture its antidote, faith. Faith is nurtured as we exercise our dependence on God. That happens as we request His intervention. Faith grows through our repeated experience of His faithfulness in bringing His power to bear on the shortfalls we constantly encounter in this life. The next verse speaks to what engaging ourselves in this way with our Creator produces in us.

4:7 “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

We honor God when we call to Him in time of trouble (Psalm 50:14-15). He is honored by our rescue. In requesting from Him what our situation calls for, He first answers by sending His peace. His eventual answer to our request might not be as we requested or envisioned it. But His peace will come over us. This verse together with the previous one teaches this, that when through prayer-and-supplication-with-thanksgiving we make our requests known to God, His peace guards our heart.

This peace is said to surpass all comprehension. That tells us three important things about it. First, the peace produced by God surpasses in magnitude normal peace of mind. Whatever peace of mind we have come to normally expect and experience in life, the peace produced by God surpasses in magnitude that peace.

Second, the peace produced by God will be unreasonable and mysterious. That is the force of the words Paul chooses here. There is a degree of peace any human can produce in themselves, a degree of calmness and composure. We see this all the time even in those who don’t acknowledge God. There is always a way to “channel” our thinking so as not to be emotionally overwhelmed. That is the peace of reason. Reason allows us to detach ourselves, to look at something in a philosophical, clinical way and experience a composure that we otherwise would not have.

Third, the peace produced by God in a person absolutely belies their circumstances. Paul had demonstrated it in Philippi when he had been beaten, was confined to a prison cell, and was singing songs (Acts 16:25). It goes beyond what all the powers of mind could rationally explain. It is not dependent on a solution or a cure, an escape, or a rescue. It simply is, independent of any change in that which we are anxious about. The person it has settled into can give no cause for it. There is no new hope but God Himself. There has been no change, except likely their greater recognition of Him. Their peace can be explained only by the fact that it flowed from His Spirit into theirs.

This peace produced by God is said to guard our hearts and our minds. Paul’s use of the two terms “heart” and “mind” is likely meant to address the real-life experience of anxiety. Sometimes it comes as we think through with our minds a particular problem and its looming challenges. Other times we seem to just feel a sense of dread and concern about something or someone for which there is no rational basis. By all

modern analysis this is still a product of our minds. But it doesn't feel that way. It seems to be just something within us. This is in Biblical terms anxiety of the heart, or of the inner man.

Paul instructs us with regard to the peace produced by God that it "guards" against both of these experiences of anxiety. The term "guard" is the same one used to describe the posting of a sentry. It is a compound word formed from the preposition "before" and the word for to see, or to stare. It was likely formed out of the practice of placing someone to watch before a potential event came about and so to prevent it. There is a work of God that He can do in our inner being through His Spirit that guards us against godless brooding. We can experience peace where once we were in turmoil. We can feel companionship where we might have felt alone and abandoned.

We live in times when people describe themselves as having panic attacks and anxiety disorders. How are we to understand such things in light of Paul's words to us here? Just as the subject of physical sickness must be approached carefully, so must this subject of emotional sickness. There are in sicknesses with a physical cause that must be treated by appropriate physicians along with prayer. There are other disorders which are dealt with spiritually through a greater work of God's Spirit. In the area of anxiety, our separation from God brings with it much anxiety that can be combated through greater knowledge of the truth. As we understand the truth about God and are led to entrust our requests to Him, our anxiety levels fall. There is no doubt that most Christians need to get better at this and as they do, much of their anxiety will disappear. They will be healthier emotionally as they know God better. It is also true that something can be amiss in our body chemistry that causes our anxiety levels to spike. A doctor's care is likely part of God's plan for us in such cases. God heals at times independent of medicine. At most times we need to view medicine as part of what He has ordained for our health and welfare in a fallen world and fallen bodies. There is no doubt about what God CAN do. But we must live in light of what He DOES do. Medical help should be consulted when anxiety is a persistent pattern, especially when it is unexplained.

Paul says that we are to combat anxiety by requesting help from God. These are words of God that must be taken seriously. They should shape our first response and they should inspire a persistent effort in us. At the same time, our hearts should remain open to the possibility of anxiety with a physical, chemical cause and allow medicine the opportunity to bring relief.

4:8 "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good report, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things."

The central idea of this verse is that we are to govern the work that our mind is engaging in. The main verb is rendered in the NASB by the words "let your mind dwell." That is one word in the original. λογίζεσθε, and it is in the imperative mood which means it is a command. The word itself is used by Paul for thinking and reasoning that is intentionally guided or bent in a specific direction, as opposed to thought that is unprincipled, random, or simply instinctive. He frequently used this term as a command when he was speaking of new thought patterns that were foreign to those new in the faith (Romans 6:11-14). Paul was always concerned with how Christians were viewing things in their own minds and the relative value they were assigning them. The renewal of the mind he regarded as the essence of the spiritual journey, and so he was anxious to help people reason rightly (Romans 12:1-2).

This then is a verse that describes the kinds of things we are to give our minds to. Our spiritual growth can be greatly accelerated and enhanced if we simply bend our minds in a chosen direction rather than letting

them drift. On any day it is very profitable to ask, “What am I preoccupied with today?” We should judge our preoccupations by these eight things. At any idle moment, when our mind can drift from the actual activity, we are engaged in we should nudge it in the direction of things that meet these eight criteria. When we are thinking about people these eight ideas should regulate where our mind is allowed to take us. They are valuable criteria for decision-making, problem solving, planning, dreaming, and virtually any other mental activity.

The first criteria by which we should choose our thoughts is truth. We should seek to occupy our minds with what is true, as opposed to what we might want to be true, hope to be true, or imagine to be true. This will radically change us. The truth sets us free (John 8:32). It is when we think in a way that is out of sync with what is true that we become enslaved. The truth enlightens. It keeps us from stumbling, which ultimately happens because of ignorance. The figure of darkness and light is the Bible’s way of helping us understand the practical value and critical role of thinking on the truth. It is taught throughout Scripture that truth is that which harmonizes with what God has revealed. A statement or thought that expresses the true nature and reality of something, as God would state it, is true. There is much of God’s thought recorded for us in Scripture. It is not an exhaustive collection of His thought, but it is His complete thought for humanity. The more it is placed in our minds and allowed to shape our thought the greater our enlightenment and the greater our ability to live according to the light. Our supply of truth is immense. Its impact is determined by the degree to which we know and embrace it. Therefore, God placed His Spirit within us, to guide us in deepening our understanding of what is true (John 16:13). As that understanding becomes more complete and as it shapes our actions, we become more like our Creator.

A second thing that we should seek to focus our minds on and deepen our understanding of is that which is honorable. The word refers to those things that are revered. There are people, things, courses of action, attitudes, that we recognize as virtuous and sacred. We should seek to occupy and ponder this holy ground. In our minds we should analyze it, turn it over and over to gain perspective on it, embrace it, and seek to mimic it. In the two central passages that outline the characteristics of spiritual leaders this is one of the terms used to describe them (1 Timothy 3:8,11; Titus 2:2). Spiritual leaders must be honorable. A mind that is refused the opportunity to run in the channel of the profane and instead made to meditate on what is honorable is a mind that soon orders the action of the high road. There is too much of that which is only ordinary and normal allowed to take root in our minds, too much about getting ahead, or getting even, or getting what will serve one’s own interests.

A third term that describes what things our mind should be occupied with is that which is “right” or “righteous.” This term describes things that evidence themselves as equitable and just. Part of our humanity that pulls us downward is our ability to justify and rationalize. In our moments of reflection on our own actions we must see them rightly and assess them righteously. We must avoid justifying ourselves. We must also avoid the danger of mingling pragmatism and righteousness. When we do so, we are bent toward what brings a desirable result rather than a righteous one. We must search out instead those things which over millennia have demonstrated themselves to harmonize with God’s character, both His graces and His judgments. Such things are self-evident, proving by their aftermath their congruence with the kingdom of heaven.

A fourth term Paul uses to describe what we should allow to occupy our thoughts is “pure.” The word’s basic meaning is clean. It refers to what is pure as opposed to that which is tainted and suspect. In both morality and ethics, we can find ourselves anxious to blur dividing lines. There are times we seek out ambiguity to find permission to do as we desire. We must put a stop to this. Now, there are issues and situations for which there is no absolute standard of prescribed thought and behavior. We are provided for in those times by a moral conscience that has been conditioned by a habitual pursuit of what is pure. We invite moral ambiguity where there is none by having allowed our imagination to traffic in impurity. Our tactic for spiritual health is like our deliberate selection of healthy food, which allows no room for our junk food craving. If we habitually select lines of thinking and imagining that are pure, there is more fertile ground for the conviction of the Spirit in those seasons when tainted thought begins to seize our minds.

The fifth term descriptive of healthy thought is “lovely.” It comes from a compound Greek word which joins the word for “love” and the word for “toward.” We could render this Greek word with a word like “loving,” or “friendly.” It is a word that defines the relational tone of our thoughts and so deals with our various “people thoughts.” Its opposite is probably best expressed by words like hostile, suspicious, vengeful, bitter, envious, or competitive. Our instinctive, fleshly thoughts take us in a direction that is decidedly unfriendly (Galatians 5:19-21). When shaped by these we become unsafe. In the process of life in the imperfect world of any local church each person will experience hurt that will define them. If they chose to embrace a line of thinking that is loving and friendly, they will be shaped by grace. Should they embrace a more natural course of thought characterized by hurt and bitterness, they will become bitter, suspicious, angry people. Dwelling on what is “lovely” is in this sense an investment in God’s family and our own souls. The one who loves others loves himself.

The next test Paul gives us regarding our thought patterns is that they be of good repute. The word he uses joins the Greek words for “good” and for “a saying.” It sounds like the English word euphemism, which describes an expression that softens the harshness of an unpleasant term. When something is of good repute it is well spoken of and well received. It is appropriate. The question we should ask of our thought patterns is this: If this thinking was known to other godly people, would they speak well of it? The Christian who lives missionally is by that a very public person. It is easy to let down one’s guard in more private moments and allow our minds to drift into the profane and absurd. We must take our minds in the direction of those things that are well spoken of. In doing so we will inevitably be equipped to strengthen and build up others, and so enhance what is dear to our Lord.

Paul then says we should give our minds to things only if there is excellence in them. This term originally meant “manliness” and so came to describe valor, virtue, and that which is admirable. Our thoughts, if they were known by others, should inspire them to all that is good. They should be such that they would gain much more than an approving nod. They should turn their heads and inspire others to think along the same lines. The thinking patterns that inspire others are those inspired by the Holy Spirit. They are the thoughts of the Most Excellent One, recognized by others as an imitation of the noble thoughts of Jesus Christ. In our idle or busy moments, we should bend our thoughts in His direction and let them be sparked and energized by the thought of heaven. This is the ultimate excellence that we can lay hold of. It is one thing to pursue excellence in what we procure, or in what we produce. It is another matter to pursue it when no one is looking in that part of our lives which no one will see.

The eighth and final thing which Paul puts down for a standard by which to judge our thoughts is that there be that about them which is “worthy of praise.” Again, we are not to allow our thoughts to be isolated from accountability and scrutiny. The question Paul might be encouraging us to ask is this: If I became aware of these thoughts in someone else, would I praise and commend them? More importantly, would Christ my master praise and commend these thoughts? We are not to settle in the most important part of our being for the merely acceptable. We are to set before our minds those things that are commended by Yahweh. There is great and enduring richness in pondering these things and gaining perspective from them.

Our part in the sanctification process is very small, compared to the volume of things brought into our lives by God’s grace. Our one thing is that we must not let our minds simply run in the tracks they naturally move to. That is the essence of a mind set on the flesh or being “according to the flesh” (Romans 8:5-6). Our sanctification depends on our minds being renewed and our personal choice enters this countless times each day. The Holy Spirit waits to do this work. It is a matter of great urgency that this verse be used by us to discern when we are allowing Him to do it.

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

Paul wants the Philippians to practice certain specific things. By this he means that he wants these things to become characteristic of them. He wants a certain character, line of thinking, and way of behaving to be clearly observed in them by others. When Paul uses this word rendered “practice” he is most often delineating a course of action as opposed to a one time or occasional act. So he is envisioning here the formation of habits.

The habits Paul has in mind are those that he himself has taught and modeled to them. He uses four different terms so that there is emphasis in the reader’s mind on the fact that this is a different set of habits from those they have by instinct.

The way of life they are being summoned to is first learned. It is not naturally known apart from revelation. It is not instinctively known as if imbedded in the mind at birth. It is not even naturally learned through logic or common sense. It was learned through Paul’s deliberate instruction, and it was learned by him through revelation.

This way of life was secondly “received” by them. This emphasizes the act of embracing something as true, allowing its implications to take root, and assuming the trust or responsibility that accompanies truth. Paul had witnessed that the Philippians had not just learned the truth, they had also embraced the sacred trust that goes with it.

Thirdly, the way of life he wanted them to practice they had heard about through Paul. This refers to the description Paul had given to them with his own voice. It included formal instruction and casual conversation. Because this lifestyle is not natural it must be described and defined. This requires one who will speak, and Paul had been faithful to declare the truth to them in words and modes of expression that they could hear with comprehension.

Fourthly, the way of life they were being summoned to had been modeled by Paul and they had seen it. They had witnessed actions in him produced by the truth he spoke and actions that harmonized with that truth. There was no contradiction in Paul. There were the values, the sacrifices, the exact emotions one would expect from a person who spoke strongly about good and evil, truth and lies.

Paul attaches to this command a blessing. The lifestyle he had called them to and modeled for them was one that was based on intimacy with God. That was first and foremost in Paul’s lifestyle, that communion with God’s Spirit. Those who embrace that are so embraced by Him and in His companionship, there is great peace. He brings peace to the heart that is tuned to Him. Perhaps the most outstanding example of the peace of God ruling in the hearts of His own had been modeled in the jail of Philippi at midnight by Paul and Silas (Acts 16:16-34).

4:10 “But I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.”

The verses that follow show that Paul had received from the Philippian church a financial gift for support of his ministry. The need to say “thanks!” provided the occasion for this letter, though there were other more important issues that Paul felt the need to address and has addressed to this point. Beginning here though, is the section of his letter in which he conveys to them that they have blessed him. His words are important in that they reveal how such a man still can be blessed and strengthened by others, though he has been weaned from the need for the praise of man. Paul’s words also reveal the full gamut of realities regarding money, from its power to bless to its impotency to fulfill.

The Philippian’s gift had caused Paul to rejoice greatly in the Lord. Money has the power to demonstrate God’s providential care. It is a tangible display to people carrying the burden of ministry that God and His people have not forgotten them. Its power to do this must never be forgotten or under-estimated. Something as “worldly” as a gift of money, caused Paul, a man who saw death as gain, to rejoice in the

Lord and to do so greatly. By this expression “rejoiced in the Lord” he is likely describing an experience that was both mental and emotional. First it was “in the Lord” in that the Lord was the object of Paul’s joy. He was reminded of the Lord by this gift, His goodness, His faithfulness, His power, His orchestration of events. There was stimulated in Paul this mental process. Second, it was “in the Lord” in the sense that the Lord was the source of Paul’s joy. Paul’s own emotional being was touched in a special way by the Lord through this gift. Paul felt the Lord relationally. There was this more subjective, mystical consciousness of the Lord’s presence. Paul wants them to know that it was intense. In the course of any day, we might rejoice in the Lord. But this was one of those special occasions for Paul. Money was used to bring it about.

The rest of the verse appears to reflect that Paul had felt somewhat forgotten. He speaks first of the Philippians “reviving” their concern for him, as if it had waned. Then he quickly clarifies that they had in fact been concerned but had not had opportunity to show that concern. We are left to imagine the exact circumstances that produced this statement. It is not hard to imagine what might have transpired. Due to the slow flow of news and communication in those times, months and even years could pass before this kind of gift would be orchestrated and delivered. Whatever those circumstances had been, Paul acknowledges that they had been concerned all along. It is likely that he had thought at one time they had become unconcerned, but Epaphroditus’ visit led him to understand otherwise. That he thought otherwise shows the emotional vulnerability we experience in this life, even though we have been redeemed. We can sense signals that aren’t present. Our “earth experience” comes into play in our interpretation of people’s thoughts and actions and we can reach very inaccurate conclusions. We must be very aware of this and manage it prayerfully.

4:11 “Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am in.”

Paul thought it was important to testify to the Philippians about his own personal maturation, his coming of age in the matter of material things. This is certainly one of the most significant plateaus that any person can reach, to arrive at a proper perspective with respect to money, and more importantly a proper perspective on contentment.

It is typical to view contentment as something that comes over us once we have certain things that we want. Contentment to us is an emotional state that circumstances deliver to us. Every person has their list. It may be a list of material things, it may be a list of emotional needs, it may be a list of achievements, it may have to do with relationships or with career objectives. Every person has a list of things that they believe will bring them contentment. This stirring that something is missing is a result of the loss of the glory that was man’s before the fall in Eden. We were made for so much more than we can now be engaged in. We feel this. There is in each of us what can be described as an emotional deficit. Ever since, humanity has turned in numerous directions to find contentment. This is a most important issue to understand in the process of our years on earth.

Paul makes clear first that his joy over the financial gift from the Philippians was not because he felt he lacked anything. That is a remarkable statement, because we will see in the next few verses that by all normal standards of judgment, he did lack. How does one learn not to lack anything when they do lack when they are in prison?

We see first that it is a learned behavior. It is unnatural and non-instinctive we could say, and yet it is obtainable. Paul had learned it. Second, we see that he had learned to be content in whatever circumstance he was in. So we can say that contentment is not something we gain when we have money and that we lose when we do not. These two ideas inform us that we should probably not understand contentment as an emotional state our circumstances control. Rather, it is one that is cultivated. Discontent people can seldom be made content, at least not in a lasting way, by altering their circumstances. Outsiders cannot fix them. They must be led, but in the end, they must LEARN

contentment. This thinking on contentment can be developed further as Paul's words in the following verses are examined. Our inherent emotional deficit can be made up.

4:12 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."

Paul says that he knows the secret of contentment, so that in a wide range of material circumstances he can live contently. He makes three statements that show the extremes he has been content in. Neither poverty or prosperity robbed Paul of contentment, and it is important to understand that either one can. Neither hunger nor satisfaction, neither need nor oversupply would swing his mood such that discontentment carried the day. This observation that one can "know how to live" at either end of the scale of wealth is insightful. It is a common error to believe that contentment is easier to find among the rich and discontentment easier to find among the poor. Yet it is easy to document that contentment is equally illusive at either end of the socio-economic scale. God reveals to us through Paul that contentment is a matter of knowing how to live.

This learning how to live is a matter of learning a secret, something not readily apparent and not universally known. Paul will state the secret in verse 13. We should approach the truth of verse 13 however, only with a very clear understanding of what the previous verses have told us.

Four things are true of contentment. First, it is something that is learned, not something instinctive. Second, that it does not relate to circumstances, and to one's socio-economic situation. Third, one can come to know "how to live" in different circumstances and so find contentment. Fourth, there is a secret, a specific piece of information to be reckoned with that makes contentment a reality. These ideas prepare the reader for the secret to being content that Paul himself has learned.

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

This is a tremendous statement even if taken alone and apart from its context. To realize its truth imparts comfort and courage in life's high and low moments. There is nothing within the scope of God's will for us that is beyond what He will do through us. The voice of experience of myriads of Christ's servants is this, when God's heart and desire brings before them tasks or trials that are impossible for them, they are strengthened and provided for by Him to do them. This has been the consistent testimony of the people of God in all eras. It can be confidently and safely embraced by all who pursue His heart.

But the statement is made more significant by the statements that precede it. Those clearly point to this as the secret of contentment in any and every circumstance. It is the knowledge and confidence, that we can do all things through Him who strengthens us that leads to our being content in any and every circumstance His will places us in.

The primary kinds of circumstances Paul has been speaking of here are economic or financial ones. He has spoken of being able to be content in either poverty or plenty through this "secret" the knowledge and confidence that he can do all things through the strength Christ imparts. There is a discontent that creeps into our lives when we have either too much or too little of life's goods, and at all points in between as well.

Now if the "secret" is as Paul has identified it, we can back our way into an understanding of the primary cause of discontent. It must be anxiety, specifically the feeling that in some sense we are "over our heads" in the circumstances His will places us in. We fear the loss of something, the pain, the emptiness, the uncertainty, powerlessness, shame, when we ponder where His will might take us or where it has placed

us. Where anxiety is present, discontent wells up. In those moments this truth can stabilize us. It returns us to trust in the nature and character of God.

This truth quenches the lies about who we are and aren't. In poverty we feel the lie that we are empty, powerless, forgotten, and vulnerable. In wealth we feel capable, adequate, influential, and powerful. In between the two extremes we feel mixtures of these. The truth is that our significance and power is in Christ alone. Everything else provides only the illusion of the things that bring contentment. They produce a contentment that is a mirage. It quickly fades or moves beyond our reach. To have Him is to have the only thing that matters. With Him we will rise to whatever He is orchestrating in the moment before us. We will not rush beyond and miss what He has, and we will not fall short and miss what He has. Where poverty and wealth in themselves will cause drift in our course, faith that takes hold of Him puts us in the right mode in the right time and place. We can do all things that are His plan for us by the strength He imparts. Apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). He is the essential possession. We must aggressively view our circumstances through the lens of faith. Then we will enter an experience of Him that leads us to contentment.

4:14 "Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction."

Since Christ is the essential thing, we might tend to turn our backs on the financial needs of those who have Him. The wonderful truth that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us can become a rationale for indifference, self-centeredness, and consumerism. This is a faithless life (James 2:15-16). It ignores the fact that God meets needs by stirring His people to give. He strengthens His own to do what His plan requires of them through His own. The Philippians had done well to minister to Paul's financial need. It was true that He didn't need the money they sent Him in one sense. It was also true that he did, or God would not have led the Philippians to give. His power to stir hearts brought Paul what he needed, and they did good to respond to God's leading and be so used by Him. In managing ourselves our attitude should be, "I have Christ and I need nothing else." However, in thinking of others we should not think, "They have Christ, they need nothing else of mine!"

4:15 "And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone."

The Philippian church had done a good thing. It was also a rare thing. This has been a great dilemma in the cause of Christ's mission. Paul does not give an explanation as to why he had no partners in this sense at that time. He only states that he did not. The reasons could have been legitimate, however, the fact that he states this as significant could be revealing that there was an unmet expectation. Whatever the reason for this lack of financial partners, it is seemingly the norm in Christian work. That it was true of one so centered on the will of God as was Paul should keep us from thinking that a lack of funding, in and of itself, indicates a lack of God's presence and blessing in a ministry. We cannot casually dismiss a ministry's lack of resource with an "Oh well, it must not be of God!"

This verse makes clear that in Christian ministry financial partnerships between givers and receivers are normal and expected. Whatever we might conclude about procedure and support levels this much is clear, that there are to be supported by Churches financially so that they can devote themselves to the work of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:1-14; 2 Corinthians 12:13). Whole movements have gotten side-tracked by feeling a need to do other than this. It is not that "tent-making" is wrong. Neither, however, can it be said to be right or even better. The norm is that those who are so called, and whose calling is affirmed by the congregation, be paid. The roots of this are found in the care for the Levites that God built into the economy of Israel. This tradition was endorsed by the command of Christ Himself (1 Corinthians 9:14).

The time that Paul is referring to here is likely reported of beginning in Acts 18:23. There an excursion which we classify as Paul's third missionary journey begins. It is one that retraces his earlier steps with significant time spent in Asia Minor and in particular Ephesus. He stated two years there ministering "daily in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9-10). Following this he returned to Macedonia.

The "preaching of the gospel" was more than the ministry of what we call evangelism. It included that, but also had to do with the application of the principles of the gospel to the lives and hearts of people. It had to do with leading them to justification and then onward into the process of sanctification. This is the work of the gospel that Christian people are bound by Christ to underwrite. It is a great investment in eternity first because it is right, and second because obedience always is rewarded. Paul will state this later fact plainly in verse 17.

4:16 "for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs."

We find in Acts 17 that Paul visited Thessalonica right after his initial visit to Philippi. This means that the Philippians had been believers in Christ only a matter of days before they embraced this discipline of giving financially to enable the ministry. It could be that Paul's shameful treatment in Philippi (Acts 16; 1 Thessalonians 2:2), was used to stir a special fondness in the good hearts there. Their sense of obligation was immediate and proved to be lasting. The total length of Paul's stay in Thessalonica is not given in Acts. It appears to be brief, perhaps as little as a month long (Acts 17:2). That the Philippians sent gifts to him there "more than once" is of significance and helps us understand why apparent break in their giving pattern would have aroused concern in Paul. This short statement then, allows us to calibrate the dedication of the Philippians to the ministry of giving.

4:17 "Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek the profit which increases to your account."

Paul's expectation was that participation by churches in the ministry of the gospel be more widespread. He has commended the Philippians for their consistent practice of sending him financial support. Now he reiterates in a little different way that his thankfulness is not because of want or need on his part for money. He has already said that he is way beyond the point of needing a certain amount of money to be content. What makes him joyful about their giving is the profit that increases to their account. This can only be a reference to the principle taught to Israel throughout the Old Testament (see for example Malachi 3:6-12) and reiterated by Jesus (Luke 6:38; 16:1-13). The principle is that God blesses those who give money and increases their ability to do so (2 Corinthians 9:6-15). As in all areas of stewardship He will also reward eternally all who give of themselves and their possessions to advance eternal things (Luke 19:11-27). The giving of the Churches made Paul thankful because it is always a sign of health and maturity. To one who lives for the growth of others this is the ultimate encouragement.

4:18 "But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God."

Paul, now a prisoner, gives this statement on his present circumstances having received the gift sent by the Philippians. The statement, and more importantly the mood that can be sensed in it, validates Paul as one who really has learned to be content in whatever circumstances. He acknowledges that he has received the full gift they had sent. This acknowledges their generosity and the integrity of Epaphroditus and the goodness of God in protecting the gift from robbers along the way. He then says he has an abundance, more than what he needs. This is heartening to any giver to know they are giving to someone who does not have extravagant needs, who has learned the discipline of contentment. It is cause for concern when the focus of anyone becomes what they don't have and is particularly ominous when it is consistently expressed by one who is charged with leading others. Paul adds to his statement that he has an abundance these words, "I am amply supplied." This leaves no doubt about his perspective on his

circumstances. His words reflect no anxiety over future need, they do not anticipate a future gift. He then does something very important. He directs them away from how their gift ministered to him to how it ministered to God. He likens it to an Old Covenant sacrifice. Those sacrifices gave off a fragrant aroma. In the 21st century the aroma from a neighbor's barbeque would be the closest comparison we would have to the aroma of these sacrifices. It was an aroma that made the taste buds tingle. But such an aroma might come from a sacrifice to an idol as well. Paul says that this was not only a fragrant sacrifice, but one that was acceptable. It was acceptable not because it pleased Paul, or pleased other people, but because it was well-pleasing to God. Giving is always a sacrifice for the giver. The degree of sacrifice may vary, but it is certain that to give wealth away is to sacrifice what could have been purchased for oneself with it. Such sacrifice is well-pleasing to God. It ministers to Him because it is a demonstration that our love goes beyond mere words.

4:19 "And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

This is a statement of confidence by one who has lived by the principle that he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him. A lifetime of wading in against all odds had taught him that despite appearances, all the odds were in his favor. There was no set of circumstances that he would not emerge triumphant from (2 Corinthians 2:14).

We do not see God in His glory in this life on this earth. Our fallenness has had the effect of veiling our eyes to the magnitude of His greatness. But nothing has diminished His greatness. "His riches in glory" refer to the wealth that we know is His which we would see if we could escape our own sinfulness and the sinful world and see Him in the glory and splendor of His uncorrupted realm. Paul speaks of that realm of reality as "glory," the place that is the seat of the weightiest, most profound elements that make up and shape what comes to be. It is the place of the fullness of God's presence. In Christ Jesus, that is, through belief in Him, all that God is and that is God's, is brought to bear in our behalf on the circumstances we find ourselves in from moment to moment. Our needs are addressed from this storehouse, this reservoir. That is why our real power and wealth do not change with our circumstances. It is why we can embrace the confidence Paul exudes in this verse concerning needs that practically arise.

So this verse is a companion to verse 13. The one who embraces verse 13, that they can do all things through Christ who strengthens them, soon thereafter states with confidence from experience the truth of this verse to others. They have been taught by experience that God enables obedience, no matter what level of need is incurred in doing what He wants done.

4:20 "Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

The most noble thought that a human being could embrace is this one, that God be glorified. We live great lives if by them we inspire others to live to this end. If we were to seek out a unifying principle or "karma" that unified all that is and all the events that come to be, as many godless have done, this would be the closest thing we would find. God is moving all things in this direction, to bring Himself glory. His motivation for doing this is not the kind of self-centeredness that we might associate with this kind of thinking. He is doing this because He IS glorious and there is absolute peace in the experience of comprehending the magnitude of His greatness. All will be well when all see the Creator as He is.

There is one great fact that takes this unifying principle out of the realm of "Karma." It is that God will act upon the events and upon nature itself to bring about His glory. The things themselves are not glorious, nor are they by some mutual energy making a harmony. It is not that things have a glory in and of themselves and have been set in a kind of motion that will result in good, with God simply a spectator. He actively intervenes and shapes reality and, in the end, will align it for His glory. Harmony and good will be because they are in the person of God. Until He is done there is disharmony in creation brought about by evil.

Our charge is to be in harmony with God Himself, to be submitted to this great objective stated by Paul, to bring God glory forever and ever. This is the only philosophy that will endure. It is the best advice anyone could receive on living life.

4:21 “Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you.”

Amidst all of Paul’s concerns about right thinking, proper procedure, and pure doctrine, we find that he was intensely relational. He worked hard to establish intimate relationships among diverse people. Christianity is healthiest and strongest when truth is practiced and disseminated in the context of close, intimate personal relationships. To emphasize just truth, or just relationships is to become imbalanced.

Here, Paul wants to embrace every saint in Christ Jesus. Those he did not know he wanted to know. Those who might feel on the fringe he wanted to draw in. This is the other half of ministry. Understand, declare, and guard the truth. Pursue, embrace, care for people. By these words Paul reaches out to those he does not know in Philippi. He also joins the hands of the Philippians to believers with him that they might not know. Inspiring unity and family while not destroying diversity was high impact work to Paul. Simple personal greetings, taking the time, was important to Paul. We must work hard at giving ministry a personal touch.

4:22 “All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household.”

With these words Paul continues to massage the enormous relational dynamic in the family of God. He made sure people knew about each other whether they were in proximity or separated by great distance. Christians are united to God and to each other so that they are never alone no matter how isolated they might feel. Paul always made it his business to know who believers were. Along with strengthening their tie to God, he always sought to strengthen their tie to each other.

Paul had become aware of believers in Caesar’s “household.” Whether these were servants or Caesar, or members of his family is unknown to us. Either shows the inroads the Spirit was making in terms of the spread of the news of Jesus Christ among the Gentiles. In Paul’s lifetime the faith had gone from being an obscure sub-sect of Judaism to a presence of some significance in Caesars household. A relatively few years before, Pilate had curiously inquired about Jesus’ “kingdom” (John 18:33-38), scoffed at any idea of truth, and in the end regarded Jesus through his pagan sense of superstition (John 19:7-11; Matthew 27:15-25). Now there was a clear understanding of the truth of Jesus in the nerve-center of the Roman empire. These words said in passing mark the truth of Jesus prediction of the latent power of His invisible kingdom (Matthew 13:33; Proverbs 30:28).

4:23 “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”

Paul closes his words with those thoughts that were a classic part of the greetings and farewells of all his letters. He believed that the grace of God was more than a force with respect to our justification. Grace spoke to Paul of God’s Spirit stirring within us, strengthening us to rise far above our fallenness. His grace is always a present event, as sure as it is a past one. In the moment we are in, His grace desires to produce something in and through us.

It is a strategic thought that His grace be with our spirits. It tends to be in our intellect, which is significant progress for the pagan, humanistic mind. This farewell expresses the vision God has for humanity, what grace encompasses, its total transforming work. This present work of grace, ongoing each day and new in each moment, God is seeking to orchestrate deep within us. Our awareness of it can falter and wane. Our vitality can slip. We can wrap our mina in a handkerchief (Luke 19). The confidence of the past works of grace and the hope of its great future works is meant to bolster our trust to seek it out today. Paul’s

desire is that our spirits always might be in tune with His. By God's great grace, this is the miracle of change that we can live.