

# THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK

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Verse By Verse Bible Studies

# UNDEFEATED!

Finding PEACE  
in a World  
Full of Trouble

*Philippians verse by verse*

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Dedication

To the Memory

Of

Joe. B. Sanders

*Man of*

*Character, Conviction, Courage*

## FOREWORD

A few months after my graduation from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary it dawned on me that I could no longer look to Mississippi College or to the seminary for my discipline in the study of God's Word. For years I had either followed the curriculum or taken elective classes, but now I had to assume responsibility for what I would read, what I really studied, how I would study, and when I would study. Before long, a method of study began to develop around three commitments. (1) There was the commitment to study Scripture, (2) an awareness of the importance of preserving what I had gleaned from my study, and (3) the desire to share what I had gleaned with others. I began by choosing a book of the Bible and preparing a detailed outline with notes. Later, I began to expand some of these studies, and when I got my first computer and Bible software, I expanded them further and refined my format.

There was still another matter that motivated me to put this much time into this study and to follow this format. There are many, many good commentaries available to pastors and lay-persons - far better commentaries than I could ever hope to write. Why should I produce another commentary when I could find far better critical commentaries on one side, and far better devotional commentaries on the other side?

Through prayer and study, I became convinced that there is a need for something, both for the lay-person and the busy pastor, which might help fill the gap between the critical commentary and the devotional commentary - something which would provide some critical commentary and some illustrations and practical applications. I decided to call it *The Bible Notebook*. *The Bible Notebook* is designed to be used with an open Bible.

It is my prayer that this study will help you to better understand the Epistle to the Philippians - and to apply it in your daily life. This is the Epistle of Joy and if you apply its message in your daily life your joy will surpass your comprehension. Let the Holy Spirit guide your study of Philippians; meditate upon its message and rejoice in the Lord as Paul did many years ago. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (4:4).

# PREFACE

## UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

I have always loved Paul's little letter to the Philippian church. I had preached from Philippians many times and had taught the Epistle in various churches on many occasions before I had an opportunity to make an application of its message in a new and special way - up close and personal. In August 1996, I had a severe heart attack and spent two weeks in the cardiac care unit of the Glenwood Regional Medical Center, West Monroe, Louisiana. I was then transferred to the Saint Francis Medical Center, Monroe, Louisiana, for bypass surgery.

I have preached it, taught it, and believed it through faith. Now, I can add my personal testimony - it works! God promises a peace that defies my comprehension and because He said it I accepted it. He promises joy to those who, by grace through faith, receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and walk in fellowship with Him. I accepted that promise and often meditated upon the significance of the peace and joy that I knew were mine as a gift from my heavenly Father. Even during turbulent times, times of fatigue, stress, harassment, and persecution I knew I had that peace and joy and thanked God for being so gracious.

But this was a new experience for me. I was lying on the examining table in the emergency room when the doctor announced, "That last EKG just bought you a room in the unit. You have just had a heart attack, and it was a bad one." I prayerfully yielded myself to the Great Physician and then to the medical staff. From the moment I was awakened in ICU by a very courteous young cardiologist, Dr. Thomas Causey, I submitted myself to him and to the staff and trusted them to care for me. I was prepared to die, and faced the possibility of death without fear (I am still amazed at that!), but I had a lot to live for and wanted to return to my family and my church.

From the time I was admitted to the ICU until I was transferred to the sixth floor (a cardiac care floor), I was told that various people on the staff were commenting on my attitude. I was pleasantly and gratefully surprised by my attitude. Even though I am a strong-willed person who has often taken problems to the Lord and failed to leave them there, I found that I was without fear, anxiety, or depression. I cultivated a relationship with some who cared for me and shared my faith when I had an opportunity. I drew great strength and encouragement from my family, church, and friends. Let me stress this - I was overjoyed by the support of my family, my church, and gracious friends.

The Lord was supplying all my needs and as I look back on my experience I am still amazed at the peace and joy I experienced under the circumstances. Recently I was reflecting on all this when it came to me - this kind of peace does surpass the imagination, but at times the Lord pulls back the veil to reveal a little of the mystery. While you cannot reduce it to a formula, it is as simple as this:

1. You are saved by grace through faith.

2. God Gives you His Spirit to nurture and develop you.
3. "...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-23a)."
4. Add your trials (heart attack, cancer, divorce, financial crisis, grief).
5. The fruit of the Spirit is manifested in and through your troubles.
6. You now have a fresh awareness of peace and joy that were yours all along.
7. You praise God for all He is doing, and then discover that He is blessing you with more peace and greater joy.

To summarize (assuming a right relationship with God): GRACE + TRIALS = JOY! Not defeat, not frustration, not anger, but genuine, abiding joy.

You can anticipate trials in life. They are coming. The Fall of man guarantees that. In Christ you may anticipate not only trials, but victory over those trials by the grace of God. When trouble comes, the Christian who is under the control of the Holy Spirit can face those troubles with assurance that God will see him through them in such a way that he will rejoice in what God has done in his life. Joni Erikson Tada is living proof of that. Your trouble is God's opportunity. Grace + trouble = joy! Everything that happens is not good, but God will work it out for the highest good for those who love Him. Paul wrote to the Romans, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28, NKJV).

As you study the Book of Philippians, I pray that God's peace will be manifested in your life and that joy will abound. And when the time of testing comes - and come it will - you will face it with complete faith that the Lord will provide all your needs, and that when the troubles and trials of this world come, the results will be deeper faith, increased peace, and joy unsurpassed.

## **THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK**

*The Bible Notebook* is as much a product of church Bible conferences and Seminary Extension classes as the pastor's study and pulpit. The format is a little different from most commentaries in that it is a verse by verse study, with comments on key words and phrases. In the average commentary, the Bible student turns to the passage he, or she, is studying and after reading the Scripture, proceeds to read the commentary, sometimes a few paragraphs, but at times pages of comments. He is reading the material because he is looking for help with a particular verse. But, since most writers do not identify each verse in the commentary, he is not sure when, or if, he will find help with the verse with which he needs help. I have read pages of commentary looking for help with a specific verse without being able to identify that verse, only to reread it and discover that the writer skipped my verse. Or, possibly when I located the verse there was a note telling me to go back to a previous book, chapter, or verse and read there the commentary on the subject.

The late Dr. Luther Hall, Director of Missions for the Northeast Louisiana Baptist Association and the Morehouse Baptist Association, began recommending me to pastors who were looking for someone to teach various books of the Bibles when I was about twenty-eight or twenty-nine years of age. For more than thirty years I have preached through many books of the Bible, taught them to my people, and for most of that time averaged teaching various books four to six times a year in other churches and in Seminary Extension classes. *The Bible Notebook* was developed from my study in preparation for those studies. The method used in *The Bible Notebook* assures you that you will find something on the verse which interests you enough to motivate you to look it up in the first place. Then, if the commentary is too limited or inadequate, you may turn to a more formal commentary for the help you need. This format is followed from beginning to end, even though it may lead to a certain amount of repetition. This avoids the problem encountered in various study Bibles, in which you are frequently asked to “see notes” on a verse in a previous chapter.

The 1995 Edition of the New American Standard Version (NAS) will be used throughout this study, unless otherwise noted. Abbreviations will be used to designate various translations: King James Version (KJV), New King James Version (NKJV), New International Version (NIV) and New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

## BACKGROUND

Background material for studies in Philippians is found in the diary (“we”) sections of the Book of Acts, beginning in Acts 16. There we see four missionaries entering the pagan city of Philippi. Little could anyone who saw them enter the city that day have realized the impact they would have on that city and the world.

Philippi was named for (and by) Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. Philip had developed a great military machine and united the various peoples of that part of the world. He secured his son's commitment to Greek culture by enlisting Aristotle to teach him. By spreading that Greek culture Alexander had determined to a great extent the environment of the early church.

In 356 B. C. Philip changed the name of a new settlement to Philippi. In 41 B. C. a famous battle was fought outside the city (on the plains of Philippi). That battle had determined to some extent the direction of the Roman Empire and the context in which the events of the New Testament transpired. The battle was between Antony and Octavian on one side, and Brutus and Cassius (conspirators against Caesar) on the other.

Philippi was a Roman colony, but it was not a great city like Rome, Athens, or Ephesus. It was, however, a cosmopolitan city. Lying across the great Ignatian Way which linked the eastern and the western parts of the empire, Philippi was very important to Rome. Soldiers, merchants, and

other travelers passed through the city regularly.

Philippi was a pagan city, with the people worshiping many and various gods. Emperor worship was also very strong. But there was no synagogue there, probably because the Jewish population was very small. This meant that there was no Old Testament background which the missionaries might use to introduce the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This was the world into which the four missionaries, Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke, entered. The important thing for this study, however, is not to know about the city of Philippi, but to know about Paul and his message. It is significant that Paul visited Philippi on his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36ff). The purpose of the second missionary trip was to strengthen the churches started on the first journey, and to establish new churches. Paul's purpose in evangelism was not to win and abandon, but to win and develop, to see new converts grow into Christian maturity. He would never forget these new believers, nor they him.

Paul and Silas had begun this missionary journey from Antioch of Syria, Silas having replaced Barnabas who accompanied Paul on the first great missionary trip. When Paul and Barnabas could not agree on John Mark, who had left them on the first missionary venture, they decided to go their separate ways. Paul and Silas visited churches established on the first journey to encourage and assist them. They were joined by Timothy at Lystra and by Luke at Troas. The missionaries were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go into Asia (modern Turkey). Paul received a vision from the Lord while at Troas of a man from Macedonia asking him to come over and help.

Philippi represents a new step in the spread of the Gospel. Moving into Europe, emotional barriers were often more challenging than geographical barriers. Christianity clashed with the paganism of the Gentiles; the Judeo-Christian culture clashed with Roman culture. There was no synagogue in Philippi, possibly because officials were determined to keep the city as purely Roman in dress, culture, and politics as possible. Another possibility is that there may not have been enough Jewish men (heads of families) in Philippi to support a synagogue.

It did not take long for the first controversy to occur after Paul and the others began to witness to the people of the city. Luke records the encounter in Acts 16:16-19. We soon find Paul and Silas in jail and the jailer asking, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). They did not say, "You don't know enough to be saved," or, "You don't have a proper background." They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31). If Paul could say that to the jailer in Philippi, we can say that to anyone in the world today. We might add that this is the only way any person is ever saved. Beginning with the conversion of the jailer and those of his household, and the conversion of Lydia and those of her household, a great church was established in Philippi (see Acts 16:14ff).

Paul visited Philippi at least two more times. First, at the conclusion of his work in Ephesus, he went to Philippi after Titus failed to arrive from Corinth when he was expected. The purpose for this trip was to Philippi and Corinth was to collect an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem. While he was in Philippi Titus arrived, having traveled overland from Achaia, to give him a good

report on his ministry in Corinth. Following this report, Paul wrote his second inspired epistle to the church at Corinth. In the Corinthian epistles he mentions two (extra-biblical) letters he wrote to the church.

Many texts on stewardship come from remarks Paul made about the Christians in Macedonia (2 Cor. 8 and 9). These saints were extremely poor but they begged Paul for the privilege of taking part in the offering. If our churches had that attitude today, we too would be turning the world upside down for Christ (their enemies in Thessalonica complained, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too" (Acts 17:6b).

The next visit to Philippi is recorded in Acts 20:4-6. After going to Corinth to collect the offering from the concerned believers in Achaia (Greece) for the suffering saints in Jerusalem, he visited the church at Philippi again on the way to Jerusalem, where he was arrested in Jerusalem and taken, after two years in prison in Caesarea, to Rome.

## **OCCASION AND PURPOSE**

Christians in Philippi heard that Paul was a prisoner in Rome and sent an offering by Epaphroditus, who would remain with Paul to assist him. While there, Epaphroditus had become seriously ill. The Philippian church heard about this and the members were concerned for his welfare. Paul learned of their concern and sent Epaphroditus, now recovered, back to report on his condition and to deliver this epistle to them. Also, Paul wanted:

- (1) to thank the Philippians for their generosity.
- (2) to urge them to stand firm in face of intense persecution.
- (3) to stress unity (a major theme of the letter).
- (4) to deal with two great problems: Jewish legalism and pagan hedonism.

## **FORM: A LETTER**

The first century Greek letter differed from the modern personal letter in a number of ways. Since Philippians is a personal letter, it is important for us to understand the parts of a proper letter in Paul's day.

1. Paul began with the name of the writer. This was an important part of a letter (and practical since it was written on a scroll).
2. Next, there is the name of the recipient(s).
3. A greeting follows (see James 1:1).
4. Then there is a prayer.

5. Next comes the body of the letter.

There is a basic difference between Paul's letters and the normal letter of his day. He followed the conventions, but he was creative rather than imitative. He does not just say, "Paul." He makes some significant statements about himself. He does not just name the recipients, but he says something about them. When it comes to the greeting, Paul does something very interesting. When he came to the prayer part, he does not just tell them he is praying for them; he includes a fervent prayer. We should never skip the salutation to any of Paul's letters.

Paul literally invented the Christian epistle. He built upon the Hellenistic letter, but there is another factor. The Pauline epistles are not private epistles, but they were circular letters. The epistle would be read in the church and then forwarded to another church after it had been carefully copied. The copy would be preserved and read over and over before the congregation. The style took this into consideration. Other Christian letters followed this style, but Paul was the first to employ it.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE**

Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote Philippians. The epistle is a beautiful expression of gratitude for the love and the gifts of the Philippian saints. He was a prisoner, possibly facing death, but there is a note of joy running through everything Paul says as he writes the Philippians about the difficulties and triumphs in Rome and the hope he has to be released and to see them again.

The great missionary apostle rises to full stature in the great Christological passages in chapters two and three. If you love Jesus Christ, you will love the Epistle to the Philippians. In addition, these chapters prepared the church for the controversy with the Gnostics over the Person of Christ (see Colossians and Ephesians for further study). They also help equip the modern believer for spiritual warfare in the battle against the so-called Christian cults - cults which claim to be Christian but deny or distort, either the deity or the humanity of Jesus Christ.

# CHAPTER ONE

**1:1 - PAUL.** This is Saul of Tarsus; Paul is his Roman name. He does not mention his apostleship (also omitted in First and Second Thessalonians and Philemon). The Greek letter of that day began with the name of the author. Paul follows the usual letter writing style but adds (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) a special Christian flair. Paul was well known by the initial recipients of this little epistle, but the modern reader will profit from a brief review of some facts about this most phenomenal individual.

Paul, who was, without question, the most outstanding missionary and writer of the early church, was also one of the true spiritual giants of the early church. No less than thirteen Epistles in the New Testament bear his name and a major portion of the Book of Acts chronicles his conversion, call, missionary journeys, and trials. This in no way minimizes the great roles played by Peter, John, and others, but it does underscore the importance of the life, preaching, teaching, and writing of this great saint.

Saul was his Jewish name, but since he was born in a Roman city to Roman citizens, he was given the Roman name Paul (Paulos) at birth. “Normally, a citizen would have three names similar to our first, middle, and last names. The New Testament records only the name Paul which would have been the middle or last name, since the first name was usually indicated only by the initial.”<sup>i</sup>

Tarsus, a Roman city with Roman officials, was the place of Paul's birth (Acts 22:3). He was a Roman citizen who grew up in a Jewish home, which meant that he was well trained in the Jewish Scriptures and tradition (Acts 26:4-8; Phil. 3:5-6). This training would have begun in the home where he was taught the Scripture and where he observed the Jewish holy days.

At an early age he entered the synagogue day school. Here he learned to read and write by copying select passages of Scripture. He learned the ancient Hebrew language from Old Testament texts. At home his parents probably spoke the current dialect--Aramaic. As Paul related to the larger community, he learned the Greek language. Every Jewish boy also learned a trade. Paul learned the art of tent making which he later used as a means of sustenance (Acts 18:3).<sup>ii</sup>

In time, Paul went to Jerusalem to study under the famous rabbi, Gamaliel, the greatest teacher of his day (Acts 22:3). He may have been anywhere from 13 to 18 years of age when he went to Jerusalem. There is much we do not know about his life during that time, but what we do know is that Paul surpassed his peers in zeal for Jewish traditions (teachings, Law, Prophecy). See Galatians 1:14. We also know that he was a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5). This zeal moved him to the forefront in the persecution of those Jews who accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. As a matter of fact, Paul is introduced to us in the Book of Acts as consenting to the stoning of Stephen. Stephen delivered a powerful message that day which seemed to agitate young Saul of Tarsus and

motivate him to become a leader in the persecution of believers (Acts 8:1-3, 9:1-2; 26:9-11; Phil. 3:6; Gal. 1:13).

The account of Paul's conversion on the Road to Damascus (A.D. 35 or 36) is given in Acts 9:3-19; 22:6-21; 26:13-23. He was on the way to Damascus to arrest Jewish people who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

This was legally possible since city governments were known to permit the Jewish sector of the city a reasonable degree of self-government. The journey would take at least a week using donkeys or mules to ride and carry provisions...

As Paul neared Damascus, a startling light forced him to the ground. The voice asked: "Why persecutest thou me," and identified the speaker as Jesus--the very one whom Stephen had seen at the right hand of God when Paul witnessed Stephen's stoning. Paul was struck blind and was led into the city. Ananias met Paul and told him that he had been chosen by God as a messenger for the Gentiles (9:17). After Paul received his sight, like other believers before him, he was baptized.<sup>iii</sup>

Not only was Paul converted on the road to Damascus, he was also called to carry the Gospel to be a missionary to the Gentile world (9:15; 22:21). Both his salvation and call are mentioned in his letters.

He wrote that Jesus had appeared to him (1 Cor. 15:8-10; 9:1); the gospel Paul preached had come by revelation (Gal. 1:12); he had been called by God (Gal. 1:1; Eph. 3:2-12). His conversion brought a complete change in the inner controlling power of his life. It was like dying and receiving a new life (Gal. 2:20) or being created anew (2 Cor. 5:17-20). This experience of radical change and call to the Gentiles provided the motivation to travel throughout the Roman world.<sup>iv</sup>

The Apostle Paul was led by the Holy Spirit to make three great missionary journeys into various countries which were a part of the vast Roman Empire in order to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. He followed the major Roman roads to the major population centers. He began his witness in each new place by going to the local Jewish synagogue, if there was one (there obviously was not one in Philippi), and when he was turned away by the Jews he turned to the Gentiles. The Roman Empire had prepared the greatest highways in the history of the world, but Satan filled Paul's road with every kind of stumbling block one can imagine. The results were almost as amazing as the Gospel he preached.

Following the third missionary journey, Paul was imprisoned for two years in Caesarea and eventually transferred to Rome (A.D. 60-62) as a prisoner of the emperor. From here he wrote this

Philippian epistle. It is believed by many that Paul was released from prison before Nero's persecution of A. D. 64, whereupon he traveled to Spain, fulfilling the call about which he wrote to the church at Rome (Romans 15:24-28). According to this tradition, after some period of time he returned to Rome where he was arrested later and beheaded in A.D. 68.

**TIMOTHY.** Timothy is mentioned, not because he was involved in the writing of the epistle, but because (1) he was with Paul in Rome and (2) he had been with Paul at Philippi. He was with Paul when the Philippian church was founded. Paul hoped to send Timothy to Philippi again, and Timothy was ready to go. Timothy was a major player in the ministry of Paul, a vital part of the last two missionary journeys of Paul, and a trusted friend during his prison ministry. Since he was so important to Paul and his ministry to the church at Philippi, it will help to review some of the things the Bible reveals about one of the major characters in the New Testament.

The name Timothy means "honoring God." When he was a child in Lystra, his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois taught him the Scriptures (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). Timothy was converted on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 14:6-23), and it would seem that Paul was instrumental in introducing him Christ, since he referred to him as his child in the faith (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2). When Paul and Silas visited Lystra on his second missionary journey, Timothy was a disciple and had the respect of fellow believers (Acts 16:1-2). Paul invited young Timothy to become a part of the missionary team. But while Timothy's mother was Jewish, his father was a Greek, and Timothy had not been circumcised. Since this would be a major obstacle in their efforts to reach Jews, Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3).

Timothy not only accompanied Paul but also was sent on many crucial missions by Paul (Acts 17:14-15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4; Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 3:2,6). For example, when Paul was unable to go to Corinth, he sent Timothy to represent Paul and his teachings (1 Cor. 4:17). Later when Paul was in prison, he sent Timothy to Philippi (Phil. 2:19). Paul felt that no one had any more compassion and commitment than Timothy (Phil. 2:20-22).<sup>v</sup>

We understand why Paul considered Timothy his son in the ministry when we review their relationship. He was so closely associated with the great missionary to the Gentiles that in six of Paul's letters Timothy's name would be listed with his as the author (2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Philemon 1).

In addition, Paul wrote two letters to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2). As Paul's ministry neared the end, he challenged Timothy to remain true to his calling (1 Tim. 1:18). As Paul faced death, he asked Timothy to come to be with him (2 Tim. 4:9). At some point in his life, Timothy was imprisoned; but he was released (Heb. 13:23). See Paul; 1 Timothy; 2 Timothy.<sup>vi</sup>

**BONDSERVANTS.** Paul does not use the word "apostles" here, possibly because Timothy was

not an apostle. Paul was an apostle and usually identified himself as one. He was appointed by Jesus Himself. His credentials were of the highest order. But his apostleship was never in question in Philippi, as it was in other places (the Galatian churches) where he was under constant attack by the Judaizers. Also, Paul may have been too sensitive to draw a distinction between himself and his young son in the ministry. So, he simply writes, "Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ," rather than making a distinction, such as, "Paul, an apostle, and Timothy, a bondservant." The apostle may well have used the term "slave" to show how he saw himself in relationship to the risen Lord. Far from being arrogant and egotistical as some have claimed, he is genuinely humble in the presence of His Lord. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul identified himself as one untimely born.

**TO ALL THE SAINTS.** "Saints" (*hagios*) is not used of professing Christians who had reached perfection, nor one who had experienced some supernatural blessing. The term is not reserved for one who has been canonized by one church or another. A saint was a believer - a child of God. "All" believers were - and are - saints in the New Testament sense of the word. There were strong saints, weak saints, and average saints in the church, then as now. The word means holy, set apart, different from other things (people in this case). A saint is a Christian, and a Christian is a saint in New Testament terminology.

**IN CHRIST JESUS.** He is the center of all relationships for Paul, and should be for us today. Those who are "in Christ Jesus" are saints. "In Christ Jesus" - a favorite expression in the Pauline epistles - occurs 48 times; "in Christ," 34 times; and "in the Lord," 50 times. In using this term, Paul also shows us that the saints have a dual citizenship. Those saints were "in Philippi," and "in Christ Jesus." They had two addresses.

**BISHOPS.** The bishop here is singled out from "all the saints" (See Acts 20:17, 28). The word is from *episcopos*, meaning to look upon, or after, to inspect, an overseer or superintendent. In the second century *episcopos* came to mean bishops and denoted one superior to elders, but this was not so in the New Testament. In the New Testament there are two church officers mentioned, bishops or elders and deacons. The plural was used because while there might be only one church in a city, there might be several elders or bishops. In Titus 1:5, 7, the terms "elders" and "bishops" are used interchangeably. Ryrie notes that:

The elder, the principal official in a local church, was called by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28), recognized by other elders (4:14), and qualified according to the standards listed in this passage. His duties included ruling (5:17), pastoring or shepherding the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2), guarding the truth (Titus 1:9), and general oversight of the work, including finances (Acts 11:30).<sup>vii</sup>

**DEACONS.** The origin of the office is probably seen in Acts 6:1-6. From "*diakonos*" meaning servant. In the beginning, deacons assisted the elders, and their qualifications were practically the same. The term is applied to preachers in 1 Corinthians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 3:6. Church offices intended by the words translated bishops and deacons are not clearly identified. Some prefer "church leaders" and "helpers." The offices will become more clearly defined in the generations

following Paul's ministry to the Philippian church. But, in the New Testament the word simply means "minister" or "servant."

The office had its beginnings in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-6). However, the word deacon is used in an unofficial sense throughout the NT of anyone who serves (cf. Eph. 6:21), as well as in an official sense, designating those who occupy the office of deacon (cf. Phil. 1:1). not double-tongued. Not hypocritical or spreading differing stories among the congregation.<sup>viii</sup>

A true servant attitude toward the Lord's work in the local church would revolutionize the ministry of the church in the community. It would also have a dynamic impact on the way the church is viewed by the community. If pastors, deacons, teachers and officers, and committee members would develop a servant attitude toward their work in the local church it would stimulate a genuine revival in the local church and greatly enhance the outreach ministry of the church. Lost people would be more easily led to the Lord if they saw this attitude manifested by God's people, not only at church, but also in the community.

There are certain individuals in the community who do not hesitate to point to hypocrites in the church as their reason for not accepting Christ as their Savior, and for not going to church. I have an answer for them: They shop with hypocrites, eat in the same restaurants with hypocrites, go to schools, hospitals, and recreational facilities with hypocrites. But we should face the issue: unchurched people in a community are more aware of what goes on at the church than many members think. They know the attitude of pastors, deacons, and choir members, and it is very hard for them to separate the message of Jesus Christ from the local messenger of Christ. Pastors and deacons must be especially careful, and when God calls the minister or the church is led to ordain a deacon, there are certain "rights" he must be prepared to give up, lest his attitude or behavior reflects on the church. When someone offends us, we have the same temptation to answer in kind as any other person, but we must first consider how that will reflect on the Lord and His church. High self-esteem may lead one to strike back; high Christ-esteem will lead him to consider the effect it will have on his testimony and his church. That may often mean that you will suffer some abuse - and when it does we must be sure that we do not make a show of suffering in silence.

**1:2 - GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE.** As we have seen, Paul begins Philippians with the typical style for a Greco-Roman letter of the day, including the author, and the recipients, and a greeting. But Paul's greeting is not the standard greeting, either for the Jewish readers or the Greek readers. It is a combination of the Greek and Jewish greeting which brings together concepts precious to the early church. The normal Greek greeting (*chairein*) carries the basic idea of joy, pleasure, beauty. Grace is from the Greek word *charis*, which in NT means God's unmerited favor and love.

In a Greek letter, it could simply mean "greetings" (James 1:1). As used in the New Testament, it refers to the unmerited favor of God. It is easier to define than to believe. To believe in grace we have to

give up our arrogance, and ideas about our own worth (self esteem).  
We can never accept something as ours because of our own merit.  
We can never claim God's blessings as our right or as our property by  
our own merit.<sup>ix</sup>

Peace (*eirene*, Gk.; *shalom* in Heb.) is the usual Hebrew greeting. The word carries the idea of joining, or weaving together. "Peace in the Jewish sense is the symphony of life made meaningful through a right relationship with God. The theological order is significant as well; it is only through the grace made available by the shed blood of the spotless Lamb of God that peace will come".<sup>x</sup> Peace is positive and not negative. It connotes far more than the absence of strife and hostility - it expresses the desire for harmony with God and with other people.

Here, peace has to do with a new relationship and points to blessings we receive because of grace. There is a problem, however. Today we usually understand peace to mean an inner peace of mind, but Paul was not a post-Freudian psychologist. God seeks to save neurotics. There are sincere Christians who are deeply troubled. Believers are often put to the test. How, then, does grace bring us peace? When one accepts Christ, the warfare between himself and God is over. So, Paul prays for them to realize what they already have (it was not dependent upon his prayer). From the point of one's new birth in Christ the Lord seeks to make the peace that passes all understanding a reality in every aspect of the life of His children.

That other Christian writers would be influenced by Paul's new letter writing style is seen in the writing of the early Church Fathers. Polycarp, who was probably an infant at the time of Paul's martyrdom, would write to this same church a half-century later. He began his letter, "Polycarp, and the presbyters with him, to the Church of God sojourning at Philippi: Mercy to you, and peace from God Almighty, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, be multiplied."<sup>xi</sup>

Paul prays for both grace and peace. They can only come in that order. Grace is the source of peace - peace is always dependent upon grace. If God withdraws his grace, there will be no peace and we would be lost. Prayer for grace recognizes a continuous need. The grace of God always comes as His free and unmerited gift; it is never our private possession - not an inalienable right. "That Gentiles have finally been made partakers in this marvelous mystery of God is the prime cause of the keynote of joy sounded throughout the epistle".<sup>xii</sup>

Millions are seeking peace today, but they will never find it anywhere except in the Prince of Peace. Perhaps you have seen the bumper sticker, or read the words on a church sign: NO JESUS, NO PEACE, KNOW JESUS, KNOW PEACE. Let me try to adapt that to this Scripture - there is

No joy without peace,  
No peace without grace,  
No grace without Jesus.

**1:3 - I THANK GOD.** There were many believers of whom Paul could say, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” (NKJV), but probably no church awakened his sense of thanksgiving more than the church at Philippi. They had worshiped with him when he was there, and after he left they not only prayed for him; they made a practice of putting feet to their prayers. They had sent love offerings to help further the cause of Christ through his ministry, and they had sent one of their own to minister to him while he was in prison in Rome. Just knowing they loved him was enough to elicit such expression of joy and gratitude.

**UPON.** This points to the basis for thanksgiving. Upon remembrance of God’s blessings we offer thanksgiving. Remembrance and gratitude go hand in hand. As I look back on my ministry, I always remember some churches and some individuals with a special sense of gratitude. I thank God for the privilege He has given me to worship with them and to preach to them.

**1:4 - WITH JOY.** The NAS has, “always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all.” Joy keynotes the Epistle to the Philippians. Paul was a prisoner, but no prison could rob him of the joy he found in Christ. Those who knew about his imprisonment in Philippi when he and Silas sang praises at midnight could believe that his joy was genuine (Acts 16). Paul was in prison and his life was in jeopardy, but his joy was not diminished. He rejoices, and he wants the Philippians to rejoice with him. This is Christian joy, and it is just as available to the modern believer as it was to those spiritual giants of the First Century. This is a joy that cannot be shaken by circumstances of life.

One other thing should be noted here. What is Paul doing (other than writing the epistle)? He is praying for them. Even though he was in prison, he was given the privilege of receiving visitors and ministering to them. He was also given the privilege of corresponding with the churches. But even if he had been denied those privileges, there is one thing Rome could not have denied him - the joy of intercessory prayer. I have a confession. Sometimes intercessory prayer may become more a matter of obligation than a joy. I do it because I know I should; I feel obligated to God and I feel that I must stop and pray for certain individuals because I promised to do so. It seems at times that I am too busy doing the Lord’s work to take the time to intercede for others. As a matter of fact, I am under conviction right now that I need to stop writing and pray for several people, but I have been trying to find a good stopping place for two hours. The phone has been ringing and I have fallen behind. Sound familiar?

However, there are times when intercessory prayer has been a genuine joy. I can think of no greater joy than I experienced while lying in CCU, praying for our church, for my family, and for friends. I prayed for the Chapmans, who had visited our church before my heart attack. I asked the Lord to reveal His will to them in selecting a church. It was not too long after bypass surgery before I was able to attend services. The first Sunday that I felt like standing in the foyer after a services, the Chapman family waited to visit with me. They told me how they had been looking forward to my return to the pulpit. Filled with appreciation, I said, “I prayed for you while I was in intensive care. I prayed that you would still be here when I got back!” Shortly after that they moved to our community, and the first Sunday they came into our church by letter.

**ILLUSTRATION: INTERCESSORY PRAYER.**

F. B. Meyer was pastor of Christ's Church in London at the same time that G. Campbell Morgan was pastor of Westminster Chapel and Charles H. Spurgeon was pastor of the Metropolitan Chapel. Both Morgan and Spurgeon often had much larger audiences than did Meyer. Troubled by envy, Meyer confessed that not until he began praying for his colleagues did he have peace of heart. "When I prayed for their success," said Meyer, "the result was that God filled their churches so full that the overflow filled mine, and it has been full since."<sup>xiii</sup>

**1:5 - FOR YOUR FELLOWSHIP.** The word for fellowship carries the idea of partnership, or participation with others. The NAS translates it: "in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now." It may be used in reference to a contribution, as in II Cor. 8:4; 9:13; Acts 2:42. The particular kind of "fellowship" or "partnership" intended here is the contribution made by the Philippians for the spread of the Gospel. Fellowship in the Gospel may be exercised in various ways: by prayers, by participation in public testimonies, by furnishing the means to enable the laborer to go forth to carry on the work. Fellowship is exercised when believers bring their tithes to the Lord's house with knowledge that a percentage of it will be used for the spread of the Gospel and related ministries.

Fellowship is a great Pauline word. It does not mean eating cookies, drinking coffee, and talking about things that are pleasant and safe. Some seem to think there is a danger that we will become angry with each another if we talk about things that are really important, and risk breaking fellowship. This idea of fellowship is superficial.

We must remember that what Paul has in mind when he uses the word fellowship is a partnership in the Gospel. It refers to their participation in the work. As we grow in the Lord's work, we recognize more and more the importance of dependability, responsibility, and consistency. A teamster was asked, "What do you understand by fellowship?" He replied, "For each one to pull his own trace and keep it tight." Paul was grateful for their participation in his ministry. This was Paul's favorite church. He loved them and does not hesitate to show his appreciation.

**ILLUSTRATION: FELLOWSHIP.** G. Campbell Morgan, in his book *How to Live*, told about a conversation he had after he finished preaching one evening.

A man approached Morgan to tell him he had invited a fellow employee, one with whom he had worked for 5 years, to attend the service. He then said, "My suggestion came as quite a surprise to my friend. He responded to my invitation by saying, 'Are you a Christian?' And when I answered, 'Yes, I am,' he replied, 'Well, I am too!' Here we had worked beside each other for years, and we never knew that we were both believers in Christ. Wasn't that funny?" To the man's surprise, Morgan retorted, "Funny? No, it isn't funny at all!

You both need to be born again."<sup>xiv</sup>

Without knowing the men, I cannot comment on whether or not he was right in his assessment of their spiritual condition, but I suspect that he might have been right. To Morgan, it was inconceivable that these two men could be saved and work side-by-side for 5 years and neither be aware of the fact that they were brothers in Christ.

**IN THE GOSPEL.** The advancement of the Gospel is the purpose of the fellowship, or partnership in the Gospel. The Christian must keep this in mind at all times. The church is not a stage upon which we perform. Everything we do must be for the furtherance of the Gospel, not for our own personal advantage. A manager of a local business told his pastor that when he was transferred to that town his company urged him to join the biggest church in town because it would be good for business. This man had been disturbed by the advice and he had refused to choose a church for business reasons.

We should not overlook the fact that Paul is expressing his gratitude here for their having entered a partnership with him from the very beginning by sending him financial aid to help in his ministry (see 4:15-16; Acts 16:11-40). Foreign missionaries frequently thank people for their financial support, but I do not recall any missionary who did not stress, "What we need most is your prayers." Prayer and our tithes and offerings are two of the ways we can participate in the ministry and evangelism of our church today.

**1:6 - BEING CONFIDENT.** This is from the word meaning to persuade. Paul was absolutely confident that the One who had begun a good work in them would never stop until He had perfected that which He Himself had begun: "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 Jesus."

**WILL PERFECT IT.** "Will fully finish it" is the idea. God began it and God will consummate it (II Cor. 8:6; Gal. 3:3). This in no way disregards the emphasis on fellowship, or partnership (vs. 5). Both Justification and Sanctification are the work of God's wondrous grace. Justification is not forced upon any individual and Sanctification does not occur without the cooperation of the believer. Progress in missions and evangelism requires our participation - our partnership in the Gospel. I have always enjoyed the story of the pastor who was invited to a farmer's home for Sunday dinner. The two men sat on the front porch and visited while they were waiting for dinner. The pastor surveyed a large garden off to the side of the house. It was about the most beautiful garden he had ever seen and one of the largest. He was not aware of the fact, but it was a "new ground" (recently cleared). The previous year it was grown up in weeds and bushes. The pastor said, "Brother Jones, you and the Lord certainly have a beautiful garden." To which the farmer replied, "You should have seen it last year when the Lord had it by himself!"

The word Paul uses for "to begin" (*enarchesthai*), and the word he uses for "to complete" (*epiteleia*), are both technical terms for the beginning and the ending of a sacrifice (2: 19f). The word Paul used here denotes the completing of the whole ritual of sacrifice - carrying out the sacrifice perfectly in every detail. Two things are seen:

1. God had just begun His work in them. He has just begun His work in you. Spiritual arrogance is without any basis. Paul had not arrived, but he believed he would reach maturity (perfection) some day. He was humble, not arrogant. Too many seem to think the problem with the church is that others are not on their spiritual level. They are "they" people, when perhaps we should be saying, "It's not my brother . . . It's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer."
2. Paul believed Christians are destined to reach maturity. In the Day of Jesus Christ, He will finish the work He has begun.

**UNTIL THE DAY OF JESUS CHRIST.** He is thinking of the Second Coming here, as in verse 10 (see also, 1 Thes. 5:1-24 ; 2 Thes. 1:10; 2:2; 1 Cor. 1:18; 3:13; 2 Cor. 1:14; Rom. 13:12). Paul never tried to set the date for the return of the Lord, but he is cheered and assured by that blessed hope. On that day Christ will come as a king. Upon the coming of a king, subjects presented gifts. The gift Jesus desires is our life; pure, holy, sanctified.

There is another great doctrinal lesson in this verse: Justification, Sanctification, and Glorification are all the results of His working in us. These three central doctrines are strongly implied in this one verse: "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you (Justification) will perfect it (Sanctification) until the day of Christ Jesus (Glorification). Also implied is another essential doctrine - Security of Believers. "Paul's confidence concerning the Philippians' ability to remain in a state of salvation until that day is not based on his estimate of them (though that estimate is obviously high also), but on the power of God to perform in them a good work unto completion. This is the basis of all confidence in the continuing nature of salvation."<sup>xv</sup>

**1:7 - BECAUSE I HAVE YOU IN MY HEART.** Some prefer "you have me in your heart." Others, like Lightfoot, say there is no way to decide which is the idea meant except to say that love begets love. "The pastor who holds the people in his heart will find them holding him in their hearts."<sup>xvi</sup> The NAS renders it: "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" (italics added for emphasis).

"It is only right" means that it is only natural (normal) that he would love those who loved him and expressed their love for him at every opportunity and in every possible way. I can understand what he means, because I am indebted to those who love me and lift me up in their prayers. On May 18, 1997, I had the distinct privilege of delivering the message for homecoming services at West Side Baptist Church, Bastrop, Louisiana. I had served as pastor of the church for thirteen years, my second church after graduating from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The pastor and members had prayed for me when I had surgery and during my recuperation and rehabilitation in 1996. Every call and every card had brought joy to my heart, but the expression of love the church showed for my wife, Becky, my sons, John and Mark, and me at the homecoming service brought a sense of joy that I cannot begin to articulate (and the pastor, Jimmy Yokum, encouraged it!). It is only right (natural) that I would love these people with whom I worshiped and

served so many years ago.

This applies to individuals as well as to churches. Former members of West Side Baptist Church, Mack and Floy Powell, who now live in Monroe, Louisiana, were among those attending the homecoming services in. Mack was on the Pastor Search Committee that visited me in 1965 and invited me to preach a “trial sermon.” The church called me as pastor and several years later I led in the service when Mack was ordained as a deacon. We hunted and fished together, our children grew up together, and our families visited often. We moved to another church in 1978, and while we never lost touch with them, we did not see them often.

When I suffered my heart attack, my brother James called to tell them. Time after time when my family visited me in intensive care, they said, “Mack is in the waiting room.” Early on the morning of my surgery, Mack came into my room with my family and walked down to surgery with us (at least, they tell me that - they also tell me I was talking with them, but I do not remember that). He waited with them throughout the day (along with many other friends and family members). It is only natural that I would feel the way I do about Mack and all the others who expressed their concern for me and supported my family.

Dr. Bill Smith, a retired university professor and longtime friend from my health club, learned of my heart attack from David Swanson, who was one of the managers at the time. Bill called regularly to check on me, and when I was able to receive calls we visited by phone. Later he invited me to a Tuesday noon meeting of the Patrick Henry Society, which meets in his church, Auburn Presbyterian Church, Monroe, Louisiana. I picked up my son John at his office, and drove to the church, where we had the distinct pleasure of visiting with Dr. Nigel Lee, the guest speaker, before lunch. Before long, others, including Bill, came into the room. Immediately, Bill began introducing John and me to members. To one of the first people we met he said, “This is Johnny Sanders - you remember, he is the one we prayed for all last Fall.” The other man assured me that they had, indeed, prayed for me for many weeks. Is it any wonder that I feel the way I do about God’s gracious people and that wonderful church?

During the time I was hospitalized, before and after the surgery, and during my recuperation at home, David Swanson called or asked my son about me. I wish I knew how many times someone took a call and then said, “That was David from the health club. He was just checking on you and wants you to know he is praying for you.” My son John told me that as soon as some of the other staff members saw him they asked how I was getting along. I can get my cardiovascular exercise on equipment at home, but nothing can replace what it means to see David, Irma (I pray for her grandson), and the other staff members when I go to the gym. It is only natural that I feel the way I do toward all those club members who encouraged me and continue to do so.

Members of Providence Baptist Church, Point, Louisiana, (between Farmerville and West Monroe) prayed for me and offered support for my family. They did all the practical things they could to help my family and sent word of their prayers and support regularly. As soon as I was able to have visitors many of them came for brief visits and assured me of their prayers. Those who had experienced serious health problems empathized with me. Senior adults, who grew up in a time

when people held their pastor in high esteem, expressed their concern in such a moving way as to leave me speechless - sometimes what I read in their eyes was a lot more expressive than anything they could articulate. It is only natural that I would feel such love for our people.

**IN THE DEFENSE.** This is an old word for apology - but not in the modern sense of apologizing. This is positive, as in the study of apologetics, an orderly and logical presentation of the Gospel. It is used in the same sense as it is used by Peter: "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15, NAS).

**CONFIRMATION.** This points to the evidence presented in support of the plea, or defense. "Defense" and "confirmation" are technical terms associated with the courtroom. The defense is the theory presented by the prisoner to the court. Confirmation is evidence presented in support of that defense. Paul says he is not going to court to establish his innocence. When he went into the courtroom, his plea would be for the Gospel and he would present all the evidence he could in support of it.

**PARTAKERS OF MY GRACE.** Did he consider his suffering a matter of grace? Absolutely! Anything that works out for the building up of the church is a gift, a ministry of grace. Anything in your life God can use to build up the church or help others involves grace. The grace in which they were sharing was his imprisonment at the moment and his ministry in general. "Partakers with me of grace" is a better translation (literally, "my co-sharers in grace"). Since the words used to denote his imprisonment, defense, and confirmation were courtroom terms, Paul is saying is that the Christians at Philippi shared in his witness for Christ in the court of law in Rome.

Grace prompted them to help alleviate the burden of his imprisonment, and grace led them to cooperate with him in defending and propagating the Gospel and to suffer for its sake. The idea of Christian partnership is strongly expressed. Christians are partners (1) in grace, (2) the work of the Gospel, (3) in suffering for the Gospel, and (4) with Christ.

**1:8 - MY WITNESS.** "For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." The same oath is found in Romans 1:9. Paul cannot prove his love for the Philippians in a concrete way, so he calls on God for his witness. This letter, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, would be another witness to his love for them.

**LONG FOR.** His longing was directed toward the Philippians. He longs for them with the very compassion of Christ; his heart throbs with the heart of Christ. There are those with whom you have certain things in common. You enjoy visiting with them and cultivating a relationship with them, but if you are separated from them for a long period of time you may not really miss them or long for them. Your relationship simply has not yet developed to that level. There are others, usually only a very limited number, who are so close that the longer you are separated from them, the more you long for them. Neither circumstances that cause you to be separated from them, nor the length of time that separates you from them, can ever diminish that friendship, especially if that is a relationship in the Lord.

A number of ministers visited with me when I was in the cardiac care unit in the hospital and others called Becky. I still recall their visits, prayers, and words of encouragement with sincere appreciation. When evangelist Bobby Ready learned that I was in the hospital he came to visit my family and they requested that he be given permission to visit me. Bobby opened his heart as he talked with me about how much I meant to him and Lolly, his wife. He said, "Dr. Sanders, You encouraged me so much when I began this ministry - I think of you as my father in the ministry." Because they live in Baton Rouge and maintain a very busy schedule, we do not see the Readys very often - but there are times when we do long to see them.

For thirteen years I served as pastor of West Side Baptist Church, Bastrop, Louisiana. Following that, I served as a pastor of the Forest Baptist Church, Forest, Louisiana for fifteen years. I have many friends there in the north east corner of Louisiana who encouraged and supported my ministry and I still love those people. I have been on the field very few times and only a few have visited us, but I long for them and know they pray for me. When my family visited me in ICU they told me about all the calls, visits, and cards - many of which came from people I had served during my ministry in Bastrop and Forest. Friends in both places called often and then they called others with an update on my circumstances.

On one occasion, Becky insisted that Winford and Sylvia Hammett join her during visiting hours when I was in ICU. Winford was chairman of the Pastor Search Committee at Forest Baptist Church when they visited with me in Bastrop. Later, as we prayerfully sought God's will, I met with the committee in their home. One of the highlights of my ministry came when this close friend prayed with me before my surgery and I realized how much he has grown in the Lord during the years I have known him. Yes, I understand how Paul longed for those precious saints in Philippi.

**AFFECTION.** Literally, it is "in the bowels," and the Authorized Version holds to it: "For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ." At one time the bowels were considered the seat of affection.

**1:9 - MAY ABOUND.** The imprisoned apostle continues his prayer: "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment." He prays that their love might continue to grow as a river that is overflowing its banks, like a perpetual flood of love that could not be contained by its banks. Like the Mississippi River at flood stage, Christian love for one another should abound.

Here we have Paul's supplication, the asking part of the prayer. He prays (9b-10) that they would have fuller knowledge and greater discernment, but first he prays that their love may abound. One needs only to recall their offering - Gentiles giving to Jews - to appreciate how remarkable their love was. God commands us to love one another - He commands it and He expects it. The first two commandments are to love God and to love other people. Love involves some serious decisions for the Christian. Sometimes we must ask what it means to love in this situation or that. Without the power to make decisions we are not going to be able to put love into action. We must pray that love will abound - and it will, but only in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

**1:10 - APPROVE THE THINGS THAT ARE EXCELLENT.** The verb translated “approve” was the word used for testing to see if something is genuine - as in assaying metals. The idea is to test in order to differentiate. For by testing things that differ we approve what is excellent. Power of discrimination is needed. The first step is to distinguish between good and evil (that is not always easy). But Christians must do more than decide between good and evil. We must live on the highest level. The problem with many Christians is not so much that they are doing things commonly considered bad; they are simply not doing what is best. To Paul, mediocrity is a sin.

When I filled out the application for the Doctor of Ministry program with Luther Rice Seminary, one of the questions that required some soul searching was, “Why are you pursuing this degree?” (Or something to that effect). I finally answered (confessed?) that throughout my entire academic career I had been guilty of the sin of mediocrity. Mediocrity really is a sin! I had seldom done my very best in high school or college, yet I was trying to motivate my children to excel. I expected more of them than I had done myself. I had failed myself, but most of all I had failed the Lord. I was disturbed by the mediocrity that had characterized so many things in my life. I wanted one more opportunity to excel, to prove myself, to motivate my sons, and to honor the Lord. He will forgive even the sin of mediocrity if we repent. If you are guilty, you should confess it and seek His forgiveness.

Excellence is the only goal worthy of the Christian. The purpose is stated positively: that we may be pure in the Day of Christ. Negatively speaking, we must leave off some things. We must often decide - not between the good and evil - but between what is good and what is best. Unfortunately, many can only think of the things from which one must abstain. Paul moves quickly to the positive, stressing those things which are excellent. Sincerity and purity are very positive terms, reflecting that which is superior.

**SINCERE AND WITHOUT OFFENCE.** “Sincere” means pure. “Without offence” (blameless) means to avoid stumbling or causing others to stumble. “Blameless” refers to the motive rather than the act. It does not imply moral perfection.

**UNTIL THE DAY OF CHRIST.** Until He returns, His children must seek to “approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless. His return will be a time of judgment; but as the recipients of the epistle have a personal relationship with the Judge Himself, they need not fear eternal separation from God (damnation; hell). Their works, however, will be judged (see 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:9-11); so Paul urges that they approve and practice those things which would show them to be sincere and without offense in that day.<sup>xvii</sup>

**1:11 - THAT YE MAY BE FILLED.** This verse stresses how the believer will want to appear before the Lord who will judge each believer according to his, or her works: “filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (NKJV). “Although salvation is by grace through faith alone (Eph. 2:8, 9), judgment will still be by works, precluding, of course, the loss of salvation (2 Cor. 5:9-11; James 2:14-26). Paul does not want them to lose their

rewards (1 Cor. 3:15).<sup>xviii</sup>

Being “filled” points, not to the Christian's achievement, but to what God does. It points, not to man's effort, but to God's grace - Justification and Sanctification are both by grace, not works. A lot of religious things we do have the result of causing people to brag on us. The Christian things we do cause them to brag on Christ. "Let your light so shine . . .that they . . .may glorify the Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). The really Christian things (love, forgive, etc.) bring people into touch with God. Paul was anxious that believers appear before Christ with positive things in their lives.

**FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.** This denotes the singular, collective idea - fruit of righteousness. It is not clear here whether righteousness is the fruit or the source. In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul lists the “fruit of the Spirit” - “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Surely, these should be considered in any study of the fruit of righteousness. William Barclay, in *The Letter from James*, makes a statement that fits well here with the emphasis on relationships and righteousness:

Right relationships are the soil in which the reward of righteousness can grow. And the only people who can sow these seeds, and who will reap the reward, are those whose life work it has been to produce such right relationships.<sup>xix</sup>

### **ILLUSTRATION: RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

Abraham Lincoln was walking into town one day when he was overtaken by a man in a wagon going in the same direction. Lincoln hailed him and asked, "Will you have the goodness to take my overcoat to town for me?"

"With pleasure," responded the stranger, "but how will you get it again?" "Oh, very easily; I intend to remain in it!"

Mr. Lincoln's humor aside, his idea for a ride roughly parallels what happens when we trust Christ as Savior. We put on Christ and are clothed in His righteousness. Because we are in Him, we are assured of reaching our destination: salvation and eternal life. But apart from Christ we are left, as it were, standing by the side of the road -- and no amount of good works or ritual-keeping can save us.<sup>xx</sup>

In 1:1-11, we find Paul's greeting and his expression of gratitude for all the Philippian Church had done for him, but especially for their love. He shared with them his prayers for the church. In 1:12-30, he will deal with his present circumstances and his view of the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Since this is inspired Scripture, we should interpret this as the view The Lord would have us take concerning the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This passage, 1:12-30, gives us about all we know of this particular imprisonment.

Paul knew he was facing a great ordeal, but he took great pains not to alarm his friends. His all-consuming concern was for the advancement of the gospel. People were beginning to talk about his bonds and his Christ, the church in Rome was becoming more confident, and he intended to follow his course. He existed only to help forward the cause of Christ (v. 21).<sup>xxi</sup>

**1:12 - I WANT YOU TO KNOW.** Why did Paul want them to know the things that had happened to him? He did not want them to misinterpret his imprisonment. Pop theology promises health, wealth, success, that Jesus will make you healthy, wealthy, and wise. The health/wealth theology, so popular among some of the television ministries, has little basis in reality. And if there is reality anywhere, it is in the New Testament. But that is not what Jesus promised. He promised a cross! Paul was in prison, but his imprisonment was not a defeat for the Gospel.

This was not a new subject. Job, perhaps the earliest book in the Bible to be written, deals with the issue of suffering and how believers may look upon their God during times of difficulty, whether it is grief, financial loss, health problems, rejection by friends, or bad theology. What we learn from Job is not so much how much a man can bear, as it is whether the person will be faithful to God during those trying times.

Paul wanted them to know that God had not abandoned him, nor had He failed him. His suffering, and his imprisonment, though designed for a totally different purpose, would serve to advance the Kingdom of God. When the officials put Paul in prison, they simply gave him time for the Holy Spirit to inspire him to write the prison epistles, which served to further the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Centuries later, authorities would find it a lot easier to lock up John Bunyan than to shut up John Bunyan.

**MY CIRCUMSTANCES.** What were his circumstances? He was a prisoner in Rome. He had been arrested (actually he was rescued from a mob) in Jerusalem, taken to Caesarea where he was a prisoner for two years, facing numerous hearings and trials. He had appealed to Rome and was put on a ship during the off-season, survived a ship wreck, snake bite, and many other trials before arriving in Rome, where he was, once again, thrown into prison. If circumstances could get a person down, Paul had been through enough to have made him despondent. Modern psychologists would say he would have been justified if he had become angry with God. How did the missionary himself view his circumstances? He said they have “turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.”

**THE GREATER PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL.** The NKJV translates it, “But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.” The word for “greater progress” in the original means “to cut down in advance.” It is the verb used for cutting away the trees and undergrowth which would hinder the progress of an advancing army. The emphasis is the clearing away of obstacles which would hinder an advance. Paul’s imprisonment, instead of shutting the door, opened the door to new spheres of work. American Christians have suffered very little compared to those in Communist lands in the past

century. Persecution of Christians is increasing rapidly in some Islamic countries at present. Does that mean that American Christians are more righteous than their counterparts in communist or Islamic countries? As most of us know, the opposite might be the case.

Christians in America would be wise to pay careful attention to the Scripture. We do not know what the future holds, but as we have moved deeper and deeper into the post-Christian era in this country, we have seen a transition from the time when the world seemed to ignore the church, to the time when it seemed only to tolerate it, to the time when it openly opposes it. Opponents began winning key victories in the courts in 1962 and 1963 (prayer and Bible reading were removed from schools), and in succeeding years as people in positions of power and influence sought to restrict religion to the places where it belongs, namely the home and church (synagogue, mosque). The ACLU and other groups are watching Christianity like a hawk for any sign of the violation of the unconstitutional “wall of separation” between church and state. Opposition is increasing as foes of the Gospel of Jesus Christ try to tie our hands so that we cannot spread the Good News of Salvation in and through Jesus Christ and through Him alone. This opposition has reached the point that it can be called persecution in some cases, and there is every reason to believe it is going to get worse if there is not a fresh Great Awakening in America.

A friend and fellow pastor, Wayne Duncan, e-mailed me some disturbing facts he heard at a church growth seminar in Shreveport, Louisiana. North America is the only continent in the world where the church is in decline! The largest Buddhist temple in the world is in Boulder, Colorado, the largest Moslem Mosque is in New York, and the largest Christian church is in South Korea. Rev. Duncan concluded, “We are in more trouble in America than most Christians know.”

It is a disturbing thought, but if Christians in America refuse to humble themselves and get on their knees before their Creator and Redeemer during a time of prosperity, God may well permit a time of persecution to see if that will bring revival to our land. Sadly, many Christians in America are so obsessed with their obsessions, and so possessed by their possessions, that they give little thought to the God Who created them. They are more interested in recreation and entertainment than God. Worship is not very high on their list of priorities. They have never seen nor experienced revival, they do not desire it, and they do not seek it. The fact that more great revivals have been spawned by trials and tribulations than by peace and prosperity is no reflection on the power of God or the love of God. If persecution comes in your life, you must understand how God can turn it into an occasion for the furtherance of the Gospel.

**1:13 - THROUGHOUT... THE PRAETORIAN GUARD.** Paul writes, “My imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else...” The praetorian guard (“palace guard” in NKJV) referred originally to 10,000 carefully chosen soldiers (RSB notes say 9,000) concentrated in Rome by Tiberius. They had double pay and special privileges, and in time became so powerful that the emperors had to court their favor. As a prisoner, Paul had access to many of these soldiers as well as palace officials.

Paul's bonds had removed the barriers and given him access to the "flower of the Roman army".<sup>xxii</sup> His bonds had inspired courage on the part of the brethren at Philippi. Prison, far from

silencing Paul, opened the door to new opportunities for the spread of the Gospel. As different soldiers served their shifts guarding Paul, they would hear the gospel. But it did not stop there - "everyone else" connected with the palace heard the Gospel. To be around Paul was to hear the Gospel. "Paul thus turns a distressing, abrasive, personal humiliation into a means of glorifying Christ and furthering His kingdom."<sup>xxiii</sup> How could his imprisonment advance the kingdom?

1. People were becoming aware of the fact that Paul was in prison, not for a crime, but for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This was known throughout the Praetorian Guard.

2. Some preachers were proclaiming the Gospel with new courage. This is always the case. There are some pastors who seem to be in competition with others. Membership, budget, and staff become a source of pride. Jealousy and envy are often in evidence. In Paul's day, people were being saved, and today people are being saved in spite of weak theology and wrong motives among preachers. But an example like Paul's faithfulness during persecution can have a dramatic effect upon other ministers and open the door to fresh opportunities. Preachers are motivated to move out with renewed faith and courage. Lay-persons will follow that kind of leadership.

**1:14 - BECAUSE OF MY IMPRISONMENT.** Paul speaks of another reason for joy. Some who had held back were now becoming bold, inspired by his example. Knowledge of Paul's courageous witness for Christ led others to become more bold in proclaiming the Gospel - even though some may not have proclaimed it with the highest motives.

**1:15 - OF ENVY AND STRIFE.** Paul was not naive - he says, "some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will." Envy and strife are the lowest of motives for preaching Christ. "Envy" is often the source of strife. "Strife" points more to rivalry than schism. The reference is to the Judaizers, who took delight in harassing him. Jealousy is usually against one's own class or profession (preachers jealous of preachers, doctors jealous of doctors, teachers jealous of teachers, athletes jealous of other athletes in their class). We usually envy those whom we consider more advantaged (more money, more talent, or a higher position).

Whatever the motive, when the Gospel was proclaimed, people were being saved, and every soul is precious. During the eighties, there was a well-publicized clash between a well-known television evangelist from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and a New Orleans-based evangelist. Charges and counter charges were made. The charges were shameful and the results very unfortunate for those involved. Both men were obviously in the wrong in one way or another, yet every soul won to the Lord through either ministry is precious to the Lord.

**OF GOOD WILL.** Some of those who were filled with a new boldness in preaching the Gospel may have been motivated by envy or strife, but many others were motivated by goodwill toward Paul. There were those who loved Paul and when they saw him in prison, or learned of his imprisonment, they redoubled their efforts to preach the Gospel.

**1:16 - OUT OF LOVE.** Paul says that “the latter,” those who preach the Gospel out “of good will” (vs. 15), do so out of love for the apostle, “knowing,” he says, “that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.” Those who loved him and took the time to get to know him understood that he was called by God unto this ministry and everything he did was for the defense of (proclamation of) the Gospel. This group preached the Gospel out of love for Jesus Christ, and they were inspired by their love for their missionary friend. Obviously, Paul's motives were not mixed. He knew nothing of the petty jealousy that characterized many believers of his day or ours. All that mattered to him was that Christ was preached. He was both called and committed. One can be called without being committed, but it is difficult for one to be totally committed without a sense of a divine call.

When I was a student at Mississippi College, I served as student pastor of the Dockery Baptist Church, between Cleveland and Ruleville, Mississippi. I began each Sunday for one year by preaching at one of the many camps at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman, only a few miles away. The Chaplain, the late Roscoe Hicks, and I often talked before I went to one of the camps. On one occasion, he vented his frustration toward the pastor where he had preached in revival services the week before. He said the pastor did not seem to recognize the opportunity they had for revival and had no sense of urgency for revival. He said, “He had a gun collection, and all he talked about all week was guns. He showed me his new guns and talked with everybody we visited about his guns.” I felt a little guilty because I had always wanted to begin a collection of guns as soon I finished school. In those days I felt that the chaplain was being a little narrow, but now I realize that he was expressing his love for the Gospel and his sense of urgency in proclaiming it to lost people.

**1:17 - SELFISH AMBITION.** Paul says that “the former (those who preach out of envy and strife) proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.” The Greek word for ambition is *eritheia*, from *eritheu* (to work for hire); rivalry, hence ambition, with the idea of selfishness or selfish ambition. It denotes factions, or partisanship (with self-ambition). This is a serious problem today, and it has been throughout the ages. Liberals fight against conservatives and conservatives fight against liberals. Moderates call conservatives "fundamentalists" to make them appear more radical than they really think they are. Conservatives label moderates "liberal" to make them seem farther to the left than they really are. This does not discount the fact that there are liberals and fundamentalists - it simply acknowledges the fact that labels are often used to deliberately misrepresent someone else or to exaggerate his position.

A well-known speaker mentioned the controversy between conservative and moderates in a major denomination. He said, "I don't believe the issue is theological at all. You know what I think it is? I think it is political." Another person responded, "Yes. And he has been involved in the politics on the other side for years!" One wonders how God can use any of us. How can He bless the work of a church, or denomination, when (or if) it becomes filled with such contention, or selfish ambition on the part of leaders? But the fact remains that God has used various churches and denominations in spite of their shortcomings to reach millions of people. He has used them in spite of their weakness, inconsistencies, and occasional contention. That is a testimony to His power and grace, and not a credit to their numbers, organization, or resources. But, just think how much more

effective we would be in our Lord's service today without the contention and selfish ambition, either of which breeds strife.

**RATHER THAN FROM PURE MOTIVES.** That is, some served without sincerity (lit., without pure motives). Some served with mixed, or impure, motives. Every servant of the Lord should examine his or her motives frequently. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus contrasts true righteousness with the pseudo-righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. His rewards are reserved for those who are sincere. The following words are from an old engraving on a cathedral in Labeck, Germany:

Thus speaketh Christ our Lord to us:  
You call Me master and obey Me not.  
You call Me light and see Me not.  
You call Me the Way and walk Me not.  
You call Me life and live Me not.  
You call Me wise and follow Me not.  
You call Me fair and love Me not.  
You call Me rich and ask Me not.  
You call Me eternal and seek Me not.  
If I condemn thee, blame Me not.<sup>xxiv</sup>

**TO CAUSE ME DISTRESS IN MY IMPRISONMENT.** "To add affliction to my bonds" (KJV). Now that Paul is down, they jump on him. In other words, they kick him while he is down. The attitude of those who distressed and harassed Paul called into question their professed love for the Lord. Charles Haddon Spurgeon in the nineteenth century must surely have identified with Paul when his fellow Baptists voted overwhelmingly to censure him. As we look back, we can see that precious souls were saved through his ministry - and through many of theirs - and the Lord is still blessing His church through the writings of Spurgeon as well as that of some of those on the other side. That does not mean that such controversy is good for the church. One can only speculate as to what might have happened if they had all served Him in sincerity and in love for one another.

**1:18 - WHAT THEN?** A very serious problem is put to Paul by the conduct of the Judaizers, who hounded Paul mercilessly during his missionary journeys. The Judaizers were Jews who professed faith in Christ - and most may very well have been genuinely converted through their faith in Christ. They insisted, however, that before Gentiles could be saved, they had to be circumcised (that is, accept Judaism). They reasoned that since salvation is of the Jews, Gentiles must embrace Judaism, of which circumcision was a symbol. For more on the Judaizers, see Galatians 2 and Acts 15 (accounts of the Jerusalem Conference). They added works to grace as a requirement of Justification.

Regardless of their motives, Paul writes, if Christ is preached and some people come to a saving knowledge of Christ, he can rejoice. Christians are often faced with difficult questions, questions that cannot be evaded. People need answers, and believers need to be able to deal with difficult issues. Some difficult questions are being asked today about evolution, abortion, separation of church and state and capital punishment, to name a few. People need answers to these questions,

and if they do not get them from the Lord's people, to whom will they go? The answer is obvious: Humanism, New Age Movements, and various cults are trying to solve man's problems. But their answers are often not God's answer to man's needs - they are in fact opposed to God.

**ONLY THAT.** The essential thing to Paul is that in spite of all their envy and selfishness, Christ is preached. This gives insight into the character of a mature Christian. This, however, does not mean that Paul was ready to compromise sound doctrine - nor should we. Unity in the local church and the denomination is dependent upon the revealed truth of God's Word. They are wrong who say, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere." Those who subscribe to false doctrine may be sincere, but they are sincerely wrong!

The Scripture clearly teaches that we should not only resist, but expose and root out false doctrine. Then what is Paul talking about here? He is dealing primarily with the motives of some of those who were preaching the Gospel and their attitude toward him. Let us take a hypothetical case. Let us say that there are twenty pastors of the same denomination in the same city, five (group A) with earned doctorates, five (group B) with seminary degrees, five (group C) with college degrees, and (D) five with a high school diploma, or less. They serve the same Lord, they all have a divine call, and they subscribe to the same basic denominational beliefs. It is reasonable to assume that these pastors would approach administration, Bible study, and sermon preparation from a different perspective - certainly their methodology would differ. But let us also assume that two of the pastors in group A feel that those in group D are ill equipped for administrative responsibilities or the preparation of expository sermons. Group A is aware of this, not so much because of what they say, but because of their attitude, so two or three from group D resent all those in group A. Let us also assume that we know this because group A confides in group B and group D confides in group C - and group B and group C exchange information.

Some questions arise out of our hypothetical case. First, what kind of fellowship do they have in their pastors conference? Second, how does this affect outreach? Do they express opinions to other people in the community? I was often shocked in an earlier pastorate to learn that some local pastors (and lay persons) told prospects they didn't want to join our church because we were "having some problems." A senior adult couple was looking for a church and decided to visit our church one Sunday morning - in spite of the warning that "they have a lot of financial problems at that church." There was a time when we did have financial problems, in that while we could handle our bills, we had not been able to support missions as we felt we should. I asked one of our deacons to lead in prayer in that service, and the visitors were amazed to hear the deacon thank God for all He had done for His church, especially for providing adequate facilities and for helping us to make the final payment on the bond program so that we could look ahead to other work He had for us to do.

Ideally, the pastors in these various groups should have a good fellowship in the Lord and support each other in their ministry in the community. If, however, a few of these men do not love each other as they should, even if they let their attitude lead them to do or say some things that fall short of the Golden Rule, we should thank the Lord for the fact that the Gospel is preached and souls are saved.

**WHETHER IN PRETENSE.** Paul sees through the pious pretense of these Judaizers and rejoices that people are getting some knowledge of Jesus Christ. His attitude seems to have been that it is better to preach Christ a little than not at all. That does not justify the preaching of half-truths common among the cults that identify themselves with Christianity. A half-truth is a whole lie! How then should we interpret this? There are many denominations which support mission work around the world. There are well known doctrinal differences between many of these groups. Without losing sight of those differences, we can pray for the success of other denominations in reaching the lost for Jesus Christ.

Prior to the 1988 Summer Olympics in South Korea, Southern Baptists were making plans to bear a strong witness for our Lord to people from the nations of the world. During that time a local Church of God (Holiness) pastor came to me to ask my help in preparing a slide-strip presentation for their district youth meeting to ask people to support their efforts to reach people for the Lord during the Summer Olympics in South Korea. My excitement about what they were doing outweighed any objection I might have had to a few points on doctrine with which we disagree.

**I WILL REJOICE.** Paul continues, “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.” Paul is determined to rejoice despite the efforts of the Judaizers to antagonize him. In this attitude we catch a glimpse of the depth of his love for his Lord and his commitment to His Kingdom. If his primary concern had been his goals, or even “his ministry,” he might well have been defensive, but he was so focused on the spread of the Gospel that he ignored the personal affront and rejoiced in what God was doing - regardless of their motives.

General Jerry Curry, (U. S. Air Force, retired) told of the time his brother-in-law, who was a minister, invited him to a service to hear an evangelist preach. After the service, General Curry said that he was highly critical of the preaching because he thought the preacher was too emotional and was appealing too much to the emotions of the audience. His brother-in-law finally responded, “Jerry, did it ever occur to you that God might not have brought him to our city just for you? A lot of people were responding to the message.” General Curry acknowledged that his brother-in-law was right. Decisions were being made, and while the preaching did not appeal to him, it was obviously reaching others. With that realization he could rejoice in it.

**1:19 - WILL TURN OUT.** This is a difficult verse. Is Paul confident of being delivered from prison, or is he thinking of his ultimate deliverance from all the trials of this world? “For I know that *this will turn out for my deliverance* through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” ( italics added).

Paul has two resources. First, there were the supplications of the people of God. Paul, like Jesus, taught and practiced intercessory prayer. Andrew Murray and E. M. Bounds tried to make their generation aware of the power of intercessory prayer. Stephen Olford, Jack Taylor, Peter Lord, Ron Dunn and many others have continued the emphasis on intercessory prayer for our day.

Paul’s second resource, and his primary source of help was “the Spirit of Jesus Christ,” the Holy Spirit, Who protects the saints. Here the Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of Jesus Christ"

because He gave the Spirit to His followers and also because the Spirit works in us for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.

Paul was under arrest when he wrote Philippians, but his greatest hope was not that he would be freed but that, free or not, he would boldly proclaim Christ. He urged the church to pray that he would, and he was confident that the Spirit would help him do this (v 19). The Spirit's protection enables us to accomplish God's plans for proclamation, not our plans for personal security.<sup>xxv</sup>

**FOR MY DELIVERANCE.** "Deliverance" in the New Testament is often used to denote spiritual salvation, but it may also be used of physical preservation or deliverance. Possibly his trial had already begun, and he was saying that whatever happened, either release or death would advance the cause of Christ. Early church tradition holds that Paul was released soon after the writing of this letter. Whatever the case might be, the apostle knows that God will not forsake him. As we see in 1:26, he sincerely hopes to see them again. So, while some take this to mean his release from prison, others have suggested that he is thinking of his eternal salvation. If there is one thing we can be sure of, it is that he was prepared either way. He knows His Lord will deliver him - of this he is certain.

**NOTE:** The following passage, 1:20-27, deals with Christian ethics. It would help every believer to keep in mind the following footnote from the Disciple's Study Bible:

Christian courage is not necessarily fearless. It acts in faith. Based on Christ's steadfastness, such courage recognizes the importance of this life as a means of advancing the gospel but knows its passing nature, too. Paul's plea for conduct worthy of the gospel is another of his many patterns of appeal for right living. See note on Eph. 4:1-3.<sup>xxvi</sup>

**1:20 - EARNEST EXPECTATION.** The word used here (and in Romans 8:19) for "earnest expectation" is a vivid one. It portrays one who is looking ahead with his neck stretched out and his head thrust forward. It means "the eager concentrated, intense look which turns its gaze away from everything else to fix it on the one object of its desire."<sup>xxvii</sup> Paul hopes he will never be shamed into silence. Both cowardice and ineffectiveness might lead to shame. But if Paul is courageous and effectively seizes this opportunity, the result will be that Christ will be glorified in him. This has rich application today.

Paul had faith in God. His only concern was whether or not he could stand up under the test. Would he fail God? To be ashamed is the opposite of the statement which follows (for me to live is Christ...). Paul's concern was that he would not let his Lord down. We should be just as concerned today that we will not let our Lord down. He says, "according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." He had written to the Roman church, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who

believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

### **ILLUSTRATION: SHARING YOUR FAITH.**

A little girl, while traveling with her mother, made the acquaintance of an aged man, through his little granddaughter. The child said to her new friend, "I got a grandpa; and he's a good man, and loves Jesus. Don't you love Jesus?" That simple question led the aged man, who was a skeptic, to give his heart to Christ. "No one," said he, "ever took that much interest in me before, to ask the simple question that the child put to me; and I am now in my eighty-third year."<sup>xxviii</sup>

**SHALL BE MAGNIFIED.** Magnify means to make great. Paul had but one ambition and that was that Christ Himself be magnified in his body, whether by life or death. With this philosophy governing his life, there is little wonder that many are convinced that Paul probably lived the Christian life more effectively than anyone else ever has.

**IN MY BODY.** Just how does one magnify the Lord in the body? The believer lives his life here on Planet Earth in an earthly body. The Lord is magnified, or denied, by what the Christian does or does not do in the body. Only God sees the spirit - your neighbors see your body. One may have the Lord in his spirit, but the only way the world will ever know it is when that love is translated into action through the body. The saint either confesses or denies the Lord in the body. It may be harder for some to magnify Christ in the body than in the spirit. One who has had a problem with drugs or alcohol before being saved will face many temptations in the body that other believers cannot understand. Many Christians, on the other hand, do not magnify the Lord in their body because they do not love Him in their spirit.

When I became pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church, Nederland, Texas, in 1973, all services were taped, and during the week the tapes were dropped off with shut-ins. Before long, someone told me how much those tapes meant to Catherine. Her husband attended services faithfully, but Catherine was unable to attend services because of her health. When I went to visit her, she immediately began to tell me how much the message the previous Sunday had meant to her. It took me a few minutes to remember what I had said! I asked Catherine about her relationship with the Lord, and she shared her testimony with me.

“For many years,” she said, “I ran a bar, and any time anyone said anything to me about the Lord, I would tell them about all those church members who go to church on Sunday who were in my bar the night before. I paid attention to that and I used it for an excuse not to go to church. Any time anybody mentioned the church to me I told them how many church members I served beer on Saturday night. That was my excuse.

“But,” she went on, “I would go home and go to bed after I closed every Saturday night and then sleep late Sunday. When I got up I would look out and watch families all up and down the street coming out of their homes and getting into their cars and driving off to church. They were

dressed up and carrying their Bibles. They did this every Sunday. I watched them for years and they seemed so happy. Every Sunday when I saw them going to church I felt that something was missing. I told myself I ought to be going to church, too. But then I would think about those church members who were at my bar the night before, and that turned me off.”

This went on for years - church members in her bar on Saturday night, Christian families going to church on Sunday morning. Every time she thought of those church members in the bar she knew she did not want to go to church with a bunch of hypocrites. But every Sunday morning she would look out and see those Christians going to church. Eventually, she told me, “These were not the same people! Those neighbors who were going to church were going every Sunday, and they were not the ones who were coming to my bar on Saturday night.” Every Sunday as I watched them, I felt empty, and that is what led me to Jesus Christ. I knew I needed something, and they seemed to have what I needed.”

In the first place, it is a shame that those neighbors did not try to witness to Catherine during those years. But to be fair, they might have tried. They may have been the very people she had told about all those church members who frequented her bar. Whether or not they had actively sought her salvation by sharing their testimony with her, it was their consistent testimony that broke down her resistance to the Gospel. Catherine’s testimony was an inspiration to me and to others who visited with her. It also speaks clearly of how easily Christians can turn people away from Christ, but how carefully they must guard their testimony if they expect to lead others to Him.

**1:21 - FOR TO ME.** Paul shows that he is determined to be faithful in life and in death (1:21-26). He is going to give his own view of living; his philosophy of life. This is a deep personal commitment. Each person must say with Paul, “For to me,” because this is an individual, not a community commitment. This philosophy derives from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is not handed down from generation to generation, even though parents should set the right example for their children. Spiritual role models are needed, but each individual must make a personal commitment to obey the Lord in all things, with the understanding that obedience to Him is our most sacred obligation. More than life itself, the believer must value and nurture obedience to God.

**TO LIVE IS CHRIST.** He is living in union with Christ. This points to a body so surrendered, and a soul so yielded to the Lord Who has redeemed it, that it may be used only to His glory and praise. If some were honest, they would have to say, for me to live is money, or fame, or power, or pleasure. Christ was the beginning of life for Paul. He was the continuation of his life. He was the end (purpose) of his life. He was the source, the way and the destiny of his life. To this great Apostle, Jesus was the indeed the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end (Rev. 1:8). If anyone can say with Paul, "for me to live is Christ," he can go on and say, "for me to die is gain." George Whitfield’s life and ministry reflected this kind of devotion to the Lord. He once said, "I am often weary in the work, but never weary of it." Life in Christ is so precious that it should be treasured above all else.

**TO DIE IS GAIN.** As precious as the life lived in Christ is here on earth, “to die is gain.” Death

to the Christian “means that we continue to live with our Savior, but in a deeper, richer, fuller relationship. Death is a departure for eternal fellowship with Christ in heaven.”<sup>xxix</sup>

“Gain” is from an old word meaning gain, profit, or interest on money. Death is a profit? That is what he is saying. “To die,” in this context, has been described as cashing in both principal and interest so as to have more of Christ than when living on earth. Paul faced death with faith and courage. Life is precious, but death holds no terror for the Christian. Any Christian who lives in fear of death does not know the Lord as Paul knew Him. Death to him was a departure, an exodus, a moving out of the travel-worn, earthly tabernacle, so one may go on to be with the Lord.

At times Paul regards death as a sleep, but here we see that at the moment of death he thought of it, not as a falling asleep, but as an immediate entry into the presence of the Lord. If we believe in Jesus Christ, death for us is both a union and a reunion, union with Christ, and reunion with those loved ones who are in the Lord.

To Paul, death would not be a tragedy. The center of his existence is the One before Whom he is going to stand the moment he dies. His love for his Savior had removed the fear of death. Andrew Murray was a Dutch Reform minister from South Africa whose writings are still blessing Christians generations after his death. I have read many of his books and often recommend one of his books (*With Christ in the School of Prayer*) to others. My only mistake was in thinking everyone would return the book when I let them read it! I only recently purchased yet another replacement copy of this great work. I remember very distinctly reading in one of his books, (I do not remember which one, and the quote is probably not verbatim) that death, for the believer, is not a change of direction; it is just another step in the direction we are already traveling.

When I was faced with the possibility of death while lying on the table in the emergency room, and later in the intensive care unit in the hospital, I was humbled by the realization that there was no fear of death. The thought came to me later, “Why should I have been anxious about all those little things through the years?” When Becky and I went for my first appointment at Rehab, the nurse spent about an hour in an interview trying to determine if there were any anxieties that would hinder rehabilitation, or pose a threat to my health later. She asked, “Are you worried about finances?” I answered, “No.” She glanced at me as though she was a little surprised, and I added, “When you owe as much as I do, why worry about it?” With all my heart, I wanted to live - to finish any work the Lord might have for me to do, and to spend more time with Becky, John, Mark and with others I love. But I was keenly aware that if I had not lived, I would really be alive! Nurses in Rehab asked me if I had ever considered teaching a class in stress management, but I assured them that I have doubts about my qualifications to teach such a class.

Early in my ministry a layman went with me to visit a prospect for our church. As soon as we were seated my friend immediately began to tell this young couple how to be saved and why they should be saved. He kept using terms like, “When you die,” and “when you stand before the Lord.” Suddenly, the young wife exclaimed, “But, I don’t want to die.” He snapped back, “You’ll be better off!” He was right - shockingly so! But we accomplished very little that night because of his approach. For the lost person, this may be a strange, if not startling concept, but the mature believer

is surely aware of the fact that he or she is going to die, and “to die is gain.”

In one of the most dramatic missions stories of the Twentieth Century, five young men landed on a beach in Ecuador in an effort to reach the Auca Indians for Jesus Christ. All five were brutally slain by the murderous Aucas, who habitually “speared” all who crossed their borders, as well as other families within their own tribe. Jim Elliot’s widow, Elizabeth, and Nate Saint’s sister, Rachel, made contact with the murderers and made the world aware of the circumstances. A friend let me borrow a copy of Elizabeth Elliot’s book, *Through Gates of Splendor*, when I was a student at Mississippi College. James and Audrey Yates had given me a small leather New Testament for being in their wedding and I carried it everywhere. I was so moved by the story of the faith and courage of those five young missionaries that I opened my little New Testament and copied a quotation from Jim Elliot.

I had not thought about that quotation for a long time until a friend mentioned those missionaries and said, “I have this quotation from Jim Elliot and I thought you might be interested in it.” She had heard it on a television program called, *Day of Discovery*. I thought I knew what the quotation was going to be, but I was wrong. The quotation was: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” I found my New Testament and opened it and read the quotation I had written there nearly forty years earlier: “Be sure when the time comes to die, all you have to do is to die.”

I marveled at the spiritual insight, the faith, and the courage of such a young man. The faith and courage of the other missionaries was no less than that expressed by Jim Elliot. These young missionaries could surely say with the great First Century missionary, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” That was the attitude of Rachel Saint who did not die then but gave her life to ministering to the Aucas until her natural death in 1994.

That story becomes even more remarkable when we learn that Steven Saint, son of missionary pilot Nate Saint, went to visit his Aunt Rachel and was baptized by two of the men who had murdered his father many years earlier. And it gets better! Christian leaders among the Aucas pleaded with Steve Saint to come to their village to help them. After much prayer he and his family moved to the jungles of Ecuador to minister to them. “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

**1:22 - IF THIS IS THE FRUIT OF MY WORK.** There is no “if” (ei) in the Greek. But the clause is conditional, so it is appropriate to render it thus for smoother reading:

“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.” It was not his choice to live or die, and fortunately it is not our choice because there may be times when one would choose to end life here to go on and be with the Lord rather than face adversities. They do not fear death, but they do fear the dying process, especially if that process involves long-term suffering, grief, or disability. There may be times when some Christians in communist or Muslim countries would choose death instead of persecution. But it might well be, God’s will that some of His saints must suffer persecution in order to get the Gospel to certain people who would never hear it any other way. Peter and John, Paul, John Bunyan, and Dietrich

Bonhoeffer are but a few of a long list of notable examples.

Christians in the Soviet Union suffered before the fall of the Iron Curtain, and believers suffer persecution in communist China, Cuba and in many Islamic countries today. The Scripture is very clear, and the Lord is completely honest with us - if you love Him you have three enemies: the flesh, the world, and the devil. James asked, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4, NKJV). This means that friendship with God makes you the enemy of the world. The more you express your faith in God, the more the world will oppose, suppress and even persecute you. Paul wrote to his son in the ministry, "...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

Jesus has promised to be with us in all things (The Great Commission). With that in mind, when we suffer in any way - persecution, pain, terminal illness, financial loss, or grief - we should be able to say with Paul, "If I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me. I know, however, that the choice is not mine. But if it were mine, I do not know which to choose, life with pain and suffering, but with the possibility of fruitful service for the Lord, or death so that I could go on to be with Jesus Christ in peace and comfort."

A number of years ago there was a godly lady who had suffered from a terminal illness for months. As the end drew near, I visited with her husband and children in the hospital. Her husband expressed the sentiment that many others have entertained while waiting for a loved one to die. He said, "I know she is going to die and we have prepared ourselves for that. She is ready to go to be with the Lord. I know that sometimes the Lord may let us suffer in order to punish us or to teach us a lesson. But she is just lying there and I don't see how she can benefit for it." I asked my friend, "Has it occurred to you that the Lord may not be delaying for her benefit, but for others? There is a limit to what people can learn about death and suffering by watching lost people go through something like this, but there is a lot they can learn by watching those who love the Lord deal with suffering and grief. He said, "You know, that may be the answer." This conviction has been reinforced many times since that night. Sickness, terminal illness, disability, and grief afford the child of God an opportunity to demonstrate their faith in Him, and for Him to manifest His grace to a lost world.

**1:23 - I AM HARD-PRESSED.** The KJV renders it "I am in a strait betwixt two..." Literally, "I am held together," with the idea of being hemmed together. He felt that he was hemmed in on both sides. Today, we might say he was between a rock and a hard place. He longed to be with the Lord, but he also longed to minister to the saints in Philippi.

**FROM BOTH DIRECTIONS.** That is, from the two sides. There is pressure to live on, and there is pressure to die and be with Christ. If the Apostle Paul was susceptible to such pressure, we must anticipate similar tension if we are as committed to the Lord as he.

**TO DEPART.** The word means to unloose, to break up, to return. The idea is to break up camp, to weigh anchor and put out to sea. To depart means "to loose from all the confinements, pain, and

limitations of this life' (same word used in 2 Tim. 4:6) and be with Christ. Death brings us immediately into the presence of Christ--no soul sleep or no purgatory in between."<sup>xxx</sup>

This is a great text for a funeral sermon. The faithful Christian knows that when death comes, he has weighed anchor and set sail for that distant shore where our Savior awaits us. All metaphors have their limits and this is no exception. We set sail, but we arrive instantly!

**VERY MUCH BETTER.** The NKJV has, "which is far better," while the NIV has, "which is better by far." The NAS captures the double comparative: "But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is *very much better*" (italics for emphasis). Paul has suffered imprisonment, physical torture, emotional abuse, and threat of death many times for his Lord. Now the man who probably lived the Gospel more effectively than anyone else ever has, wants nothing more than to go home to be with his Lord. He was probably tired and weak physically from all the exposure to the elements, illness, shipwrecks, harassment, torture, and stress of imprisonment with the inquisitions and the uncertainty associated with it.

#### **ILLUSTRATION: HEAVEN.**

A child of God who was seriously ill and lacked assurance of salvation said to his physician, "Doctor, although I'm a Christian, I'm afraid to die. Exactly what happens to us in the hour of death?" The surgeon, who was also a believer, thought for a moment and then replied, "I'm afraid I can't give you an exact answer to that question!" As he walked across the room to leave, he desperately wished he could say something comforting. Pausing briefly before opening the door, he heard the sound of scratching and whining on the other side. Suddenly he realized that he had left his car window open and his little dog had jumped out. With the patient's permission he let in his pet poodle who leaped on him with an eager show of gladness. In a flash the doctor's mind was awakened to a scriptural truth he had never before put into words. Turning to the sick man, he said, "Did you see how my dog acted? He's never been in this room before. He had no idea what was inside; yet when I opened the door, he sprang in without fear, for he knew his master was here!" As Christians we have not been told about the glories that await us on the other side of death. But one thing we do know; our Master is there, and that is enough!<sup>xxx</sup>

**1:24 - IN THE FLESH.** Even though he prefers to go on to be with the Lord, he says, "Yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." Though he had much rather depart to be with his Lord, he is willing to remain with them until his ministry to them is complete. "Flesh" here denotes his physical life (in his body) rather than in an evil sense which is defined by W. Ian Thomas (*If I Perish, I Perish*, Zondervan, 1967) as the "Perverted principle which perpetuates in man Satan's proud hostility and enmity against God."<sup>xxx</sup>

**1:25 - AND ABIDE WITH YOU ALL.** There is a word-play in the Greek that is not easily reproduced in English. The word for abide is *menein*; and the word for continue is *paramenein*. Barclay follows Lightfoot in suggesting the translation "bide" and "abide." That rendering shows a play on words but not the meaning. The point is this; *menein* means "to remain with"; but *paramenein* means to remain with (wait beside) a person to be ready to help at all times. "Paul's desire to live is not for his own sake, but for the sake of those whom, by living, he can continue to help and serve."<sup>xxxiii</sup>

#### **ILLUSTRATION: SERVING CHRIST.**

It was Dwight Moody who said, "I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And that which I can do, by the grace of God, I will do." With that simple commitment, God used him to bring revival to England and America.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

**1:26 - IN CHRIST JESUS.** "In Christ Jesus" is the basis for glorifying and the basis for hope. This was the key to everything in life for Paul - and for the Philippian Christians. It should also be the key to a life of meaning and purpose for the believer in post-Christian, post-modern America today. Modernism denied God, post-modernism is open to a god, gods, or a supernatural force, and often proclaims faith in Jesus Christ - but the New Age Christ has little in common with the Christ of the New Testament. Post-modern spiritual systems (New Age religions) readily profess belief in a whole host of gods, and include Jesus Christ - so long as He is inclusive and not exclusive. They insist that if your god pleases you and their god pleases them, everyone should be happy.

New Age or post-modern religious philosophy holds that all is one and one is all; that there is just one entity (monism). You are one with the universe and everything that is in it. The universe, being one with god, brought itself into existence. Since you are one with the universe, you are god. If you search for the god within, you will discover that you are your own god (you are Christ). If you can fit your Christ into that scheme, you are welcome to Him, but if your Christ is the One Who insists that He is the only way by which one must be saved, They reject Him and oppose you. The Bible is very clear about Jesus Christ: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, KJV). See also John 14:6.

Jimmy Furr, Regional Director of the Interfaith Witness Department of Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, talked with me about a large New Age extravaganza held in Florida. Representatives from all religions were able to rent a booth and distribute literature and talk with people about their faith. His department rented a booth and gave copies of the New Testament to those who stopped by their booth. Before long, people from various New Age religions converged on their booth, verbally assaulting them for having the audacity to come to their meeting and pass out New Testaments and talk with people about Jesus Christ. The prince of this world founded the religions of the world, and no one knows better than he that Jesus Christ is not of this world - nor is His church of this world. The religions of the world are at enmity with Christ and His church.

Calvin Mangum and his wife, Mae, have been close friends for many years. I was his mother's pastor for years and delivered the message at her funeral. We visit, exchange materials, and stay in touch by telephone or e-mail. As a matter of fact, he and his mother gave me my first computer, and one of my first writing projects was the original draft of this study in Philippians. On a recent visit, Calvin gave me a book someone had given him. He correctly identified the book as New Age. The book (*Compassionate Energies Dancing the Cosmic Dance*) was written by Larry Hein, a Catholic priest from New Orleans. The title page includes the subtitle: Reflections of an Old Priest on the Cosmic Dimensions of the Spiritual Journey. The following is taken from the back cover:

A Jesuit for 58 years, Father Hein is privileged to have been able to accompany hundreds on their spiritual journey. For many years his ministry has been spiritual direction and privately directed retreats.

Fr. Hein is currently a priest in residence at the Cenacle Retreat House in Metairie, Louisiana. He lives in splendid solitude with his canine angel, Missy Regina.

Missy says, "There are many religions on Planet earth. They differ. Ultimately, the movement, the spiritual journey to the *Transcendent* within is the same for all humans."

Part I is entitled, "The One and the Many Dancing the Comic Dance." Quoting Aldous Huxley, he lists "four fundamental doctrines."<sup>xxxv</sup> The first has to do with the "Divine Ground within"; the second with realizing the existence of the Divine Ground by a direct intuition; the third deals with "an eternal Self, which is the inner man." He continues:

Fourth: man's life on earth has only one end and purpose: to identify with his eternal Self and so come to a unitive knowledge of the Divine Ground.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

You think this is weird? Then you ought to study some of the philosophies Paul had to deal within writing some of the thirteen epistles he was inspired to write which are included in the New Testament. The New Testament gives the answer to Gnosticism, which became a major problem for the early church, and the same Scriptures will answer New Age (post-modern) mysticism today.

The key to victory is "in Christ Jesus." We must hold the line against anyone who would offer any other solution to man's sin problem today. If you are in Christ Jesus and He is in you, then you must study the New Testament so that you have a thorough understanding of the Doctrine of Jesus Christ. Only then will you be ready to offer a defense against those who either attack, detract from, or minimize in any way either the humanity, or the deity of Jesus Christ.

**THROUGH MY PRESENCE.** Or, my coming to you again. The word (*parousia*, a presence, a

coming) is the word commonly used in reference to the second coming of Christ, but here it is used in the ordinary sense of presence, as in 2:12; I Cor. 16:17.

## **CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM - 1:27-30**

Eddleman points out that the saints are obligated in four directions:

1. To be becoming in Christian Living (1:27).
2. To be courageous (1:28).
3. To be thankful for their distinctive honor (1:29).
4. To compare their plight with his [Paul's] (1:30).<sup>xxxvii</sup>

**1:27 - CONDUCT YOURSELVES.** “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” The term Paul uses for “conduct yourselves” (*politeuw*) was a political term which means to live as a citizen - here, as good citizens of the Kingdom of God. Philippi as a colony possessed Roman citizenship, and Paul was proud of his Roman citizenship. The Authorized Version does not convey to us what it did in 1611 when the word was rendered "conversation," which, at the time, suggested conduct, and not simply speech. But it still does not preserve the figure of citizenship.

One thing is essential: no matter what happens, either to Paul or to the Philippians, they must live in a manner worthy of a good citizen of the Kingdom of God, that is, worthy of their profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Paul was a Roman citizen, writing from the center of the Roman Empire, to believers in Philippi, a Roman colony. We must remember that Roman colonies were like little bits of Rome planted throughout the world. In Roman colonies the Roman citizens never forgot that they were Romans. They spoke Latin, wore Latin dress, called their magistrates by Latin names, and insisted on being absolutely Roman, no matter how far they were from Rome.

Christians should never do less as citizens of the eternal Kingdom of God than Romans did as citizens of Rome. As shameful as it is, a lot of church members do not conduct themselves as good citizens of America, much less as citizens of the Kingdom of God. It is also disturbing that there are many church members who profess to be Christians who place a much higher value on their temporal citizenship as Americans than they do on their eternal citizenship in heaven. They go to political rallies, call and write politicians and vote in every election (and condemn those who do not vote), yet they are lax in worship, Bible study, and prayer, and seldom if ever show up to vote on anything in the church business meeting.

**WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL.** The readers in Philippi were a long way from Rome, but they would remember the responsibilities of Roman citizenship. Christians have a higher duty than that.

At all times, wherever you are, you must live in a manner befitting a citizen of the Kingdom of God. You must never forget the privileges and the responsibilities of citizenship in the Kingdom of God. Whether at home where everyone knows you, or on vacation where no one knows you, you are a citizen of the Kingdom of God, a subject of the King of Kings, and your conduct must always honor Him: You must always “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” That is simply not being done by the average church member. And he wonders why God does not answer his prayers!

**STANDING FIRM.** Paul writes to citizens of the Kingdom of God in Philippi, urging them to stand firm “in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” What does he expect of the Philippians? Eddleman says

- (1) he expects them to stand fast.
- (2) he expects unity.
- (3) he expects an unconquerable spirit.
- (4) he expects a cool calm courage.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Citizens of a city or country need to come together in a united way for the good of their country. Just so, citizens of the eternal kingdom must “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”

Many of the founders of America were men and women whose lives exemplified this dual citizenship. By word and by deed they exercised their citizenship both in the Kingdom of God and in the country to which they believed God had led them. They were convinced that this new nation should be established on Christian principles - for at least two very good reasons. First, since they believed He had led them to the new world to give them freedom to worship Him, they were convinced that He wanted them to found the new nation on His principles - not as a theocracy, but a republic that recognized His sovereignty. Second, they were convinced that His were the best principles upon which to base their laws.

Perhaps no individual was more influential in the shaping of America than the John Witherspoon, minister, teacher, college president, congressman, and signer of the Declaration of Independence. John Adams once wrote, “Heard Dr. Witherspoon all Day. A clear, sensible Preacher.”<sup>xxxix</sup> He was surely a “clear, sensible” preacher - the kind that God can use to shape a nation. At one point in his life, after he was devastated by the death of his daughter, he preached sixteen successive sermons on “the doctrine and duty of submission to the will of God.”<sup>xl</sup> All sixteen sermons were based on Luke 22:42: “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”

Witherspoon was president of the College of New Jersey from 1768 to 1794. In those twenty-six years 478 young men graduated - about eighteen students per year. Of those 478 graduates, 114 became ministers; 13 were state governors; 3 were U S Supreme Court judges; 20 were United States Senators; 33 were U S Congressmen; Aaron Burr, Jr. became Vice-President; and James Madison became

President. Of the 55 delegates to the Constitutional Convention, 9 (one-sixth) were College of New Jersey graduates, and 6 graduated while Witherspoon was president.<sup>xli</sup>

Witherspoon, president and teacher at the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University), was a Christian - not a deist. He was a powerful influence behind our constitution of the United States. What was the key to the great influence of John Witherspoon, and why was he so highly esteemed by the Founding Fathers? Eidsmoe sums it up well:

His young secretary and third cousin, John Ramsay Witherspoon, described him as having “the simplicity of a child, the humility of a patriarch and the dignity of a prince.” Roger Schultz’s summary complements that: “[John] Adams called him a true son of liberty. So he was. But first, he was a son of the Cross.”<sup>xlii</sup>

**STRIVING.** Rather, "striving together" as in an athletic contest. We might paraphrase it "striving in concert." This word supports and enhances "fellowship" (participation with others in the work). It reveals that serving the Lord can be challenging - sometimes exhausting - work but always productive and rewarding. Find God’s will and strive for Him, and leave the productivity and the rewards to Him.

**FOR THE FAITH.** That is, for the teaching of the Gospel (objective sense of *pistis*, faith). Citizens of Philippi understood their citizenship and their duty and they never forgot it. As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we must understand our citizenship and fulfill our duty for the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**1:28 - IN NO WAY ALARMED.** The NAS has, “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.” The NKJV renders it “and not in any way terrified by your adversaries...” The metaphor is that of a timid or scared horse. I grew up on a farm in the Mississippi Delta, in the Green River community seven miles west of Sledge. I had the dubious honor of having to plow with mules before my father began to farm with tractors. I was not yet a teenager when he made the transition from mules to tractors, and while I do not remember any specific prayers, I am sure that first tractor answered one.

There were very few pleasures associated with farming the way we had to do it when I was a child and younger teenager - and most of those pleasures came before planting and after harvest! One of those pleasures was getting to ride Ole Bill, a powerful, fast mule with a lot of sense. Riding Ole Bill was like riding a horse. He would spoil you for riding other mules. Very few things disturbed him. One man would turn his ignition switch off and back on to make his truck back-fire to try to scare Bill into running away with me (we didn't have a lot to do for entertainment). But Bill didn't seem to notice. Nothing seemed to bother him. Nothing, that is, except a bicycle. On more than one occasion, Ole Bill, when frightened by a bicycle, and he ran away with me. During that time the best mule we ever had was totally out of control. And the first time it happened, I was almost as frightened as he was.

Fear can paralyze. It can also lead to unusual behavior in which one loses control of his emotions and at times his ability to make rational decisions. Such fear is not productive, but destructive. It does not honor the Lord. It is not characteristic of the Spirit-filled believer.

**BY THE ADVERSARIES.** They have lined up against Paul. They may have been Jews, Gentiles, or both (See 2 Thes. 2:4). Any preacher who attacks evil will have opposition. The pastor who condemns sin is seldom the most popular person in the community. That is, unless he attacks someone else's sin! We love the preacher who "steps on our toes" - up to a point. But when he really attacks the specific sins of members of the local church, some members of his own congregation will turn on him. Pastors are seldom forced to move from a church and community by the lost people of the community because he stepped on their toes.

When I was a youth, Barney Walker was pastor of the Tunica Baptist Church in Tunica, Mississippi. While I was a student at Mississippi College, I was pleased to learn that he had been called to a church in Jackson. Once when he spoke at a Baptist Student Union (BSU) meeting on campus, he told us about something he had experienced when he was the evangelist for a revival - he never told us where. It was a week-long revival, and by the middle of the week some of the people were criticizing him for preaching on some specific sins. After the Thursday evening service some men gathered under a tree outside the building, and a youth overheard some of the talk. He rushed inside and approached the evangelist with fear in his eyes and in a quivering voice said, "Brother Walker, some of the men are standing outside under the tree, and they are talking about running you out of town." He said, "Son, you go back out there and tell them that they may carry me out of town, but this old man won't run." The next night a spirit of revival broke out in that church. They asked him to stay for another week." There will be adversaries when the Gospel is faithfully proclaimed, but the believer is encouraged and fortified when he recalls the Lord's promise: "...and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20b, NAS).

**DESTRUCTION.** The NKJV follows the KJV, "proof of perdition." When you face the adversaries of the Cross "without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you," as the NIV reads, "this is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved--and that by God." The word means ruin, loss, destruction. In some passages it is temporary. In others, as here, it is eternal. The Scripture does not say that the enemies of the Cross will recognize or believe the sign, but it does say that the fearlessness of the saints during a time of oppression or persecution is a sign for those who will receive it. The Lord never hides this reality from us.

**1:29 - FOR CHRIST'S SAKE.** "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake."

Christ's suffering adequately atoned for sin. The church continues to suffer so all the world may know of and benefit from Christ's atonement. Christians must continue the ministry and, therefore, the suffering of Jesus until He returns. Knowing the ultimate purpose of our suffering allows us to rejoice in it. We do not suffer for ourselves

or for some mysterious evil force we do not understand. We suffer for Christ and His church.<sup>xliii</sup>

Suffering in behalf of Jesus Christ is one of God's gifts to us. That thought may be very disturbing to us at first, but when we see what God has accomplished through the trials of some of His servants, we can understand why some of the martyrs counted it such a privilege to suffer for Jesus Christ. It would be interesting to know how many church members have ever really suffered in behalf of Jesus Christ. It would also be interesting to know if the lack of suffering is directly related to the lack of service in His behalf. Sacrificial service and apathy are antithetical, and America is paying a terrible price for apathy of the church. The church in America often proclaims a painless but powerless Gospel. Our members are not suffering, but our neighbors are going to hell.

Faithful Christians can expect to suffer opposition, oppression, even persecution and death in behalf of Jesus Christ. If the world hates Him it will also hate those who follow Him, those who think and act as He does. Jesus is the Light of the world, and He calls His servants to reflect His light ("You are the light of the world," Matt 5:14). If we do that the world will hate us. In John 3:20, we read, "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." Jesus states it clearly in John 15:18, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you."

#### **ILLUSTRATION: SUFFERING FOR CHRIST.**

In the days of the Roman Emperor Nero, there lived and served him a band of soldiers known as the "Emperor's Wrestlers." Fine, stalwart men they were, picked from the best and the bravest of the land, recruited from the great athletes of the Roman amphitheater.

In the great amphitheater they upheld the arms of the emperor against all challengers. Before each contest they stood before the emperor's throne. Then through the courts of Rome rang the cry: "We, the wrestlers, wrestling for thee, O Emperor, to win for thee the victory and from thee, the victor's crown."

When the great Roman army was sent to fight in Gaul, no soldiers were braver or more loyal than this band of wrestlers led by their centurion Vespasian. But news reached Nero that many Roman soldiers had accepted the Christian faith. Therefore, this decree was dispatched to the centurion Vespasian; "If there be any among your soldiers who cling to the faith of the Christian, they must die!"

The decree was received in the dead of winter. The soldiers were camped on the shore of a frozen inland lake. It was with sinking heart that Vespasian, the centurion, read the emperor's message.

Vespasian called the soldiers together and asked: "Are there any among you who cling to the faith of the Christian? If so, let him step forward!" Forty wrestlers instantly stepped forward two paces,

respectfully saluted, and stood at attention. Vespasian paused. He had not expected so many, nor such select ones. "Until sundown I shall await your answer," said Vespasian. Sundown came. Again the question was asked. Again the forty wrestlers stepped forward.

Vespasian pleaded with them long and earnestly without prevailing upon a single man to deny his Lord. Finally he said, "The decree of the emperor must be obeyed, but I am not willing that your comrades should shed your blood. I order you to march out upon the lake of ice, and I shall leave you there to the mercy of the elements."

The forty wrestlers were stripped and then, falling into columns of four, marched toward the center of the lake of ice. As they marched they broke into the chant of the arena: "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ, to win for Thee the victory and from Thee, the victor's crown!" Through the night Vespasian stood by his campfire and watched. As he waited through the long night, there came to him fainter and fainter the wrestlers' song.

As morning drew near one figure, overcome by exposure, crept quietly toward the fire; in the extremity of his suffering he had renounced his Lord. Faintly but clearly from the darkness came the song: "Thirty-nine wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ, to win for Thee the victory and from Thee, the victor's crown!"

Vespasian looked at the figure drawing close to the fire. Perhaps he saw eternal light shining there toward the center of the lake. Who can say? But off came his helmet and clothing, and he sprang upon the ice, crying, "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ, to win for Thee the victory and from Thee, the victor's crown!"<sup>xliv</sup>

**THE WRITER'S PRAYER:** Oh, God, how ashamed I am when I read of such commitment to Jesus and think how little I have suffered for You. The Christian life is a life filled with risk, and I have really not risked that much for You. Consequently, Satan has fired only pellets at me while he was firing cannons and rockets at those who have served you more faithfully and courageously. Father, forgive me and do as you will with me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**1:30 - CONFLICT.** The idea is that of an athletic, or gladiatorial contest as in 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7. The Philippians had seen Paul suffer (Acts 16:19-40; 1 Thes. 2:2) just as they now hear about his suffering in Rome. He has suffered at the hands of the lost, and he has suffered at the hands of those who professed to be believers. Nothing hurts the cause of Christ more than contention and self-seeking among God's people. But this kind of conflict will continue as long as there are those among us who love preeminence (as Diotrephes in III John). I have paused often at my health club to visit with a black minister I have known for several years. One day vented his frustration with those who are always willing for you to "call on them to do something around the church." "But," he added with emphasis, "you had better call their name before the service is over!" His point was that they were willing to do the work as long as they received recognition for it.

There are those who, if you do not praise them they get their feathers ruffled, but if you do, others resent it.

I once tried to understand why I could not please a certain church member. I said to a friend, "I try to be courteous, I listen to him, I visit him, and show every consideration I can without compromising the Gospel." The friend replied, "What you don't understand is that he will never be pleased until you call his name in a service and praise him before the congregation." After some reflection, I realized the friend was probably right. I also concluded that this man would never be pleased with me.

As long as the church is in the world there will be conflict. We can expect conflict from two sources. Conflict from without comes from outside the church (Communism, Islam, ACLU, abortionists, and those who are trying to confine the influence of Christianity to the home and the church building). Conflict from within may come either from within the local church, the denomination, or within Christendom in general (liberalism, fundamentalism, political skirmishes over moral and social issues, or basic doctrines such as Calvinism or Eschatology). Those conflicts that come from outside sources are often more easily identified and resisted. Those from within are often not dealt with, even if they are identified. Why?

The problem may well increase as humanists and New Agers hawk self-love and self-worth; and as social scientists, including Christians, continue to proclaim the gospel of self-esteem over the Gospel of Christ-esteem. Advocates of New Age and humanistic philosophies are creating a self-centered, self-loving, self-serving generation that knows nothing of the meekness, humility and gentleness of the Gospel Jesus proclaimed. This is having an impact on the church today. The influence of this philosophy may be a very serious problem in the future.

The Bible portrays man as he is - as he should see himself. For the value God places on man, see Genesis 1 and 2 and Psalm 8. But modern man has taken man (or human kind) far beyond that. In fact, humanism dethrones God and enthrones man in the human intellect and volition. Jay Adams, in his book *The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love, Self-Image*, deals with the problem and some answers to it. Commenting on Romans 12:3, he notes that the operative part of the verse literally reads, "...not to be high-minded above that which he ought to be minded, but to be so minded as to be sober minded."<sup>xlv</sup>

Adams touched on a theme that has disturbed many evangelicals, and that is the blending of what some call pop-psychology and Christianity. David Hagopian and Douglas Wilson, in *Beyond Promises*, warn of the danger of what I would call an unholy wedlock between pop-psychology and the Gospel. They quote William Kilpatrick, educational psychologist at Boston College, who writes that the church's assimilation of modern psychology represents

a case of a confused and conciliatory Christianity willing to lop off limbs from the Body of Christ in order to fit it to a Procrustean bed of psychology. Although there is room for some accommodation between Christianity and psychology, there are some areas where it is

clearly a matter of either/or. Either the psychologist is right or the Christian is right. Both can't be.

In such cases, attempts to reconcile Christianity to psychology will actually have the effect of undermining the Christian point of view.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Hagopian and Wilson summarize:

Like it or not, the true gospel and pop psychology cannot cohabit without some compromise and without eventually conceiving and giving birth to the illegitimate child of the psychologized gospel. That child has grown and is running amok in the church today.<sup>xlvii</sup>

# CHAPTER TWO

## Christ, Our Model in Humility

Humility and unity - both are elementary in the Christian's spiritual growth. High value is placed upon both, because they honor the Lord and bless His church. The humility of Jesus Christ is our example, and that is an example He expects us to imitate. Only in humility will there be unity in the church, the body of Christ. Sound doctrine is a key to unity. Love is essential to unity. But without humility true unity will never be realized. Genuine humility cannot be affected and true unity cannot be faked. There are people who claim to love one another who, at best, only tolerate each other; just as there are churches that claim unity because they no longer talk about the things that divide the people. But nothing is more obvious than an affected humility. A humble person is not likely to write a book on *My Humility and How I Obtained It*. Humility does not call attention to itself but exalts Christ and edifies His church.

In 2:1-4 we see some of the causes of disunity. One of the dangers which threatened the Philippian Church was the danger of disunity. There is a very real sense in which this is a danger to every healthy church. Sometimes very sincere people who are eager to promote their own plans or programs encounter other very sincere people who are just as enthusiastically promoting different plans and programs. And the greater the enthusiasm, the greater the danger that they will find themselves in opposition to each other. This is perfectly natural, and there is no problem to this point. The next move will determine whether there will be unity or disunity in the church. Paul hopes this kind of conflict and the disunity it can bring can be avoided. Illustrations abound that prove this is still a problem in the church.

**2:1- IF ANY.** Here we have a fourfold appeal, each beginning with the words, "if any." There are four reasons why the members of the church should live in harmony. "If" is not hypothetical, but factual. This could be translated, "since," or "in view of the fact." Paul uses four conditional phrases in this verse - all of the first class, assuming the condition to be true. The condition of the first class always assumes the statement to be true, so "if" here does not imply doubt; it states a fact.

**ENCOURAGEMENT IN CHRIST.** The NKJV follows the KJV, "consolation"; the NAS and NIV render it "encouragement." If they had experienced the gentle encouragement of Jesus Christ (or, in view of the fact that they had - condition of the first class), then their experience should challenge them to live together in a state of harmony. What He has done for us should be our incentive for peaceful living.

**CONSOLATION OF LOVE.** The NKJV has "if any comfort of love." If (since) the love of God had been truly shed abroad in their hearts, it would promote harmony among the members. God's love for us is the highest incentive for our loving Him and for our loving one another. The love of God compels us to live together in a spirit of unity and harmony.

The united people of God gain courage and comfort from Christ, live in fellowship with the Spirit, and reflect the church's unity through love, compassion, and common attitudes and goals.<sup>xlviii</sup>

**FELLOWSHIP OF THE SPIRIT.** The word translated “fellowship” means partnership, not cookies and Cokes after church on Sunday night. It denotes mutual participation in something. This is a partnership in the Holy Spirit and the first fruit of the Spirit within us is love (Gal. 5:22). If (since) they (Christians) had known something of the communion of the Holy Spirit, they should be willing to walk in the fellowship of the Spirit.

**AFFECTION AND COMPASSION.** Many are more familiar with the KJV: "any bowels of mercies." The word translated “bowels” points to the seat of the emotions, the inward parts, the heart. The word rendered “compassion” denotes tender mercies. Paul seems to be saying, "if there is anything to your Christian experience, then there is an impulse of sympathy for others."<sup>xlix</sup> He is going beneath the surface of the mere shallow, superficial appeal so common today. He calls upon all that is tender and compassionate in their new nature to come now to the front and develop unity among them.

**2:2 - MAKE MY JOY COMPLETE.** The NKJV has, “Fulfill my joy.” "Fill full" is the idea. Paul's cup of joy will be full if the Philippians would “work together harmoniously and clear up their petty quarrels. He particularly had in mind the division caused by two women, Euodia and Syntyche (4:2).”<sup>1</sup> His joy would be complete if they would keep on having unity of thought and feeling. Paul is saying, “You have caused my heart to rejoice before (1:4), now fill my cup of rejoicing to the brim.” He gives a fourfold approach. (1) “Being of the same mind” (The NIV has “be like-minded”; the NKJV, “of one mind”); (2) "Having the same love" (NKJV); (3) "Being of one accord" (“united in spirit,” NAS); (4) "Of one mind" (“intent on one purpose,” NAS). "Mind" is used five times in four verses. The emphasis is not so much upon intellectual apprehension as upon one's mental attitude. The hearts of believers in every local church should be knit together with the right attitude (being of one accord in love and humility). If you want to make your pastor's joy complete, love God and humble yourself before Him first; then worship and serve Him in a spirit of humility and unity.

**LOVE.** The word Paul uses (*agapay*) is a mental attitude type of love, a love that can be commanded because it can be controlled and directed by the mind (under the influence of the Holy Spirit). This means that we must make some serious decisions about others with whom we worship and serve. We must cultivate this mental attitude love that will lead us to act rather than react, even when it means forgoing our rights and privileges for the good of the church. This is the cure for disunity. Barclay notes that Paul lays down five appeals to prevent disunity.

1. The fact that we are all in Christ should keep us in unity with one another.
2. The power of Christian love will keep us in unity with one another. Christian love is that unconquered benevolence and good-will which will never know bitterness, and which will never seek anything but the good of others.

3. The fact that they share in the Holy Spirit must keep Christians from disunity. The Holy Spirit binds man to God (and man to man).
4. Human pity and compassion should keep men from disunity. Disunity violates the very structure and character of Christian life.
5. Paul's last appeal is personal. There can be no happiness for him as long as he knows there is disunity in the church. The church at Philippi was very dear to the Apostle. It seems to have been his favorite church.<sup>li</sup>

**BEING OF ONE ACCORD.** Harmonious in soul and spirit is the idea. We should be in tune with Christ and in tune with each other. This reminds us of the attitude of the first believers in Jerusalem: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1, KJV). Following Pentecost, Luke tells us, "They, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46). Warren Wiersbe (*Be Hopeful*, p. 53) has written, "Unity does not eliminate diversity. The absence of diversity is not unity; it is uniformity, and uniformity is dull. It is fine when the choir sings in unison, but I prefer that they sing in harmony."<sup>lii</sup>

#### **ILLUSTRATION: UNITY.**

On the Sierra Nevada mountains of Northern California reside the largest trees in the world. The huge sequoias tower almost 300 feet into the sky. The largest tree has a circumference at its base of 101 feet. Botanists now know that some of the biggest sequoias are almost 4,000 years old -- which means that at the time of Christ, they were already more than 100 feet tall! But even these giants wouldn't be able to stand against the California winds without a strong root system. Not only do their roots sink into the soil, they intertwine around the roots of other trees. The parallel between well-rooted trees and well-rooted believers is obvious. We are part of the body of Christ and we all need each other.<sup>liii</sup>

**OF ONE MIND.** Unity of thought and harmony in feelings is desired. "It is not the difference of viewpoint that makes for disunity among us, but rather the wrong attitude toward others whose viewpoint differs from our own."<sup>liv</sup> We need to try to see our brother's problems from his viewpoint. If you are intolerant of the views of others, you honor Satan, not Christ. We also need to learn to disagree agreeably. Unfortunately, many church members do not seem to be able to do anything agreeably. Insecurity may lead us to react rather than relate to those with different views. Insecure people are often intimidated and may often try to intimidate others.

I learned a valuable lesson in a Sociology class at Mississippi College from Dr. R. R. Pearce. During a very heated debate (which he seemed to be enjoying) he suddenly turned to the chalk

board and wrote two words: "Heat" and "Light." After a minute or two we were all silently looking at those two words. He calmly asked, "Now what are you throwing on the subject, heat or light?" Light illuminates. What does heat do? A rule of thumb in any discussion might well be that when you begin throwing more heat than light on the subject, you should find a good way to bring the debate to a peaceful conclusion.

**2:3 - DO NOTHING FROM SELFISHNESS.** "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves." The NKJV has "selfish ambition"; the KJV, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory." Vainglory is empty pride. "Nothing is less suited to a follower of the meek and lowly Son of Man than a contentious spirit, and a vainglorious bearing."<sup>lv</sup> Vainglory is the desire for empty glory. There is always the danger that people may work, not to advance the Kingdom of God, but to advance themselves. A me-first, selfish attitude is an ugly thing as the following illustration shows.

### **ILLUSTRATION: SELFISHNESS.**

A cold wind was howling and a chilling rain was beating down when the telephone rang in the home of a doctor. The caller said that his wife needed urgent medical attention. The doctor was understanding. "I'll be glad to come, but my car is being repaired," he said. "Could you come and get me?" There was indignation at the other end of the phone as an angry voice sputtered, "What, in this weather?"<sup>lvi</sup>

God desires unity in His church, and nothing destroys unity more quickly than vainglory, or selfish ambition. There are those who use the church to promote themselves, and when they do they do not deceive many people. The result is, almost without exception, disunity. Even if it does not promote open disunity, it is fruitless. Many professional entertainers have made the statement that they got their start singing in a church choir. But, if their music today glorifies Satan more than Christ, for whom were they singing back then? Is it possible that at least some of them were motivated by vainglory, or empty pride?

Self-worth, self-love, and self-esteem have received a lot of overtime from educators and social scientists for several decades. Too little has been written about the problem of too much self-esteem or self-love. J. B. Phillips said, "Christ regarded the self-loving, self-regarding, self-seeking spirit as the direct antithesis of real living. His two fundamental rules for life were that "love-energy," instead of being turned in on itself, should go out first to God and then to other people."<sup>lvii</sup>

**HUMILITY.** The KJV reads, "in lowliness of mind." This is genuine humility. There is a wonderful little book by Andrew Murray (*Humility: The Beauty of Holiness*, Christian Literature Crusade, Fort Washington, PA, ) that would be profitable reading on this subject. I have my mother's copy of the book, but before I had the book, I had in my mother one the most unforgettable examples of humility and holiness I have ever seen. A brief prayer appears on the title page:

Lord Jesus! May our Holiness be perfect Humility  
Let Thy perfect Humility be our Holiness!

The following quotes are but a few of those my late mother had underlined in Andrew Murray's book.

Humility, the place of entire dependence on God, is, from the very nature of things, the first duty and the highest virtue of the creature, and the root of every virtue.

And so pride, or the loss of this humility, is the root of every sin and evil.<sup>lviii</sup>

Humility is the only soil in which the graces root; the lack of humility is the sufficient explanation of every defect and failure. Humility is not so much a grace or virtue along with others; it is the root of all, because it alone takes the right attitude before God, and allows Him as God to do all.<sup>lix</sup>

Here we have the root and nature of true humility. It is because this is not understood or sought after, that our humility is so superficial and so feeble.<sup>lx</sup>

The root of all virtue and grace, of all faith and acceptable worship, is that we know that we have nothing but what we receive, and bow in deepest humility to wait upon God for it.<sup>lxi</sup>

O brethren! Let us beware. Unless we make, with each advance in what we think holiness, the increase of humility our study, we may find that we have been delighting in beautiful thoughts and feelings, in solemn acts of consecration and faith, while the only sure mark of the presence of God, the disappearance of self, was all the time wanting. Come and let us flee to Jesus, and hide ourselves in Him until we be clothed upon with His Humility. That alone is our holiness.<sup>lxii</sup>

At no time and under no condition should believers strive among themselves (2 Tim. 2:24). True unity will be destroyed when self-esteem prevails rather than a high esteem for others. Whenever the dominant note in any Christian group or body is selflessness and self-forgetfulness, unity will take the place of disunity. There is one big problem here for the modern believer. The world simply does not think like that. Humanism, the religion of the masses, sees high self-esteem as a cardinal virtue and low self-esteem as the greatest sin of society. Robert Schuller considers low self-esteem to be man's most serious sin. B.F. Skinner's behavior modification place great value on raising one's self-esteem. Charles Colson and Carl F. H. Henry are among a host of writers who warn of the dangers involved in self-esteem theology. High self-esteem, self-love, and self-worth

are attitudes far removed from the humility of which Andrew Murray wrote and from the attitude set forth by divine command and holy example in the Bible.

This is not a new problem - there were lovers of self in Paul's day (2 Tim. 3:1-4) as there are today. They were a threat to unity then as they are today, but it may be even more acute today than in that time, if only because Humanism has so well defined this ungodly gospel and refined the propagation of it.

Christian humility must never be limited to the church building, worship or other church ministries. Bob Moore was a deacon when I was pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church, Nederland, Texas. Bob placed great value in honesty and often shared with me some story or anecdote about personal integrity. He gave me a special appreciation for illustrations of honesty. Over the years I have come to appreciate stories about humility as much as those illustrating honesty. It amazes me how many great people are also humble people. In my book, humility is a prerequisite to greatness. That is why I am so impressed with stories about some of our Founding Fathers (and Mothers!).

The contrast between James Madison and some modern politicians is striking. Madison was called the "Father of the Constitution. He was the youngest member of the Continental Congress, signer of the Declaration of Independence, member of the Constitutional Convention and main author of the Bill of Rights, and he kept the best notes of anyone at the convention.<sup>lxiii</sup> He was Secretary of State and chief advisor to President Jefferson, and two-term President of the United States. William Pierce, a Georgia delegate to the convention said of Madison: "Of the affairs of the United States, he perhaps has the most correct knowledge of, of any Man in the Union... Mr. Madison is about 37 years of age [actually 36], a Gentleman of great modesty, - with a remarkably sweet temper."<sup>lxiv</sup>

It often strikes me as intriguing that most of those who do a lot of boasting have every reason to be humble, while those who have accomplished many noteworthy things are often the most humble among us. Can you imagine a man having the best knowledge of the United States of any one in the country - at age 36? That is almost as amazing as his humility in light of all his accomplishments. What was the great influence in his life? It was his faith in God and his study of the Bible in the home and in the Episcopal church in his youth, in the College of New Jersey (Presbyterian) where he received the personal attention of Dr. John Witherspoon. For a number of years he prepared for the ministry (he was considered a lay-theologian). While the Lord obviously led him in a different direction, the Christian principles learned as a young man influenced his life and his view of law and government. There were those who thought him better suited for the pulpit than politics.

Madison's humility and meekness did not stem from a faint heart. He knew how to fight for what he believed was right. He was uncompromising on the issue of freedom of religion. He grew up in colonial Virginia where the Episcopal church was the established church and all citizens were taxed to support the state church. "As a youth Madison had heard Baptist clergymen preaching from their jail cells, and the spectacle remained firmly implanted in his mind. His years under Rev. Witherspoon at the College of New Jersey strengthened his belief in religious freedom.<sup>lxv</sup> In 1774 he

wrote his college friend William Bradford that the

“Diabolical Hell conceived principle of persecution rages among some and to their eternal Infamy the Clergy can furnish their Quota of Imps for such business.” He went on to say that “There are at this [time] in the adjacent county [probably Culpepper County] not less than 5 or 6 well meaning men in close Goal (jail) for publishing their religious Sentiments which in the main are very orthodox.” Note that Madison’s outrage at the fact of persecution, and also his astonishment that those being persecuted are in the main “very orthodox.” Mr Madison knew what was orthodox and what was not and he considered it outrageous that the orthodox were being persecuted.<sup>lxvi</sup>

There is little doubt that God was preparing Madison for that visit from John Leland and other Baptists who urged him to help support the principles of religious freedom. When many wanted a Bill of Rights, it was James Madison who prepared the first draft of the First Amendment with a provision for religious liberty.

Thankfully, all the good examples of humility are not in another century. In 1978, I attended a colloquy at Luther Rice Seminary when the main campus was still in Jacksonville, Florida (it is now in the Atlanta area). The colloquy was required of Doctor of Ministry students for graduation. John’s sixth grade teacher and his principal thought it would be a good experience for him, so with daily assignments in hand he joined me for the week. West Side Baptist Church, Bastrop, Louisiana generously paid most of my expenses for my Doctor of Ministry program. Deacon Perry Talley and his wife, Helen, drove Becky and Mark to Jacksonville for my graduation.

I met and introduced my family to some very impressive people while I was there. Among them were some future denominational leaders (Larry Lewis would become President of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention; Fred Lowrey would become President of the Louisiana Baptist Convention). Dr. Kenneth Meyer, President of Trinity Evangelical Seminary, chose Luther Rice, the seminary that pioneered the Doctor of Ministry program, both to earn a degree and to learn how to implement the program at Trinity. Many others would go on to make an immeasurable contribution to the Lord’s work, including Spiros Zodhiates, who would continue to minister to ministers through *Pulpit Helps*; and General Jerry Curry, who would seek to strengthen the ministry of his chaplains where he was commanding officer at the U. S. Air Force base in Colorado Springs.

During the week I met another man whom I will never forget. I heard him speak briefly, and noted with interest the respect given him by those who knew him, including President Robert Witty and faculty members. But little did I realize the impression it would make when I finally had an opportunity to meet him. His name was Stephen Olford. I had met brilliant people, humble people, and powerful people before, but as I shook hands with Stephen Olford, he looked me in the eye, smiled and spoke, and then we visited for a few minutes. I had the overwhelming impression that at

that moment I was looking into the eyes of a person with a keen intellect, genuine humility and meekness, and great courage and power - all in one person. In time I would discover that I shared that impression with evangelists, missionaries, and pastors around the world.

Humility and power are not mutually exclusive; meekness does not denote weakness. The world places great value on power and self-sufficiency, but in spiritual matters, the key to real power is in humility. "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you" (James 4:10).

**REGARD ONE ANOTHER.** "Let each esteem others better than himself" (NKJV). Paul wrote to the Roman church, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another" (Romans 12:10, NKJV). In all the Old Testament there is no better example of this attitude than that of Jonathan toward David. It is refreshing to see this attitude in our society. My youngest brother, Mike, and his wife, Susan, have four children, Jim, Rachel, and twins, Will and Joanna. Even when they were still in highchairs, Joanna was determined that no visitor overlook Will. She was a beautiful child and people were naturally attracted to her, but when people began to talk with her, she invariably pointed to her twin brother and said, "Will." When you played with Will she sat watching quietly - and approvingly. That is an unusual attitude even for a very small girl toward her twin brother, but that is not natural for people in general. The attitude Paul has in mind is a supernatural attitude - one nurtured by the Holy Spirit for the edification of the Body of Christ. It is expressed by Paul in his letter to the church at Rome, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor" (Rom. 12:10).

The Second Great Commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39, NKJV), is not first and foremost a command to love yourself. It is a command to love others. It assumes that you will love yourself. The First Great Commandment (to love God) looks up and the Second great Commandment looks out to others.

**2:4 - DO NOT LOOK.** "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." To "look" denotes aim or goal. "The church was apparently evidencing petty jealousies among members over honors and rewards. Paul commends humility and the right disposition that Christ Himself demonstrated and wants to give to His followers (v. 5)."<sup>lxvii</sup> True believers are not constantly keeping an eye out for number one, but looking out for the good of others. A keynote of 2:1-4 is the word "others," Jesus came and suffered and bled and died for others. He lived for others. He died for others. He knew no selfishness. Devotion to others characterized His whole life. True discipleship focuses on others, their needs, their interests, and their blessings.

The selfish, self-seeking person looks out for himself. The Christian is exhorted to look not on his own interests, but on the interests of others. For the sake of unity, Strauss says, "It is a part of our fallen human nature to suppose that life's greatest happiness can be found in man's satisfying his own desires."<sup>lxviii</sup> An application of this passage is needed in the church today.

Our interests should be bound up in the welfare of others. Unfortunately, we too often get caught up in the values of the world and try to set ourselves apart from others. Our philosophy is

often exclusive, rather than inclusive. We want new members if they are in our socioeconomic group. We do not try to reach some people because "they are not our kind of people." We can tell by the house they build, the car they drive, and the clothes they wear. Many Americans today are very conscious of designer clothes. Any teenager can tell you what brand of tennis shoe their friends wear. They "wouldn't be caught dead" in the wrong tennis shoe. How does a teenaged boy feel when he attends a Sunday School "fellowship" and observes that all the other boys present are wearing designer jeans, very expensive tennis shoes, and shirts with the right logo, while he is wearing his big brother's hand-me-downs with the wrong emblem on the shirt and jeans, and the wrong name on the shoes? Girls may be even more sensitive to this kind of situation. This, however, is not just a youth problem. How sensitive are you to what your neighbor drives? Or wears?

There are some church members who are not into material things as much as others. Their game is power, influence, or popularity. It might profit some long-time church members to be forced to move to another community for two years and then move on to another community and try to fit into the fellowship of a new church. They would possibly be more sensitive to new members coming into their church. We want new members and we want their money - nickels and noses - but not necessarily their opinions. How quickly we tire of the statement, "We did it differently in the last church we attended."

## **2:5-8 - CHRIST EMPTIED HIMSELF**

Barclay puts verses 5-11 together under the title, "Humility and Exaltation." regardless of the outline, it is always to be remembered that when Paul thought and spoke about Jesus, his interest and his aim were never primarily intellectual or speculative; they were always practical. To Paul, theology and action were always bound together.

Bible students recognize the distinctive nature of this passage in Paul's letter to the Philippian church. Commentaries and study Bibles identify this passage on the humility of Christ as the high mark of the epistle.

Unlike the informal, conversational style of the rest of the letter, verses 5-11 are highly polished. It is also noteworthy in that they convey in a few verses Paul's conception of the uniqueness of the person and work of Christ. Paul's point is that the disposition, the temper, of church members ought always to be that of Christ's.<sup>lxix</sup>

## **COMPARING ADAM AND CHRIST**

## ADAM

Created in the image of God

Aspired to be as God

Aspired to a reputation.

Refused to be God's Servant.

Sought to be like God.

Adam exalted himself.

Adam became disobedient unto death.

Adam was condemned and disgraced.

## CHRIST

The very essence of God

Did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.

Did not aspire to a reputation.

Took upon Himself the role of bond-servant.

Came in the likeness of man.

Jesus humbled Himself.

Jesus became obedient to the point of death.

Jesus was highly exalted by the Father.

*Based on a similar chart in the Believer's Study Bible.*

"These seven verses (5-11) form one of the most sublime and majestic paragraphs on the Person of Jesus Christ to be found anywhere."<sup>lxx</sup> Paul has been pleading for humility. Now he moves from the plea to the Pattern. Christ is our pattern. "Every divinely-ordered virtue enjoined upon God's children is exhibited in the Man, Christ Jesus our Lord."<sup>lxxi</sup>

**2:5 - HAVE THIS ATTITUDE.** The NKJV reads, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus," while the NAS has, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." The great Southern Baptist scholar, A. T. Robertson, renders it literally, "Keep on thinking this in you which was also in Christ Jesus."<sup>lxxii</sup> Paul presents Jesus as the supreme example of humility and pleads for humility on the part of the Philippians as the only way to approach God and the only way to secure unity. This is one of the richest passages in the New Testament on humility. The aim was to persuade the Philippians to live a life in which disunity, discord, and personal ambition were dead.

It must be stressed, and we are in no danger of overstating the point, it is not a common feeling or experience that brings this unity to the church. Common agreement on some issue, no matter how noble it might be, is not key to unity. As shocking as it may be to some Christians, love is not what holds us together. Human emotions, like human commitments, are at best less than perfect and subject to variation. God's Word is perfect and it never changes. The secret of unity in

the church is a humble commitment to revealed truth, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

"Mind" (NKJV) does not mean that we are to strive for intellectual perfection. We are asked to have in us the same moral attitude which was in Christ. His life on earth was the highest example of selflessness, self-forgetfulness, and concern for others the world has ever known. We must follow His example. Failure to do so is very costly to the individual and to the local church.

Here we also find the key to the spiritual life, or the Spirit-filled life. It is not in ecstatic experiences, speaking in other tongues, or dropping religious clichés all through the day. No condemnation is made here of any of the above practices. The point this writer is making is simply this: These things will not produce spirituality, nor is either proof of it. The genuinely spiritual person is the one who keeps on thinking as Jesus thinks. When you begin to think as He thinks, you will begin to live as He lived. His attitudes will be your attitudes. His goals will be your goals, His methods, your methods. For that reason, any study of the wonderful Spirit-filled life should begin here, but I do not know that I have ever heard any of those who major on supernatural phenomena include this attitude as a pre-requisite to the Spirit-filled life.

#### **ILLUSTRATION: THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE.**

A real Christian is an odd number, anyway. He feels supreme love for One whom he has never seen; talks familiarly every day to Someone he cannot see; expects to go to heaven on the virtue of Another; empties himself in order to be full; admits he is wrong so he can be declared right; goes down in order to get up; is strongest when he is weakest; richest when he is poorest and happiest when he feels the worst. He dies so he can live; forsakes in order to have; gives away so he can keep; sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, and knows that which passeth knowledge - A.W. Tozer.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

**2:6 - HE EXISTED.** The NAS reads, "who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." Jesus exists from (for) eternity in the form of God. This is a declaration of true deity. The richness of this passage is reflected in the wealth of comments on it in the commentaries. Spiros Zodhiates notes that "This passage concerns the deity of Jesus Christ prior to His incarnation and continuing during His sojourn on earth as the God-man."<sup>lxxiv</sup>

The Trinity is a difficult (if not impossible) subject to define. It is much easier to accept than to explain. In fact, many do not like the term Trinity. They point out that the Scripture does not use the word. Many of these people hold a unitary theory of God. Some who hold this position see God as one in essence and in Person. That is, during the Old Testament period He is the Father; during the earthly ministry of Jesus He is Christ; and at Pentecost He became the Holy Spirit.

Others would have a problem applying this interpretation to the baptism of Jesus when the Son was baptized, the Spirit descended, and the Father spoke. How do we reconcile this view with

references to Jesus praying to the Father and promising to send the Holy Spirit? Or, to Jesus' statement, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28)?

Zodhiates sees two main considerations in this passage. First, there is the consideration that Christ is equal with the Father (which Phil. 2:6 states). John 10:30 clearly teaches this: "I and My Father are one." Then there seems to be the teaching that Christ is not really equal with the Father. Jesus stated, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). He also said in Matthew 24:36, "Of that day and hour knoweth no man; no, not angels in heaven, but my Father only."

Zodhiates comments on John 10:30, "I and My Father are one." He says, "The word 'one' in the Greek is *hen* . . . , which is in the neuter gender and which does not mean one person, but one in essence, power, and quality."<sup>lxxv</sup> So, Zodhiates agrees with those who see the Father and Son as two in personality, but one in essence, power, quality, action, nature, character, and purpose.

**IN THE FORM OF GOD.** This denotes the essential attributes of God. The Bible reveals that the Father and the Son are distinct personalities in the Godhead - two in personalities but one in essence, with all the attributes of one applying to the other. Robertson states:

In the preincarnate state Christ possessed the attributes of God and so appeared to those who saw Him. Here we have another clear statement of the deity of Christ. No creature could exist in the form of God. The first man aspired to be as God and fell. The Second Man came down from heaven "from Godhead's fullest glory, down to Calvary's depth of woe."<sup>lxxvi</sup>

Our conclusion must be that Jesus Christ is co-eternal and co-existent with the Father. He is One with the Father. This message is still critical. Walter Martin writes:

The deity of Jesus Christ is one of the corner stones of Christianity, and as such has been attacked more vigorously throughout the ages than any other single doctrine of the Christian faith. Adhering to the old Arian heresy . . . many individuals and all cults steadfastly deny the equality of Jesus Christ with God the Father, and hence the Triune Deity.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

A clear understanding of this doctrine is essential to every Christian witness. It is especially important in dealing with the many cults that prey on church members. The New Age Movements are challenging the church at this very point. The name New Age is not used in connection with these various movements as much today as it was in the eighties, but they are still gaining momentum, often under the current designation, Post-Modernism. Anyone who knows the Christ of the Bible will not be deceived by the New Age Christ. They are not one and the same!

There have always been those who dismissed the New Age Movements as insignificant, just as there are those who think of them as one movement. New Age is an umbrella term under which

you might find numerous groups, each with its own agenda. New Age or Post-Modern spirituality, the influence of eastern mysticism, and a commitment to globalism are a few of the things they might have in common. They may, however, be very different in method and commitment. It would be a mistake to dismiss these movements under the assumption that those who warn us about them are a bunch of wild-eyed fanatics with yet another conspiracy theory. Ronald Bailey (“*Who is Maurice Strong?*”, *National Review*, Sept. 1, 1997, Vol. XLIX, NO. 16) writes about a man whose 200,000 acre Baca ranch in Colorado has been turned into a “New Age” center run by his wife, Hanne. While the center is attracting Zen and Tibetan Buddhist monks, his agenda is quite different. Writes Bailey:

“The survival of civilization in something like its present form might depend significantly on the efforts of a single man,” declared *The New Yorker*. *The New York Times* hailed that man as the “Custodian of the Planet.” He is perpetually on the short list of candidates for the Secretary General of the United Nations. This lofty eminence? Maurice Strong, of course. Never heard of him? Well, you should have. Militia members are famously worried that black helicopters are practicing maneuvers with blue-helmeted troops in a plot to take over America. But the actual peril is more subtle. A small cadre of obscure international bureaucrats are hard at work devising a system of ‘global government’ that is slowly gaining control over ordinary Americans’ lives. Maurice Strong, a 68-year-old Canadian, is the ‘indispensable man’ at the center of this creeping UN power grab.<sup>lxviii</sup>

Strong, who was asked by UN Secretary General U Thant to organize the first Earth Summit, is among those who think the UN should have the authority to tax Americans to support the ambitious global policies of the UN. Yellowstone has been designated a “World Heritage Site” by the World Heritage Committee (UNESCO). A group of environmentalists asked the committee to come to Yellowstone to hold public hearings.<sup>lxix</sup> Their purpose? To save “Mother Earth.” After all, if you believe in monism (all is one and one is all), you are one with the universe. To many New Agers, the universe is god - and so are you! Some even proclaim, “You are your own Christ,” or “You are god.”

Philippians 2:6 is a statement of the fact of Christ's deity. The question may be asked, was He really God, or was He like God? Deity was always a part of His very being. See John 1:1ff; 8:58; 1 Tim. 3:16. He was in "the form of God" before He took upon Himself "the form of a servant." "Form" does not refer to outward appearances, but to the very essence and nature of God in verse 6, and the very essence and nature of a "servant" in verse 8. The "form" indicates what He was; the "fashion," what He looked like.

**THOUGHT IT NOT ROBBERY.** This denotes a prize to be held onto rather than something to be captured. The idea is that the eternal Christ did not try to hold onto everything He had with the Father in Heaven before the Incarnation (which was His by right), but emptied Himself of all those

things that He might become human and pay the price for our sins. While on earth he humbled Himself in the presence of others rather than exploiting His relationship with the Father for some temporal advantage over them. The NRSV translates it “. . . though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as *something to be exploited*” (Italics added for emphasis).

**TO BE AN EQUAL WITH GOD.** Jesus is for all eternity equal with God. The Jews of His day understood Him clearly and sought to kill Him because He "said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18b). The Scripture is very clear: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1-2).

**2:7 - EMPTIED HIMSELF.** Jesus “emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.” The NKJV follows the Authorized Version - “but made Himself of no reputation.” “Emptied” denotes the fact that Jesus divested Himself of some of the attributes that were His in Heaven. But of what did He empty Himself? Certainly it was not of His divine nature. That would be impossible. He was still the Son of God. *Kenosis* is the Greek word translated "emptied Himself." The kenosis of Jesus Christ during His incarnation does not mean that He surrendered His essential attributes of deity. It does, however, mean that He took on the limitations of the flesh. “This involved a veiling of His preincarnate glory (John 17:5) and the voluntary non-use of some of His divine prerogatives during the time He was on earth (Matt. 24:36).<sup>lxxx</sup>

The word “form” is the same word we find in verse 6. He was fully God and fully man. He was as much God as if He had not been man at all, and He was as much man as if He had not been God at all. It may be incomprehensible, but it is also undeniable. To deny either the deity of Christ, or humanity of Christ demands that we deny the other. Both His humanity and His deity are irrefutable established, so to deny, or even minimize, either is to place the individual in opposition to the biblical doctrine of Jesus Christ.

This doctrine has been surrounded by controversy, but the picture is of one taking something from a full container, measure by measure, until it is completely empty. Robertson says:

He gave up his environment of glory. He took upon himself limitations of place (space) and of knowledge and of power, though still on earth retaining more of these than any mere man . . . It is hard to believe that Jesus limited himself by error of knowledge and certainly not by error of conduct. He was without sin though tempted as we are.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

Among the great characteristics of Jesus' life were humility, obedience, and self-renunciation. He did not desire to dominate. He wanted to serve (he washed His disciple's feet). He did not desire His own way, He desired the Father's way. His example is consistent with the New Testament which teaches that only the one who humbles himself will be exalted (Matt. 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14).

The self-renunciation of Jesus Christ brought to Him greater glory. Some day every creature will bow before Him. And it should certainly bring everyone in awe and wonder before Him today. Christian greatness and fellowship both depend on the renunciation of self, and are destroyed by the exaltation of self. "Selfishness, self-seeking and self-display destroy our likeness to Christ and our fellowship with each other."<sup>lxxxii</sup>

**THE FORM OF A BOND-SERVANT.** He took on the characteristic attributes of a bond-servant (same word for "form" as in vs. 6). He was as much man as though not God at all, and He was as much God as though not man at all. Remember that Paul has been pleading for lowliness of mind and humility of spirit among believers. He points to Jesus as our greatest example - "He emptied Himself . . ." (Vs. 7).

In the Incarnation, Christ divested Himself of something. But what? There is no mention of His abandoning any of the essential attributes of deity. There is no question that He divested Himself of some things (omnipresence, for example), but also retained some things (His basic attributes). "When He enrobed Himself in flesh and enslaved Himself for humanity, He laid aside certain rights as God the eternal Son, but of His deity, never!"<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

**IN THE LIKENESS OF MEN.** It was no imagined likeness, but a real likeness; no mere phantom humanity as the Docetic Gnostics claimed. Paul wrote to the Colossians that

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist (Col. 1:15-17).

He who is the "image of the invisible God," came "in the likeness of God." We must be very careful to detect any compromise of the Scriptural revelation of either the deity or the humanity of Jesus Christ. The first sign of a "Christian cult" is a group's identification of itself as "Christian," while minimizing in any way either the deity of Christ, or the humanity of Christ (as do Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses).

**2:8 - IN APPEARANCE.** "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." The KJV uses the words "in fashion," rather than "in appearance." Either points to Jesus' whole outward appearance, in which there was no difference between the Incarnate Son and other children of men. "It was the mode of His manifestation."<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

There is a contrast between what He is in Himself, and what He appeared to be in the eyes of men. It is a voluntary humiliation on the part of Christ, and for this reason Paul is pressing the example of Christ upon the Philippians; this supreme example of self-renunciation. The extent to

which He goes in self-humiliation and self-renunciation before the Father is seen as “increasingly He uses the words *not*, and *nothing* of Himself.”<sup>lxxxv</sup>

“The Son can do nothing of Himself” (John 5:19).

“I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 5:30).

“I do not receive glory from men” (John 5:41).

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

“My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me” (John 6:38).

“So Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me” (John 8:28).

**BECAME OBEDIENT UNTO DEATH.** This does not mean that He became subservient to death. He is and always will be the mighty victor over death. The Resurrection proved this for all time. The purpose of the Incarnation was to defeat, and ultimately destroy the angel of death (Heb. 2:14-15; Rev. 1:18). Death marked the ultimate point of obedience, the extent to which He would go to fulfill the purpose of the Father. “He chose a form of death reserved for slaves and criminals. He displayed humility and obedience to an extent that no other ever could display it. History has no parallel.”<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

**EVEN THE DEATH OF THE CROSS.** The cross was the most despicable form of death - that reserved for a criminal. This was indeed the bottom rung of the ladder - looking down from the throne of God to the cross. Jesus came all the way down from the throne of heaven to the most despised death of all, a condemned criminal on the accursed cross. Each step down brought Jesus into deeper humiliation and finally to death (from Glory to Golgotha), the most shameful death of all!

**2:9 - FOR THIS REASON.** This points to His voluntary self-emptying, His supreme humility. Because He was willing to empty Himself of His glory, take on the form of a human being, and suffer a cruel death on the cross for our sins, God raised Him and exalted Him.

**GOD ALSO HATH HIGHLY EXALTED HIM.** This is a glorious fulfillment of Psalm 110. As His humiliation was extreme, His exaltation is supreme. “Because of Christ's voluntary humiliation God lifted Him above or beyond the state of glory which He enjoyed before the incarnation.”<sup>lxxxvii</sup> What glory did Jesus have after the Ascension that He did not have before the Incarnation? His humanity. He returned to heaven as both Son of Man and Son of God. Another possibility is a title - Savior. He returned to Heaven as Savior, Redeemer, Intercessor.

It is interesting that the One Who humbled Himself is once again exalted, and that now His exaltation is extended to a larger sphere than before. If His humiliation is a mystery, His exaltation is possibly a greater one.

**A NAME WHICH IS ABOVE EVERY NAME.** What is the Name above every name? Jesus! Christ. Jesus Christ. Lord. The late Dr. R. G. Lee, often called "The Prince of Preachers," praise the name of Jesus in moving terms. Here is a sample:

He is Adam, Advocate, Anointed, Apostle, Author, Amen, Alpha,  
Ancient of Days.  
He is the Beginning, the Begotten, Beloved, Branch, Bread,  
Bridegroom, Bright and Morning Star.  
He is Elect, Ensign, Everlasting Father, Emmanuel.  
He is God, gift of God, Governor, Guide, Glorious Lord.  
He is the Life, the Light, Love, Lily, Lion, Lamb, Lawgiver, Living  
Stone, the Lord of glory.  
He is Messenger, Mediator, Master, Messiah, Mighty God, Mercy's  
paradox.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

**2:10 - AT THE NAME OF JESUS EVERY KNEE WILL BOW.** At no time in history has every knee bowed and every tongue confessed the Lordship of Jesus Christ. But the time is coming when "at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW" (capitalized by NAS translators). Only a small per cent of the human race has ever respected and revered that Name. It is more often blasphemed than revered in this world. More and more, the entertainment industry is making that holy name nothing more than a blasphemous epithet. But it is in that Name that remission of sin is preached to a lost world (Luke 24:47). It is in that Name that the children of God come to Him in prayer (John 15:7; 16:23).

On Sunday afternoon, August 2, 1998, I turned on the television and discovered that the Chicago Cubs were honoring the late Harry Cary, longtime broadcaster of Cubs games, His grandson, acting as Master of Ceremonies, greeted the fans and introduced a number of special guests, including the widow of the famous broadcaster. At one point the younger Cary turned to the fans and said, Can't you just picture my grandfather sitting back in Heaven in his rocking chair with a (beer) and saying, "Hey, Jesus (using the Spanish pronunciation), You gotta do something about them Cubs." I switched channels because I refuse to listen to anyone abuse and misuse the "Sweetest Name on Mortal Tongue."

We will remember that Jesus is His personal name; Christ, (meaning the Anointed) His title. There is coming a time when at the mention of Jesus' name, there will be universal acknowledgment of the majesty and power of Jesus, Who carries His human name in Heaven. This universal homage to Jesus is seen in Scripture where we read about what the Father

...brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills

all in all (Eph. 1:20-23).

And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever" (Rev. 5:13).

### **ILLUSTRATION: JESUS CHRIST.**

I am much struck with the contrast between Christ's mode of gathering people to himself and the way practiced by Alexander the Great, by Julius Caesar, and by myself. The people have been gathered to us by fear; they were gathered to Christ by love. Alexander, Caesar, and I have been men of war, but Christ was the Prince of Peace. The people have been driven to us; they were drawn to him. In our case there has been forced conscription; in his there was free obedience.

- Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821).<sup>lxxxix</sup>

Those who worship Jesus are responding to His love. Jesus won men's hearts, not by blasting them with power, but by showing love for them. One does not say, "I am battered into submission." He says, "Lord, I give myself to Thee." He joyfully sings, "All to Jesus I surrender, All to Him I freely give." This is a reasonable response to His love. "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my all."

**2:11 - CONFESS.** "(A)nd that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." People may flout Christ's authority on earth, but they will confess it in Heaven - and in hell. This is one of the most important verses in the Bible on this subject. The day is coming when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess. For countless numbers, this will not be a confession unto salvation. Every soul in hell will confess Him, but it will be too late to help them.

A day is coming when God's exalted Son will return, and when His mission is completed every creature will be in subjection to Him, the Mighty Sovereign. He will return as King of Kings, not Suffering Servant. "In our day multitudes kneel before Roman Catholic popes. In that day all popes and all their followers, all Jews and all Gentiles will bow and confess before Him Whom they have humiliated and dishonored."<sup>xc</sup> This does not point to a universal, willing worship of the Lord Jesus Christ by His servants. But all creation will bow before the mighty King Who is returning in power and glory.

A principle is clearly seen in the Scripture: "For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11, KJV). Christ manifested Himself in humility. The Father did the exalting. This is a lesson the Holy Spirit would impress upon the hearts of all who read this passage. Humble yourself before God and if He wants you to be exalted He will do it. If people focused less emphasis upon what they can get out of God, and more

emphasis upon what God gets out of them, then both God and the individual believer would find the relationship more beneficial.

If one believes God, there is coming a day when the Stephen Jay Goulds and Carl Sagans of this world will no longer make cynical remarks about creation or the Creator. Sagan scoffed, showing nothing but disdain for God and His Word in his lifetime, but when I heard the news of his death my first thought was that he knows better now. The Huxleys will no longer dethrone God and enthrone man in the human will and intellect. In that coming day, all atheists will all be former atheists! There will be no agnostics in Heaven or hell.

Paul Kurtz, in a televised debate with Norman Geisler on the John Ankerberg Show a number of years ago, made the statement, "If I had started reading the Bible earlier, I would be a stronger atheist than I am now." Kurtz at the time was editor of a magazine for Humanists. Murderers, rapists, homosexuals, anarchists, terrorists, pompous, arrogant egotists, and all those who just "never got around to it" will confess Christ. Is it any wonder that there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth? Is it any wonder that hell will be such a miserable place?

While we have time, we must confess Jesus. Confessing Jesus is a matter of great urgency. The unsaved should confess Him as Savior and Lord:

...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Rom. 10:9-10).

Confession of faith in Jesus Christ is required of all who would know God's great salvation. But that is not the end of it - every saved person must confess Him daily. Martin Luther said:

If I profess with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God, except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point (quoted in John Whitehead, *Religious Apartheid*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1994, p. 161).<sup>xci</sup>

The Bible is also very clear about any refusal to confess Jesus: "...every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God" (1 John 4:3). Furthermore, Jesus warned, "And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8-9).

**JESUS CHRIST IS LORD.** Peter claims that God made Jesus Christ "Lord"(Acts 2:36). The term Lord has become one of the most lifeless words in the Christian vocabulary, but in reality, it

conveys the true character and dignity of Jesus Christ, Who is both the basis for - and the object of - worship. "Lord" is one of Paul's favorite titles for Jesus. The term denotes sovereignty, and points to His right to reign in the hearts of believers.

**NOTE:** 2:12-18. Strauss points out that we have seen the *plea* and the *pattern*. The plea is for self-renunciation, humility. The sublime example of Christ is set before us as a perfect *pattern*. And in this passage we have the *process* whereby attainment is possible.<sup>xcii</sup> Once again, God has given us an answer to an error in the world's thinking. This is the Scriptural response to the gospel of self-esteem, self-worth, self-love.

2:12-16 deals with assembly life and responsibility. In these verses we see how the church is to live and serve. Paul is speaking of the working out of our salvation, and not working for it.

**2:12 - NOT AS IN MY PRESENCE ONLY.** Paul is concerned that believers in Philippi do more than just render "eye-service" when he is with them. There are people who get excited during a local church revival or area crusade, but drift away soon after the visiting evangelist leaves. Paul urges them to remain faithful, even to do much more when he is away.

**WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION.** Verses 12 and 13 must be read together for a proper understanding of what Paul is saying. "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, *work out your salvation* with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (italics added). This implies neither a works salvation, nor a grace plus works salvation. Salvation is by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8). A.W. Tozer said, "Christ is not one of many ways to approach God, nor is he the best of several ways; he is the only way."<sup>xci</sup> We may not, and cannot work *for* our salvation, but we should work *out* our salvation.

A "works salvation" is not being taught. The idea is to progress to the finish or completion in spiritual growth and maturity. This process is what the Bible calls "sanctification." It should be noted that v. 12 makes it clear we are to be active, not passive, in this process. However, though we are active, we are not alone. Verse 13 reminds us again that the entire salvation process is the work of a sovereign God and the result of His grace. "For it is God who works in you" is the ultimate ground and basis for our salvation.<sup>xci</sup>

To work out here is "to work out to the finish." This exhortation assumes human responsibility (free agency) in carrying on the work of one's salvation. There is a difference in working for salvation and carrying out the work of one's salvation. The word Paul uses for "work out" (*katergazesthai*) always carries the idea of bringing to a full completion, to a complete accomplishment or conclusion (see Eph. 2:4-10).

It is important to note what Paul said and what he did not say. He is not suggesting that our salvation is uncertain - we are not in danger of losing our salvation. In fact, Paul's epistles emphasize the security of believers. But here

He called on the church to work on her spiritual health, continuing the obedient pattern of life she had known until spiritual disease no longer plagued Christ's body. The enormity of such a task calls for humility expressed by "fear and trembling" before the task. The church can accomplish the task and grow to spiritual health because God is at work to help the church. God's energy can change the church's will and change our actions until we accomplish His purpose. This is the present tense of salvation.<sup>xcv</sup>

Every Christian has his work for the Lord and he must bring it to a conclusion. He must "work out" his salvation, as one works out his garden. If you have a garden you do not say, "I am working for my garden." It is already yours. You say, "I am working out my garden." Paul exhorts Christians, whether they faced an assembly problem or a personal problem, to work it out to its ultimate and victorious conclusion as one might work out a math problem to find its final and correct answer.

**WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.** This is not slavish terror but wholesome and serious reverence for God. This shows a nervous and trembling anxiety to do what is right. See I Cor. 2:3; II Cor. 7:15; Eph. 6:5. A professional quarterback, even a seasoned veteran, will often admit to being nervous before a big football game. When asked about it, he may respond, "I would be worried if I were not a little nervous." He knows the game plan, he knows what he can do, and he believes his team will win, but he also knows there is a lot at stake.

The Christian is not shackled by a paralyzing fear of the unknown, but he approaches the Lord's work with fear and trembling for two reasons. First, he is in awe of the holiness of Almighty God. Second, he knows something of what is at stake - in terms of his own personal growth and development, and what is at stake for the Kingdom of God. It has been observed that Paul exhorts as if he were an Arminian in addressing men. He prays as if he were a Calvinist in addressing God and feels no inconsistency in the two attitudes. He makes no attempt to reconcile divine sovereignty and human free agency (or responsibility) at this point, but boldly proclaims both. God is sovereign and all believers should serve Him. However, we are not coerced into serving Him.

**2:13 - IT IS GOD WHO IS AT WORK IN YOU.** You could not work for your salvation, and you cannot work out your salvation in the flesh. "It is God who is at work in you" enabling you to work out your salvation. He uses the word *energōs*, meaning to be at work, to energize. God is the energy and the Energizer of the universe. The saints are to work out their salvation realizing that this is only accomplished as we do it in fellowship with God. It is God alone, and not some "force" or "universal spirit," Who energizes us for this task. He is putting forth His power in us. See Gal. 2:8; Eph. 3:20.

Satanists are concerned with power. Those involved in witchcraft are concerned with power. Millions are seeking some kind of supernatural power through cults, or the occult. The New Age movement is concerned with power. Let us never forget that Satan has power and can impart a certain amount of power to those who worship him. However, people should be aware that much that passes for supernatural power may well be a hoax. Christian magician Danny Korem has exposed many fakes who claimed to have supernatural power by demonstrating how an experienced magician can perform the same trick over and over. Remember that the fact that you do not understand how someone accomplishes some extraordinary feat does not mean that it is supernatural. No human being has supernatural power. If it is supernatural, it is either of God or of Satan, and the Holy Spirit will accurately and unfailingly help believers discern between the two. The Holy Spirit is not working in the hearts of non-believers, and it is understandable that they may be deceived by Satanic activity.

Christians have power, even though many seem totally unaware that it is available to them. God is working (putting forth His power) in us now. We must not think of this as something that has happened in the past, or something that will happen at some point in the future. He wants to energize us right now - day by day. "At any time we may draw down the unlimited source of divine power. We work and God works. It is a mutual effort toward the common goal of glorifying God in our lives" (Strauss quotes F. B. Meyer).<sup>x cvi</sup>

God may be working in you to try to get you to begin a serious program of Bible study, to increase your prayer commitment, or to confess to a fellow Christian that your speech was unkind. Whatever it is, work it out as He works in you to accomplish it. There are times when the believer feels led to attempt something and before long realizes that the results are beyond normal human accomplishment. He knows that while he is working for the Lord, the Lord is working in him and through him to accomplish what he could never accomplish alone. And God forbid that we should take credit for that which is accomplished!

**FOR HIS GOOD PLEASURE.** To quote Strauss again, "Divine sovereignty and human responsibility meet at the cross roads of some mighty decisions. And remember, the sign marked 'His good pleasure' is the only one worth following."<sup>x cvii</sup>

**2:14 - WITHOUT GRUMBLING.** The KJV has "without murmuring;" the NIV and NKJV, "without complaining." We see the same idea in Acts 6:1f. This advice is practical and greatly needed for the church in any age. This is a difficult passage and commentaries vary. To Ironside, verses 14-16 reveal the working out of assembly salvation; the church carrying on the work of salvation. Some see man's work as a part of his salvation. But salvation is by grace and not by works (Eph. 2:8-9). Nor is it a combination of grace and works (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16; 3:1).

Christians must face their problems without muttering half-concealed complaints. We must not give in to the temptation to grumble. Every church has its grumblers and complainers. In some churches they are very vocal, often a constant source of agitation. In other situations they may be murmuring behind the scene or behind the backs of church leaders. While the former may be more often responsible for open disputes, the latter may well destroy fellowship within the body ( See

Num. 20:2; 21:5; I Cor. 10:10).

**DISPUTING.** Grumbling (complaining), if allowed to continue, will result in disputing. Murmuring and disputing break our fellowship with God and with one another. They must be checked; and they may be checked in one of two ways. First, do not encourage the one doing the murmuring in such a way as to imply that you approve of what they are doing.. You may find yourself guilty before the Lord of participating in the murmuring, even though you are only a passive participant.

In the second place, the Lord may lead you to speak to the individual in order to point out how his murmuring may lead to "disputing" and "disputing" to broken fellowship that may destroy the ministry of the church. Too often people encourage gossip and murmuring by listening in a manner that suggests approval. Why do we do that? The real answer to that question might be embarrassing. Frequently, gossip and murmuring reveal a lot more about the participants than about the one against whom it is directed.

**2:15 -TO BE BLAMELESS.** "(S)o that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world." Literally, that you may become blameless, free from censure. As used here it means to be without fault before others (as Daniel was without fault, Dan. 6:4).

**INNOCENT.** The NKJV has "harmless;" the NIV, "pure." The meaning is without any mixture of deceit, without any mixture with foreign material. This word points to our inward state. Our thoughts and our motives are to be without guile, unmixed with selfishness and insincerity. Our motives must be unadulterated. Unfortunately, all church members are not harmless. Some are harmful. Some are dangerous. They need to confess their sin and seek God's forgiveness.

If one's thoughts and motives are not unmixed or unadulterated, there is a real danger that his actions will soon reveal it. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Pro. 23:7, KJV). Your inner condition is going to determine your outward conduct. That explain why we have some mean-spirited people in some churches.

**ABOVE REPROACH.** Christians are to be above reproach - just as the Old Testament sacrifice was to be without spot or blemish. Believers must be above reproach (unblemished) in reputation and in character. The King James Version has "without rebuke." Our Savior is revealed as the Lamb without spot or blemish. That should be the goal of every Christian. Those who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ have been brought into a Father-child relationship with God. As Children of God, we trust our Heavenly Father and seek to please Him rather than the world. "As part of God's community, His children should display characteristics of the Father. The Christian community must be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and God's instrument for peace.

The earnest desire of our heavenly Father is that, as children of God, we should be above reproach. All true believers in Christ are children of God now, and neither time nor growth in grace can make us more the children of God than we are now (that is Justification, and it is once for all

time). His goal for us as His children is that we will be "above reproach" (that is Sanctification and it is accomplished progressively through the ministry of the Holy Spirit). This goal will be ultimately and perfectly reached when our Lord returns to gather His church unto Himself (That is Glorification and it is forever). See Eph. 5:27.

**CROOKED.** Paul used an old word for curved, with the idea of "twisted." He will present to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or blemish. It will be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:27). While we wait for His coming we are to shine as lights in the world in order to lead men out of darkness. Children of God, today as well as in Paul's day, live in a crooked and evil society. It is only by living a life that is unblemished and unspotted by the world that we will be able to lead lost people to turn from the darkness to the Light of the World.

**PERVERSE.** The word means to distort, to twist, to turn to the side. This is an unpleasant word and it describes behavior that can only be described as ugly. Believers live in a world filled with perversions. When perversions creep into the church the results can be catastrophic. The Kingdom of God has been rocked by numerous scandals involving popular television evangelists, or other individuals associated with the church. Talk show personalities have had a field-day at the expense of the church. A crooked and perverse nation will never be reached by crooked and perverse church members.

This has a shocking application in modern day America. Through the Spring of 1997, ABC promoted one particular episode of the sitcom, *Ellen*. Most every TV viewer in America knew the date of the "coming out" episode when the title character would come out of the closet (as a homosexual). The media joined in the fanfare and, in effect, promoted the show with a spirit of celebration. In fact, there were celebrations across America. There were, however, some columnists who were alarmed by what they saw. Don Feder (*The Conservative Chronicle*, May, 14, 1997) began his April 30 column:

I had intended to ignore last night's episode of *Ellen*, wherein the title character careened out of the closet to media fanfare. The actress who portrays her came out weeks earlier, and was rewarded with the cover of *Time Magazine*.

Then I saw a photo of Ellen DeGeneres and her squeeze, actress Anne Heche, draped over each other at last weekend's White House Correspondent's dinner, with Bubba (President Bill Clinton) beaming at the pair like some cherubic impresario of concupiscence. This was an unendurable provocation.

GIVEN CLINTON'S white trash ethics, it stands to reason that he would be a gay-rights champion. If the revelations of an alleged ex-mistress, a woman who claims he sexually harassed her and a battalion of state troopers are true, the leader of the free world has himself been leading an alternative lifestyle since he climbed out of

the crib.<sup>xcviii</sup>

Don Feder, a conservative Jew, was appalled by the moral (immoral) position of the President of the United States, who professes to be a Christian, is a member of an evangelical church, and is often seen going to church services. Feder continues by quoting President Clinton: “As I said in my State of the Union Address this January, we must never, ever believe that our diversity is a weakness, for it is our greatest strength,” the multiculturalist in chief intoned.<sup>xcix</sup>

Pat Buchanan, a Roman Catholic, had a column in the same publication under the title, *Is the Hour at Hand for America?* He began:

Spring 1997 may mark the moment when decadence went mainstream in America and neo-paganism emerged as the religion of our cultural and media elites.<sup>c</sup>

Buchanan pointed to the White House Correspondent’s dinner at which Ellen DeGeneres and Anne Heche stole the show, declaring themselves lesbian lovers, kissing and stroking each other for the cameras beneath the beneficently smiling president of the United States.<sup>ci</sup>

It is sad to say, but it gets worse. Again, quoting Buchanan:

THE DAY OF THE dinner, the *New Republic* came out with a preview of Norman Mailer’s *The Gospel According to the Son*. The magazine cover depicts Mailer as a teary-eyed Christ in stained glass, a crown of thorns pressed down upon his brow, beneath a parody of some of the last words of the crucified Savior: “He is finished.” The sub-head: “Norman Mailer Nails Himself.” How witty.

In post-Christian America, the most sacred of Christian events have become fair game for parody, satire, mockery and exploitation.<sup>cii</sup>

Columnist, Linda Bowles, who openly professes her faith in the Lord, wrote about the same TV show in a May 5 article:

Sexual deviancy has been defined up in America.

The coming out of Ellen represents a high sewer mark of one of the most brilliant propaganda campaigns in recorded history. The television show was the climax of years of effort to incorporate homosexuality into the American mainstream. It was brilliantly done. Ellen was presented as next-door nice-- a normal, unimportantly different person.

Millions of children viewed what was little more than an infomercial

for homosexual behavior. The ABC television network and its parent, Disney Corp., are thrilled at the ratings.

...They are succeeding. The National Day of Prayer fell on the day after the Ellen show was broadcast. Its observance got lost to most Americans in the massive media celebratory coverage of the homosexual event. We don't have our priorities straight.

It would be a tragedy if America came to be known as the only nation in the history of mankind that gave civil rights to a venereal disease and put decadence on a pedestal.<sup>ciii</sup>

George Grant and Mark A. Horne (*Legislating Immorality*, Moody Press, 1993) make a statement which those who pursue pleasure through perversion should consider, because if they are right - and they are - the consequences are going to be disastrous. First they point out that "the collapse of Greco-Romanism was rooted in the moral collapse of Greco-Romanism. The reason is as simple as it is universal."<sup>civ</sup>

Just as liberty and equality are opposite extremes often contrary to freedom, so sensuality and satisfaction are opposite extremes often contrary to happiness. There is, in fact, no real connection between the pursuit of happiness and the pursuit of pleasure. Happiness and pleasure could even be described as antithetical to one another, in that happiness is founded on the value of something eternal, whereas pleasure is founded on the values of something ephemeral.<sup>cv</sup>

The church needs to rediscover the meaning of holiness. It would probably help if Christians would turn off the television and begin reading good Christian literature. A good place to begin might be the book, *Knowledge of the Holy*, by A. W. Tozer. We must study the Word of God. But a regular practice of reading good Christian literature - devotional books, books of poetry, bibliographies, narratives, and commentaries will help to inform, inspire, and motivate believers in their walk with Jesus Christ. I have found some of the older works by people like Spurgeon, Tozer, Andrew Murray, E. M. Bounds, Francis Shaeffer, and a host of others writers to be a source of immeasurable blessings. During one period of five or six years I read all the works of Francis Shaeffer (more than twenty volumes) three or four times. So, it took me three times to understand Shaeffer! But it was more than worth it. Fortunately, we have many outstanding writers who have taken over where these older saints left off.

**AS LIGHTS IN THE WORLD.** He has in mind, luminaries like the heavenly bodies. Christians are the light of the world (Matt. 5:14) as they reflect the light from Christ (John 1:4; 8:12), but the word is not *phos* (light), but *phosteres* (luminaries, moon, planet). He is the true Light. We may only reflect His light.. We must reflect that light in the darkness of this world where it is needed.

**2:16 - HOLDING FAST.** The NAS renders it, "Holding fast the word of life, so that in the day

of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.” Paul urges the Philippian saints to hold fast to the Gospel he had preached to them - they did not have the entire New Testament, but did have the Old Testament Scripture as well as the teachings of Paul, which included both the instructions shared with them in person and this epistle.

Paul looks for the imminent return of the Lord and holds it up to them. That is a good example for the preachers and teachers of the Word today. Paul anticipates the joy he will experience when Christ returns and finds them holding fast to His word and walking with Him in holiness. At that time Paul will know that he had not labored among them in vain.

### THREE EXAMPLES - 2:17-30

Joy is the theme of Philippians and in this section we learn that we can rejoice, even during times of trials and tribulations. In this passage we see examples of three men of like passion who will illustrate the point Paul is making. The first, and briefest, is Paul himself (17-18), and the second and third are Timothy and Epaphroditus.

**2:17 - IF I AM BEING POURED OUT.** Perhaps you are more familiar with the King James: “Yea, and *if I be offered* upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.” The NAS reads, “But even *if I am being poured out as a drink offering* (italics added). The word Paul uses is an old word, used in the New Testament only here and in II Timothy 4:6. The picture is of one pouring out wine as a libation on a pagan altar, a picture with which the Gentile believers could readily identify, because of their own experience in paganism. James Montgomery Boice (*Philippians: An Expository Commentary*) explains it:

It is a technical word for a certain part of a pagan sacrificial offering.

If we were to have watched a Greek or Roman perform such an offering, we would have seen him arrive at the altar with his sacrifice.

It would have been a living animal, and it would have been valuable.

The animal would have been killed, and after it had been killed it would have been burned on the altar, giving off a sweet fragrance in the process. At this point the ancient worshiper would have made an additional offering called a libation. He would have taken a cup of wine and poured it upon the altar, thus pouring it upon the sacrifice that was already burning. Because the altar was hot, the libation would immediately disappear in a puff of steam and be gone.<sup>cvi</sup>

Again and again Paul took pictures from the ordinary affairs and activities of the people to whom he wrote, or spoke. He has already taken a picture from the athletic games; now he takes one from heathen sacrifice. A common heathen sacrifice was the libation. A libation was a cup of wine poured out as an offering to the gods. Every meal began and ended with such a libation, as a “grace” before and after the meal.

Paul is saying, though I am poured out as a libation (drink offering) “upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.” He pictures his life-blood as being poured out upon the sacrifice of the faith and service of the Philippians. He feels a bond of mutual service and joy with them. Joy is mutual when the service is mutual. Most of us would agree with Ironside when he said, "Possibly no other mortal man ever drank into the Spirit of Christ so deeply as the great apostle to the Gentiles."<sup>cvi</sup> Missionaries offer their lives as a challenge to other Christians to match their prayer and their money with the missionaries' sacrifices.

Paul could relate this to the Philippians and to himself. What he is saying to the Philippians is: "your fidelity and your Christian loyalty are already a sacrifice to God; and if death for Christ should come to me, I am willing and glad that my life should be poured out like a libation to the gods on the altar on which your sacrifice is being made."<sup>cvi</sup>

**2:18 - YOU TOO.** The Apostle's joy in the Lord, and his joy in these believers was so great that he could rejoice even as his life was being poured out as a libation upon their sacrifices. He said, "I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me." He has experienced a great joy in their relationship with the Lord and he wants them both to experience that joy, and to share their joy with him.

## **2:19 - 24 - TIMOTHY, AN UNSELFISH PASTOR**

In 2:19-30, Paul returns to personal matters, expressing his plans to send Timothy later, but Epaphroditus right away. He has mentioned "lowliness" (2:3) and "lights" (2:5). Now we have in two of Paul's partners good examples of both. He wanted to be sure that the church would accept them as his representative with his apostolic authority. "No one else with him then, except Timothy, had the interest of Christ at heart (v. 21). Epaphroditus was a leader in the Philippian church who brought the financial gift to Paul and whom Paul sent home with this letter (v. 25)".<sup>cix</sup> In 2:19-24 Paul not only recommends Timothy to them as his representative, but holds him up to them as a worthy example.

**2:19 - TIMOTHY.** We are not given much information about Timothy at this point, but a lot can be gleaned from the New Testament about his commitment to Christ, his loyalty to Paul, and his devotion to the Gospel. The personal name, Timothy, mean "honoring God." We know that he was a friend and trusted coworker of Paul. Robert Dean (*The Holman Bible Dictionary*) provides us with a good biographical sketch of his life and ministry.

When Timothy was a child, his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois taught him the Scriptures (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). A native of Lystra, he may have been converted on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 14:6-23). Paul referred to Timothy as his child in the faith (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2). This probably means that Paul was instrumental in Timothy's conversion. When Paul came to Lystra on

his second journey, Timothy was a disciple who was well-respected by the believers (Acts 16:1-2). Paul asked Timothy to accompany him. Timothy's father was a Greek, and Timothy had not been circumcised. Because they would be ministering to many Jews and because Timothy's mother was Jewish, Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3).<sup>cx</sup>

Timothy not only accompanied Paul on two missionary journeys and assisted him when he was in prison, but was also sent by Paul on a number of crucial mission assignments (Acts 17:14-15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4; Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 3:2,6). When Paul was engaged in his work in Ephesus and unable to go to Corinth, he sent Timothy as his representative to try to deal with problems that had arisen in the church (1 Cor. 4:17). Here, when Paul was in prison in Rome, he would send Timothy back to Philippi (Phil. 2:19). He expressed his opinion that no one had any more compassion and commitment than Timothy (Phil. 2:20-22).

So close were Paul and Timothy that both names are listed as the authors of six of Paul's letters (2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Philem. 1). In addition, Paul wrote two letters to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2). As Paul's ministry neared the end, he challenged Timothy to remain true to his calling (1 Tim. 1:18). As Paul faced death, he asked Timothy to come to be with him (2 Tim. 4:9). At some point in his life, Timothy was imprisoned; but he was released (Heb. 13:23). See Paul; 1 Timothy; 2 Timothy.<sup>cx</sup>

Paul says, "I trust *in the Lord Jesus* to send Timothy to you shortly" NKJV, italics added). The NAS reads, "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy." People today often use hope and wish interchangeably. This is more than wishful thinking with Paul. He was prayerfully seeking the Lord's will with regards to sending Timothy. He hoped to send Timothy to Philippi for two specific reasons, the first of which was to continue his ministry with them through Timothy. The second was that he wanted more information about the church and its members. Paul wanted to know how the church was getting along, but it had to be the Lord's will for him to send Timothy. This should be our philosophy in everything we do - find God's will and then do it. Sometimes, however, we take some action that makes perfectly good sense to us, and then ask God to bless it. If we first find His will and do it, He is going to bless it.

**THAT I ALSO MAY BE ENCOURAGED.** The NKJV reads, "that I also may be encouraged when I know your state." Paul's concern for the saints in Philippi is impressive when you consider his circumstances. He would send Timothy to minister to them when he needed someone to minister to him. He would send him to get more complete information because this fresh report on their situation would be very comforting to him. What an example this is to those who think only of themselves during a crisis or time of stress.

Most pastors regularly visit shut-ins or patients in hospitals and nursing homes who seem more concerned about the welfare of the pastor and other members of the church than they are about

their own circumstances. They also visit some who feel sorry for themselves. They gripe and complain share the specifics of their case every time he sees them. He is often relieved when the visit with the latter is over. But the former are a source of joy and inspiration.

**2:20 - I HAVE NO ONE ELSE OF KINDRED SPIRIT.** The NKJV has “like-minded;” whereas the NAS has, “For I have no one else *of kindred spirit* who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare” (italics added). This statement speaks volumes about why Paul felt the way he did about his young son in the ministry. Silas was more experienced, Mark proved valuable, and Titus was certainly more effective at Corinth, but there was simply no one else who thought as Paul thought. Paul had begun teaching Timothy when he was very young and had continually trained him and given him a lot of practical, hands-on experience in the ministry. There was no one else whose thinking conformed more to his own than that of young Timothy. His thinking was harmonized with Paul's - he was like-minded (of kindred spirit). When Paul needed information from a church, he could always send Timothy, and when he needed a message delivered, any message in the hands of Timothy was as safe as if Paul had delivered it himself.

We often hear statements about the greatness of Paul. But it may help to note that without the help of people like Timothy, Titus, John Mark, Luke, Silas, Priscilla and Aquila, there would have been many times when Paul's hands would have been tied. When any leader begins to think too highly of himself it might help to think about this. Even when a trusted associate begins to think too highly of himself, it would help to remember that there were times when Titus was more effective than Timothy. An understanding of this Scripture will lead to a healthy attitude toward one's self and others.

**GENUINELY BE CONCERNED.** There was no one with Paul at that point in time “who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.” The NKJV has “who will sincerely care for your state;” and the NIV, “who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.” Paul loved the Lord with all his heart and was willing to sacrifice everything for Him (see 2 Timothy 4:6-8 and Acts 20:24). He was disturbed by those who were not like-minded (2:21). Timothy (2:19) and Epaphroditus (2:25) were ready to be sent anywhere God would have them go. One of the key words in The New Testament to believers is "go." See Mark 16:15 (The Great Commission) and Mark 5:19 (the maniac of Gadara), John 1:41-42 (Andrew), and Matthew 21:28-30.

**2:21 - FOR THEY ALL SEEK AFTER THEIR OWN INTERESTS.** When people speak of New Testament Christianity they often do so with a sense of awe and reverence. But human nature has neither evolved nor devolved since the Fall. There were Christians in the New Testament period, just as there are today, who were primarily concerned with their own interests, and “not those of Christ Jesus.” Sadly, some of those to whom he referred were ministers of the Gospel.

Paul could not appreciate that kind of Christianity. One often hears today that we need to return to New Testament Christianity. According to this passage, Christianity in the New Testament period, or in the first century, had not reached its potential. Even in the middle of the first century most believers were more interested in their own things than the things of Christ. We know, of course, that the New Testament had not been completed at the time of this writing. No one had seen

the New Testament as we know it. If this attitude was inexcusable then, it is even more inexcusable when Christians today "seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." And very often the more they "own" the more they seek their own things and their own interests and neglect the things of Christ. Too much emphasis on the things you own, like "doing your own thing," can quickly lead downward from a blessing, to an obstacle, to a curse.

After a morning worship service one of the deacons and his wife gave a lady a ride home. On the way the lady asked the deacon, "What's wrong with that church?" She said "that church," even though she was a member of that church. The deacon, Ollie Canterbury, was a quiet, easy going man most of the time, but at times he could be uncomfortably honest, and this was one of those times. He responded, "You asked me what's wrong with our church, and I am going to tell you. It's people just like you. You don't support the church, you don't attend services faithfully, you don't witness, you don't tithe - you don't do anything but gripe and complain." Needless to say, the lady found another church.

On another occasion, the same deacon was talking with an absentee member and he tried to talk with him about his need to be in services. The friend said, "Do you know why I don't come to church?" The deacon said, "No. Why don't you come to church?" His friend said, "I got to the point that I can't tithe, and I am embarrassed to go to church." Mr. Canterbury answered, "Mr. Smith (not his real name), the first thing you need to do is to stop lying about your tithe." When another member offered various excuses for missing services, the deacon simply replied, "You do what you want to do. If you are not going to church, it's because you don't want to."

Because Mr. Canterbury was a close personal friend, I knew that he never sought opportunities to offend people - he preferred to remain silent. But he did not shrink from his responsibility to stand up for his Lord and his church when the situation demanded it. For the most part, he was right - you do what you want to do.

What is wrong with your church today? It is possible that too many members are pursuing their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. What is needed may well be someone like the Apostle Paul, or Ollie Canterbury, to explain it to them in plain and simple terms. Only the Holy Spirit will ever be able to bring them under conviction so that they will repent, but He can, and will, use Christians who will teach by example as well as with their tongues.

**2:22 - PROVEN.** The KJV has, "But ye know the proof of him..." The NAS is translated, "But you know of *his proven worth*, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father" (italics added). The word translated proof (or proven worth) denotes a test, as in the testing of metals (II Cor. 2:9; 9:3). They had seen Timothy on three different occasions (Acts 16:13; 19:22; 20:3ff). They knew him and needed no further proof of his character or commitment.

**SERVED WITH ME.** Paul considered Timothy his "son in the ministry," who served "with" Paul. He did not serve Paul. He served Jesus Christ. This is one of the keys to the greatness of Paul - he worked "with" Timothy - it was a horizontal relationship, not a vertical relationship. Young Timothy was fortunate to have been blessed with a teacher like Paul who was wise enough to

include a lot of in-service training. Timothy learned well and served the Lord in partnership with his mentor. Pastors and administrators of Christian institutions should remember that their associates serve with them. They serve Jesus Christ, even when serving under their leadership.

Paul wrote two epistles to his young son-in-the-ministry, and in one of them he urged him to, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (I Tim. 4:12, NKJV). Every community and every church today would rejoice to see more young people like Timothy. There are some around, but they are often overshadowed by those who are not like Timothy. Consider the following quotation:

Our youth now loves luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority, disrespect for older people. Children nowadays are tyrants. They no longer rise when their elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble their food, and tyrannize their teachers.

Most of our adults would say a hardy, “Amen!” to that. But do you know who wrote that? Socrates! Euripides wrote about conditions in Sparta: “No Spartan girl could ever live clean even if she wanted. They are always out on the street in scanty outfits, making great displays of naked limbs. . . Abominable’s the word.”<sup>cxii</sup>

We should thank the Lord that there are many potential young Timothys in our midst today, learning to serve the Lord in church, at school, at work, and at play. One of the first lessons they must learn is to work “with” other Christians. One of the great lessons the church needs to learn is that we must let them work with us if we are to see them develop their potential in the church.

**2:23 - SHALL SEE HOW IT WILL GO WITH ME.** Paul says, “Therefore (that is, for all the reasons just mentioned) I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me.” As soon as he learned what Rome was going to do with him, he would send Timothy immediately, both to report on his circumstances and to minister to them. Melick (*The New American Commentary*, Vol. 32, Broadman) points out two statements that reveal the importance of Timothy to Paul and to his Gospel ministry.

First, Paul needed Timothy a little longer (v. 23). When he knew “how things [would] go,” Timothy would be free to come. No one knows why Paul felt that way. What is certain is that Timothy uniquely sustained Paul during the uncertainty of his trials, and Paul felt he could hardly get along without him. Later, as Paul knew of his impending death, he called Timothy to stand with him (2 Tim. 4:9-11). Second, Timothy replaced Paul, who desired to come when he could. In sending Timothy, Paul sent the best he had - an extension of himself ...to them. After all, they had sacrificed for him as well.<sup>cxiii</sup>

Two things are worth noting about the attitude Paul expressed here. In the first place, it is natural for one who is facing uncertain circumstances, especially when death is a possibility, to want to encourage friends and prepare family members. This strikes close to home with me. When I had my heart attack in the emergency room of the hospital, a nurse asked me who I wanted her to call. I thought of my brothers, James and Mike, but since I could not recall Mike's office number and was not sure James was at home, I immediately thought of my sons. Mark was out of town but my older son, John, is a local attorney and I gave the nurse his pager number, knowing that would be the simplest and quickest way to notify every one.

John now tells people that upon receiving the call, he contacted his mother, and then he went directly to the hospital. When he finally found the right office, a nurse came out and asked, "Are you John?" When he identified himself to her she handed him a sheet of paper and said, "This is a list of things for you to do." He looked at the list: Call David Hammett. Worship services. Pastor's Class. There was also a list of people to call. Today he jokes about the fact that even while I was having a heart attack I was giving him a list of things to do. It may be amusing now, but at the time it was important to me to get word to David and Melanie that they would have to get someone else to perform their marriage ceremony - the rehearsal was the next night.

It was especially important to me to know that someone would preach for me the next few Sundays - our deacons took care of that. Then there was prayer meeting, - John led in the prayer service and Bible study for the next few months. I was also concerned about my pastor's class, about shut-ins and nursing homes. There were also some personal things. I wanted John to know where I had parked my truck - I even left instructions about having his mother's car repaired (so John says!).

For several days, Becky, John and Mark were only able to visit every four hours while I was in the intensive care unit. Usually some other family member would accompany them for a few minutes and then leave so that we could visit together. My sister and brother-in-law, Linda and Jimmy Furr were there for several days from Nashville. Jimmy is a Regional Director for the Interfaith Witness Department of the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board and it was a blessing for him to pray with me. My brothers and sisters-in-law were there to visit me or stand by my family and to help with practical things as the need arose.

Jim Hayes, a building contractor and long-time friend, had just begun a renovation job and an addition to the front of our sanctuary, and I was very interested in that. Mark, who had designed the renovation job, talked with Jim daily and gave me daily progress reports. Mark had worked for Jim and they had worked together on a number of projects before, and since I knew how well they worked together I was not concerned about that project. Mark's regular progress reports were welcomed, however.

I remember asking John to wait when others left one day. I wanted to tell him where my I kept my will, where he would find insurance policies and IRA accounts, and how to contact the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. John listened but I sensed that he was a little uncomfortable with the conversation, and I felt that he was trying to keep me from dwelling on such things for fear that it might create unnecessary anxiety. However, it was important to me to talk

with someone in my family about these things. If I thought of something I wanted to tell them after they visited I had to wait four hours before they could visit again. Not being able to talk about them would have bothered me a lot more than talking about them. In the first place, I believed I would survive, but in the second place death did not frighten me. That was not a matter of personal courage, but a matter of faith in my Lord.

Let me share my feelings (and my thinking) for the benefit of anyone who might find himself in that situation. First, I expected to live, but I was prepared to die. If I had not survived, Becky knows all about our insurance policies, retirement programs, and investments. Mike and John are attorneys (Mike wrote my will and John is the executor), so I knew all bases would be covered from a legal standpoint. I knew Mark would be of inestimable assistance to his mother. I knew they could take care of business without my input; I simply wanted to make everything as easy as possible. Now, this is the point I want to stress - talking about this did not upset me. It did not cause stress or anxiety. If I had not been able to talk about it, it probably would have caused some anxiety - four hours can be a long time between visits.

The second thing we may learn from this passage is that Paul's attitude shows compassion, character, and courage. It takes both courage and faith to accept such uncertainty and still experience the joy he expresses, without becoming discouraged. Even with death seemingly imminent, he was still deeply concerned for the Philippian saints. As soon as he knew what would happen to him he would send Timothy. The word translated "see" means to consider attentively.

**2:24 - I TRUST IN THE LORD.** He wrote that he would send Timothy (with a report) as soon as the outcome of his case was known. Now he adds, "I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly." Paul's whole life was centered in the "Lord," the title Paul often employs for the Second Person of the Trinity. If it was the Lord's will he would be released, and if released, he would visit them as soon as possible. Robertson (*Paul's Joy in Christ*) points out the "curious parallel" in Paul's language about his proposed visit to Corinth after he had sent Timothy to try to deal with a problem there: "But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will." Robertson adds, "If Paul wrote Philippians before Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon, he was not able to come right away, but only after a year or so. We do not know precisely what Paul's expectations were about this 'shortly.' The whim of a Nero was an elusive thing to count upon."<sup>cxiv</sup>

It is interesting that he does not mention Spain here. He had written to the Roman church of his plans to go to Spain: "Whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while" (Rom. 15:24, NKJV).

Some believe he was imprisoned in Rome for a period of time, then upon release traveled to Spain, and after ministering there returned to Rome, whereupon he was arrested again - with this internment ending in his execution. However, no mention is made of a trip to Spain at this point. Robertson says,

He no longer thinks of going on to Spain first as he had once planned

(Rom 15:28). His heart now turns to the east (Phile. 22). His long imprisonment in Caesarea and Rome has made it necessary for Paul to set things in order in the east. The Gnostic disturbers had already appeared on the horizon before Paul left Asia (Acts 20:29f). These “grievous wolves” had taken full advantage of Paul’s absence to play havoc with the flock in various parts of Asia. Philippi also tugs at Paul’s heart which now definitely turns eastward.<sup>cxv</sup>

## **2:25-30 - EPAPHRODITUS, THE DEVOTED MESSENGER**

Boice points out that “of all the men Paul honors in his epistle to the Philippians, it is a layman named Epaphroditus who gets the most attention. Here is a man who is almost unknown to us, and yet Paul selects him - Epaphroditus - as deserving highest honor.”<sup>cxvi</sup> Paul’s purpose, however is not primarily to honor Epaphroditus, but also to protect him against possible criticism. This passage reveals something of Paul’s courtesy and his compassion; it shows how considerate and thoughtful he could be of others. In earlier days, he had been very narrow where John Mark was concerned, and possibly inconsiderate of Barnabas.

There is a dramatic story behind this. It seems that the Philippians had heard that Paul was in prison and they wanted to do something for him. They sent a gift to him by Epaphroditus. Not only did they delegate Epaphroditus to be the bearer of this gift; they also intended him to stay in Rome to be Paul’s personal attendant. Clearly Epaphroditus was a brave and trustworthy Christian and a man in whom the church had absolute confidence.

In Rome Epaphroditus became ill. Barclay suggests that it might have been the notorious Roman fever which sometimes swept the city like an epidemic.<sup>cxvii</sup> Anyway, he was near death and word of his illness had reached the church at Philippi. Paul knew they were worried and this concerned him. God had mercifully spared Epaphroditus and Paul knew it was time that he went back home so that his family and friends could see that he was well. In all probability, Epaphroditus was the bearer of this letter.

There was one problem. They had sent Epaphroditus to stay with Paul to minister to him. If he simply returned home there might have been some who would have thought he was a quitter and a coward. There was always the possibility that someone might claim that Epaphroditus was not seriously ill, just home sick. So Paul gives him a tremendous testimonial, which would silence any possible criticism.

In this testimonial every word is carefully chosen. Epaphroditus was Paul’s brother, fellow-worker and fellow-soldier. Barclay cites Lightfoot who says that he was one with Paul in sympathy, one with him in work, one with him in danger.<sup>cxviii</sup> The word Paul uses for messenger was *apostolos*, meaning one sent out on an errand.

**2:25 - I THOUGHT IT NECESSARY.** Before continuing, we need to read verses 25 and 26 together:

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; because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.

Paul is wording this passage very carefully, lest they question Epaphroditus's loyalty. Is it possible that Paul has grown since his rejection of John Mark? Here he seems to reflect something of the compassion and loyalty of Barnabas for a fellow servant, or young assistant. If he had had this attitude toward John Mark, he and Barnabas might have continued working together for the cause of the Lord. As it was the Lord used both in His service and Paul later acknowledged the loyalty and commitment of John Mark.

**TO SEND TO YOU EPAPHRODITUS.** This was a common name, though used only in Philippians in the New Testament. Paul wanted to send Timothy, but found it necessary to send Epaphroditus. The fact that Paul does not offer an explanation raises a number of questions. Why did he find it necessary to send Epaphroditus instead of Timothy when Timothy would have been his ideal representative? Had his sickness left him incapacitated to the point that he would be of little use to Paul? Had something happened that caused Paul to lose confidence in him as he had with John Mark on the first missionary journey? Since these questions are not answered, we will not waste more time in speculation. It is more profitable to focus on the commendation. Paul introduces Epaphroditus as he commends him. He first pointed to their personal relationship, which obviously meant a lot to him. Next, he stresses that this relationship to him is on behalf of the church at Philippi.

As for Paul, Epaphroditus was a brother, fellow-worker, and a fellow-soldier. These descriptions emphasize partnership by employing familial, vocational, and military terms. Each of them provides insight into how Paul saw the work of the gospel. Epaphroditus was an equal; there was no hint of inferiority or failure.<sup>cxiX</sup>

Epaphroditus had worked faithfully and tirelessly for the Lord and in support of Paul. His sickness had not prevented his service for Paul and for the cause of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And his service was a gift from the church. Melick says writes:

The NIV translation describes Epaphroditus as “your messenger[*apostolon*], whom you sent to take care [*leitourgon*] of my needs.” The words “messenger” (*apostolon*) and “servant” (*leitourgon*, a word suggesting religious service which the NIV fails to translate clearly) state his mission. He came with news of the church’s love and a gift from them. He also determined to stay and care for Paul.<sup>cxx</sup>

This points to the love of the church for Paul as well as the courage and commitment of Epaphroditus who left home, family, and church to serve the Lord by ministering to Paul under the most trying of circumstances.

One thing most commentaries do not call our attention to is the practical nature of the gift the church at Philippi sent and the practical nature of the service Epaphroditus rendered to Paul. All gifts are not practical, even though they may be appreciated as much as if they were. All expressions of affection are not essentially practical, although they may be appreciated as much as if they were. There are magnanimous gestures that are not totally practical, yet appreciated because of the expression of affection. I like to see flowers in a hospital room, a nursing home room, or at special times in the home. Sickness and sorrow often bring numerous arrangements of flowers and potted plants. Sending flowers is a wonderful way of saying that we care. But the average room or home can use only so many plants and floral arrangements. Any more would be excessive. Because so many people send flowers, my wife and I began many years ago sending money to the Baptist Children's Home or to the Gideons to buy Bibles in honor of an individual, or as a memorial gift. Many make donations to the church library or to the building fund in memory of a deceased person.

I have known a few ladies who have the special gift for going into someone's home during a time of sickness or grief to prepare meals, arrange places for relatives to stay, clean the house, and keep coffee on for guests. The family could visit, hold family conferences, and comfort one another, and receive guests without giving any thought to meals, or housekeeping. That is very practical. There are men who think to have the family car serviced and washed, or mow the lawn.

When word got out that I had had a heart attack, family, church members, and other friends, especially from former pastorates contacted my family to see if they could help with anything. My brothers and sisters-in-law checked to see if Becky needed anything. Mark was attending a Leadership Ouachita conference for selected members of the Chamber of Commerce in Vicksburg. Mike drove to Vicksburg to tell Mark and to bring him back to the hospital. A friend drove his car back home, and others from this group provided support for him for several weeks.

James, who is retired, told Becky in advance what he could do and when he would be available. He had sat with me in the hospital after I got out of ICU, and knew that I would be going to Rehab. Knowing that I would not be able to drive for a few weeks, he told her that she could plan to go on back to school. He would drive me to Rehab and sit with me so he could answer the phone and help with anything I might need. Becky was able to go back to Downsville High School where she teaches sixth grade classes, without too much anxiety because James was there. This is important: James told her in advance what his schedule was and when he could stay with me during those first two weeks, and when he could drive me to Rehab after that. He did not say, "Call me if you need me." If he had said that, she would have called - if she had really, really needed him. Very often the people who say, "Call me if you need me," can make you feel very uncomfortable if you call on them.

Becky's brother and sister-in law, Bud and Patsy Turner of Leland, visited while I was still in intensive care. Before they left, Patsy handed Becky a stack of calling cards. This enabled my

family to keep family and friends updated. Once when Becky was in a local hospital a deacon and his wife visited with her and when they left he handed Becky a roll of quarters. You can really use quarters in a place like that - parking meters, vending machines and pay telephones. I had given quarters to people in hospitals, but I had not thought about calling cards. This was both considerate and practical.

The phone rang one morning and James answered it. He talked with the caller for several minutes and, after hanging up the phone, he said, "That was Charles Burns." I thought, "How fitting!" I was his pastor when we ordained him as a deacon when I was in Bastrop. I wish I knew how many times that I visited people in the hospital or nursing home who showed me a card from Charles and Jenny, his wife, or how times when I visited in a home following some crisis when someone would say, "Charles Burns called us this morning." I think of Charles when I think of how many times I think about sending a card or making a call, but never get around to it.

Sylvia Abbey is a Registered nurse with a lot of surgical experience and she knew that during my by-pass surgery the waiting room would be filled with family, church members, and other friends. She mentioned it to her husband, Eugene, and they decided to have a very large tray of sandwiches and various condiments delivered to the waiting room. Carol Antley and Gloria Wink also provided food for the family and friends in the waiting room the day of the surgery.

Mike and John both list many Christian attorneys among their friends. There were a number of Christian lawyers who were praying for me and they stayed in touch with them to reassure them. John also knows a lot of people in law enforcement and quite a few of them are Christians. These people sent word that they were praying for me and some had their churches praying for me.

Friends Billy and Ivie Antley gave Becky a gift certificate from a local restaurant so that she could pick up meals as they needed them while I was in the hospital and after I came home. They also arranged to have some ladies to clean the house. Numerous ladies from our church provided complete meals for us after I was released from the hospital. Weeks later church members were still sending food.

Jim Hayes, the contractor, had a helper water my plants and make some repairs at home. Members brought food for meals and food for the freezer, some bringing complete meals. Others called members to give regular reports on my progress. Ronnie and Mary Whitehead were among the first to visit after I went home and I expected it, because Ronnie had suffered a heart attack several years earlier and he wanted to encourage me. More importantly, these and others were praying for me.

Deacon Chairman, Don Antley, got the deacons together and they invite Jerry Brossett, who had been Interim Pastor before I was called as pastor, to preach for me until I was able to return to the pulpit. Jerry visited me often in ICU and prayed with me. Committees and church leaders stepped up their work to cover for me. Billy (Sonny) Antley visited shut-ins on a regular basis. Later, I announced to the church that Billy Antley visits a lot of people and so far we have had no complaints! These are all practical things - and they are deeply appreciated.

Many expressed their support in other ways. Once while I was in a room at Glenwood regional Medical Center, there was a light knock on my door and when I answered, Dr. Michael Zambie, my allergist came in. He said, "I saw Mark down stairs and he told me what had happened. I wanted to come up to see how you are getting along." Dr. Zambie is a kind, compassionate doctor and a man of integrity. He is also a very busy man, but he took the time to visit.

Charles Martindale, Senior Adult Pastor at First Baptist, West Monroe, visits the hospitals regularly. I saw more of Charles than anyone else other than family and staff while I was in ICU and I came to anticipate his visits. His prayers were a blessing. Pastor David Terry and members of various Sunday School classes at First Baptist Church, Swartz, Louisiana kept a steady stream of cards coming with poems, notes, and signatures of class members. I read them over again during my recuperation at home and rejoiced in them and memories I have of the reception I had received when I was in the church for two Bible conferences.

After I was transferred to St. Francis Hospital for surgery, Dr. Thomas Causey, my cardiologist, was making late calls the night before my surgery and he came by to check on me. We visited for several minutes and then I asked, "You are going to be praying for me, aren't you?" He said, "Dr. Sanders, at this point, that is the most important thing I can do for you." It was encouraging to know that both my cardiologist and my surgeon, Dr. Blaine Borders, were committed Christians. It was also encouraging to know that they had the confidence of the medical community.

Billy Babb and I got acquainted at Goudeau's health club in Monroe, Louisiana. We often talked about our churches. He served on important committees in his church and from time to time he asked for advice. Billy visited me regularly while I was in the hospital and called to check on me. After I was able to go back to the gym, I saw another friend, Joe, who had also called to check on me. As we talked I mentioned Billy and I asked Joe and another friend, Jim, if they had seen him at the health club. I told them I was looking for him so that I could thank him for the visits and the prayers. They had not seen him in some time. While Jim and I talked, Joe went out to the desk in the lobby and returned in a minute, and announced, "He's dead!"

Jim and I stood there staring at him for several seconds and then he repeated it, "He's dead. He had a very fast type of cancer and only lived one month after it was diagnosed." I was immediately stricken with regret that I did not get to thank Billy for caring. I could not begin to list all the things people did to minister to me, but this one thing I can do: I can thank God for them. I can also rejoice in the Lord because of them.

**2:26 - HE WAS LONGING FOR YOU.** Epaphroditus was "longing for" members of his church in Philippi. He was not simply home sick because he had been ill. He was distressed because he had learned that they were worried about him. Christians should always be considerate of the feelings of others. Believers should be the most considerate and the most courteous people in the world.

**WAS DISTRESSED.** Paul wanted the Philippians to know that Epaphroditus was not running out

on him. Nor, was he failing them in the mission on which they had sent him. He could not have done more and should not be criticized for leaving before Paul's trial.

**2:27 - HE WAS SICK.** “For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow.” The Apostle Paul wanted the Philippians to know that Epaphroditus was not using some minor illness as an excuse for returning home. Their missionary friend was also setting a good example for us. We should be sensitive to the feelings and needs of others.

Some of the most gracious people we will ever meet are Christians, which is as it should be. Unfortunately, all Christians are not considerate of others. Some people could testify that their greatest injury has come at the hand of some insensitive, self-centered church member. A self-centered church member may try to get his, or her, way by flattering others with attention and praise. If that does not work, they may resort to slander or ungodly plots and schemes. This kind of thing should never be seen in any church. But it is!

**2:28 - I HAVE SENT HIM.** “Therefore,” he writes, “I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you.” Paul has acknowledged their deep concern for Epaphroditus when they had learned of his seriously illness, and assured them that Epaphroditus was deeply burdened by their concern for him. Even though he had been a valuable co-worker and fellow-soldier, Paul was sending him back so that they could (1) rejoice in his recovery, and (2) so that Paul would not be burdened for them.

Is Paul primarily concerned about their joy, or is he just using good psychology? The context reveals his genuine concern for both the saints at Philippi and for Epaphroditus. Fortunately, the Lord has many saints today who are kind and compassionate, and take the time to express their concern for others. Ronnie Whitehead is a deacon and faithful member of our church. He had a heart attack a few years before I had one and he and his wife, Mary, understood something of what I was going through. Their support for me and my family was a source of great encouragement and no one needed to tell me they were praying for me. I did not have to be with them to sense their love and concern. I also knew that their son, Donald, was checking with my family and keeping them informed. We were not surprised that they would be among the first to visit when I got home.

Juanita Temple is a first cousin who was with her husband, George, in Houston where he was receiving treatments for leukemia. Even under those circumstances, she took the time to call and wrote often. Her cards and notes brought joy and encouragement. But I was not surprised because Juanita has always been like a sister to me. What did surprised me was that Jennifer would call so often and write lengthy notes in which suggested passages of Scripture for me to read.

Jennifer Furr is my sister's older daughter, and even though we were close to her when she was a little girl, her father had been called to a church in a suburb of Omaha, Nebraska when she was still very young. She had grown up in Nebraska and in Nashville, where her family moved when he began his work with the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Jennifer, an emergency room nurse in Memphis, is familiar with heart attacks and

understood my situation. Her parents told me she called often and after I got out of the hospital I read all her notes again and they brought tears of joy to my eyes.

I wonder how many times I have thought about calling or sending someone a card but somehow never got around to it. Those times when you think you should contact someone who is in the hospital, ill at home, or someone who is grieving, depressed, or just disappointed, don't just think about it - do it! Here is a little tip. If you send a card it does not take much time to personalize it. A brief note, Scripture reference, or any word of encouragement is appreciated. The first thing I looked for when I got home and reread my cards was the personal notes so many included.

Christians should, of all people, be compassionate and caring. We should make an effort to show consideration for others, especially for others who are children of God. But we must be sure to avoid hypocrisy at this point. It can be very painful when someone suspects that our interest in them is not from the heart.

**AND I MAY BE LESS CONCERNED ABOUT YOU.** The NKJV reads, “and I may be less sorrowful.” The NAS seems to capture Paul’s feelings - he was concerned for them and sending Epaphroditus back to them with his personal note of appreciation and assurance that their friend had made a significant contribution his ministry would relieve him of his concern for them. The sorrow (NKJV) was not for himself but for them. This is a beautiful expression of Paul's feelings for both the Philippians and for their returning representative. He is plainly stating that their friendly reception of Epaphroditus would lessen his sorrow. How could they refuse such an appeal?

**2:29 - RECEIVE HIM.** “Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard.” This is obviously a more delicate situation than the modern reader may detect in our English translations, and with our cultural backgrounds. They had sent Epaphroditus on the most important mission of his life, and very likely the most important mission in the entire history of the church. They had sent him to minister to Paul, and to take a love offering to him. He had either contracted a serious illness on his voyage to Rome, or after arriving at Rome. The Philippian church learned of his illness, possibly through a letter from either Paul or Epaphroditus, and upon receipt of that letter, they had apparently written back to inquire about their friend’s health.

At this point Paul may have been responding to their questions. Yes, he had been seriously ill. Robertson says the English states it too mildly. Literally, “he was sick nigh unto death.”<sup>cxxi</sup> Yes, he had recovered sufficiently to render the service for which they had sent him. No, he had not failed in his mission and he had not failed Paul. No, his problem was not simply homesickness, though he was distraught when he learned that they were anxious about his health. He may have been concerned that they would think he had failed them, failed the Lord, and failed Paul. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul is trying to handle this with every consideration for their feelings and for the reputation of Epaphroditus. He seems to sense that they will either receive him in honor or dishonor, depending upon what he writes.

The keynote of the Epistle to the Philippians is “joy.” Paul urges them to receive their fellow-member, his fellow-laborer, “in the Lord with all joy.” “In the Lord” is the key to “all joy” for every servant of Jesus Christ. Sometimes it is easy to forget when we select the carpet, buy the

hymnals, select the pew cushions, or schedule activities that all things should be done for the Lord. Fortunately, He has given us a way of knowing that what we do as a church is done “for the Lord.” Paul provides the answer here - if what we do is “in the Lord,” it will be done for the Lord - for the glory of the Lord.

I would like to borrow a phrase from the title of a biography of George Washington by Harrison Clark - *All Cloudless Glory*. Clark’ title may have been suggested to him by the first president’s appearance in his youth,<sup>cxvii</sup> his wisdom as a youth,<sup>cxviii</sup> his courage, his success, or even his godliness. I am not sure why he chose this title, but I would like to take this title and move to the spiritual realm and apply it to the Lord, to whom the title seems most appropriate - ***ALL CLOUDLESS GLORY!*** That which we do “in the Lord’ is done for His cloudless glory.

**IN HIGH REGARD.** Paul writes, “hold men like him in high regard.” The Authorized Version (KJV) has, “and hold such in reputation; the NIV, “in honor;” and the NKJV, “in esteem.” Epaphroditus may have expressed fear that he would not be received in high regard (in honor) if the church believed he had failed Paul and let them down. This is a noble plea in behalf of Christ’s minister. It is also a good example for Christians today. Too often, when a Christian is down, some fellow members seem more inclined to kick him than to help him up. This may seem cynical to those who have never seen it, but I have seen it often enough to be disturbed by it.

There is a very disturbing modern day phenomena going on in the church in America. The number of forced terminations of pastors is both alarming and scandalous. It does fit, however, the pattern of diminishing respect Americans have shown for ministers of the Gospel for half-a-century. But the most phenomenal aspect of this is the way the terminated pastor is often treated by his brothers and sisters in Christ. I will grant that some forced terminations are justifiable and handled in a Scriptural manner, but I have in mind those in which the pastor is guilty of no breach of faith that would justify such action. Many such abused - shall we say persecuted - servants of the Lord have suffered in silence, but when questioned, they admit that a lot of Christians treat them as if they have leprosy. This is especially painful (and sinful) when the guilty party is a fellow minister. Some ministers have discovered that when they are wounded and hurting many of their fellow ministers, especially local ministers, seem to turn their backs on them, or at the least, hold them at a distance. They often do not talk about it, especially with lay-persons, for reasons that should be all too obvious.

It is interesting that when a rattlesnake bites a neighbor, we crush the head of the snake and minister to the victim. But when some venomous gossip attacks a servant of the Lord, many professing Christians crush the victim and pat the vile serpent on the head. Such things are not done “in the Lord.” Christian friend, it is a shame when a fellow laborer is neither received “in the Lord with all joy,” nor held “in high regard” by other believers who, like him, are nothing more than sinners saved by the grace of God.

**2:30 - HAZZARDING HIS LIFE.** “Because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.” This is translated from the word (*paraballomai*) which means to expose one’s self to danger. Paul stresses once again that

Epaphroditus was near death from whatever illness it was that had afflicted him (possibly the dreaded Roman fever). The illness was not something he chose, but he did choose to make this trip to minister to Paul and that is the reason he found himself at the point of death so far from home. Epaphroditus, however, had not placed his life in such danger just for the Philippian church, or for Paul. Paul says that he did it “for Christ.”

Epaphroditus was at the mercy of some illness that almost claimed his life. He had made a choice “for the work of Christ” which placed him in danger of death. When the Lord said, “You shall be my witnesses” Acts 1:8), He was well aware of the fact that to be a witness for Him might would call for such decisions. In fact, the very word translated “witnesses” (*martus*) is the word from which we get the English word martyr. A witness is one who is prepared to lay down his, or her, life for Jesus Christ.

**TO COMPLETE WHAT WAS DEFICIENT IN YOUR SERVICE TO ME.** Most translations may seem to imply that Paul is rebuking the Philippian believers for not doing more for him (the KJV has, "To supply your lack of service"). But this is not a charge that they had failed Paul. The NIV captures the idea: “to make up for the help you could not give me.” It is an acknowledgment of the fact that they had sent Epaphroditus to provide in person the service they could not render from a distance.

Paul was facing a possible death sentence, yet he was concerned that his friend should not meet with embarrassment when he returned home. Man is basically selfish by nature. But when he becomes completely yielded to Jesus Christ he is, like his Lord, a minister to all who need him (Luke 4:18). To walk daily with the compassionate Christ, as Paul had, is to learn compassion. Had Paul grown since that time a few years earlier when he rejected John Mark? Or were the circumstances just different?

# CHAPTER THREE

As Barclay observes, Paul makes two very important points:

1. He sets down what we call the "indestructibility of Christian joy." See John 22.
2. Paul also sets down what we might call "the necessity of repetition." Like any good teacher, he is not afraid of repetition.<sup>cxxiv</sup>

Paul suddenly turns from the theme of joy to deliver some harsh criticism. Many things in this chapter relate to things he has covered in chapter two. As he thinks of the Lord Jesus laying aside the glory He had with the Father and becoming man, Paul stresses the humility with which Jesus renounced all that He had by right in order that He might provide salvation for all who call upon Him. Jesus had renounced something precious in order to provide for our salvation. Paul had renounced all he considered valuable to follow Jesus. When the congregation is singing "I Surrender All," have you ever wondered how many really mean it? Do I really mean it?

**3:1 - FINALLY, MY BRETHREN.** The word translated "Finally" is literally, "as for the rest." Since this is a phrase Paul commonly uses toward the close of his epistles (2 Thes. 3:1; II Cor. 13:11), some see this as meaning that Paul was about to bring this letter to a close when something else came to mind (as a preacher may announce the close of a sermon two or three times before he stops!). There is no proof for this theory, however. Nor is there any evidence that Philippians was not originally one letter. We must remember that while Paul was the human instrument, the Holy Spirit the divine Author.

**REJOICE IN THE LORD.** Philippians is the Epistle of Joy. Joy is one of the great fruits of salvation. It is one of the special blessings of the Christ-life here and now. Sincere Christians do indeed rejoice in the Lord Christ Jesus, but Paul is now about to take some to task - and he will do it in a very stern way. One wonders if there were Christians in Philippi like a lot of church members today. If the preacher preaches on love, joy, and faith, they complain, saying, "I like for a preacher to really step on my toes." But if he really steps on *their* toes (not their neighbor's), they complain that he is too negative - "We need more sermons on joy, love, and faith," they will say. If those sermons come the Scripture and are prepared under the guidance of the Holy Spirit they will cover both the positive and the negative side of the Gospel message.

Christians should rejoice in all situations, knowing that our circumstances are God's opportunities. Joy is God's gift to every believer, but only those who appropriate it by faith and assimilate it by the grace of God can fully appreciate it.

## **ILLUSTRATION: JOY.**

A Hindu trader in India once asked a missionary, "What do you put on your face to make it shine?" With surprise the man of God

answered, "I don't put anything on it!" His questioner began to lose patience and said emphatically, "Yes, you do!" All of you who believe in Jesus seem to have it. I've seen it in the towns of Agra and Surat, and even in the city of Bombay." Suddenly the Christian understood, and his face glowed even more as he said, "Now I know what you mean, and I will tell you the secret. It's not something we put on from the outside but something that comes from within. It's the reflection of the light of God in our hearts."<sup>CXXV</sup>

**TO WRITE THE SAME THING.** Literally, it is "the going on writing the same thing." What things does he have in mind? Is he talking about repetition? He has just used the word which means to go on rejoicing, and he will repeat it in 4:4. But he may have something else in mind. What Paul is about to write (verses 2-3) is something that he had probably dealt with many times while with them: "Do not let Christianity be debased into some form of the Jewish ritualistic religion, obviously a danger then in Philippi."<sup>CXXVI</sup>

If he has in mind the Judaizers, when had he previously written to them about this? We are not told, but it seems obvious that Paul had written previous letters to them because they knew his situation and had sent Epaphroditus. It is also possible that they had heard about his situation from another source, but there had been communication between Paul and the church at Philippi.

**A SAFEGUARD.** He says, "To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you." It is possible that they had asked his help but apologized for the imposition. He responds that it is not an imposition on him if what he writes is a safeguard for them against any problem that would seriously hinder the Gospel in Philippi.

**3:2 - BEWARE.** Used three times for urgency and with a different epithet for the Judaizers each time. This is a strong warning; sudden, sharp, and harsh, but very much in order when we consider their ruthless attacks on Paul and the Gospel he preached.

**THE DOGS.** The Jews called Gentiles dogs and evil workers and now Paul turns the term on them. Jesus used the word (*kunarios*, little dogs), possibly in a humorous way, in talking with the Syro-phoenician woman (Matt. 15:26). Now Paul turns the term on the Judaizers themselves. In Isaiah, God uses the term to designate false pastors or shepherds in Israel (Isaiah 56:10-11). In the Bible the dog stands for that than which nothing can be lower.

In the East in the time of Jesus the dog was not the family pet, but a loathsome scavenger, roaming the streets, sometimes in packs, looking for garbage or rubbish. There is a Rabbinic saying, "The nations of the world are like dogs." The Jewish teachers called Gentiles dogs. Paul is saying to them, "in your proud self-righteousness, you call other men dogs; in your nationalistic pride in being a Jew, you call other nations dogs; it is you yourselves who are dogs, because you shamefully pervert the gospel of Jesus Christ."<sup>CXXVII</sup> Judaizers looked upon Gentiles in much the same way. Paul turns this on them. They were careful about their diet, but he calls them scavengers.

**EVIL WORKERS.** He calls them "deceitful workers" in 2 Cor. 11:13. Professing themselves to be ministers of Christ, they were in reality servants of Satan. Just as there were some evil workers in the church in the first century, there are evil workers in churches today. There are some who make mistakes - some are backsliders and there are some who are just plain evil. They viciously attack those who disagree with them, or those who may be more popular. These people are more dangerous than a rattlesnake, because they strike without warning and spray their venom in all directions. They attack people to their face, but even worse, they continue their character assassination behind their back. This is what the Judaizers were doing. Matthew Henry wrote:

"Evil workers," and "the concision" support the belief that "dogs" point to Judaizers. They fought Paul and the gospel he preached everywhere he went (see Galatians). For them Paul reserves the harshest criticism. He is saying, we are the true circumcision who worship God in spirit. The same principle applies to baptism or church membership today.<sup>cxxviii</sup>

We need to distinguish between Jews, Judaizers and Christians. There were both Jews and Gentiles who had become Christians by placing their faith in Jesus Christ. Judaizers were Jews who professed faith in Christ, but insisted that salvation is of the Jews and that before a Gentile could be saved he had to embrace Judaism. They believed in salvation through grace plus the Law (grace plus works). They followed Paul everywhere he went stirring up opposition, constantly attacking the Gospel of pure grace which Paul preached.

**FALSE CIRCUMCISION.** The KJV has "concision." Paul employs stinging sarcasm in his warning against the Judaizers, whom he calls "those mutilators of the flesh" (NIV). The word he chose means incision, mutilation (in contrast to the word for circumcision). The Judaizers boasted of circumcision but Paul calls them mutilators of the flesh. There is a pun here that is not translatable into English. Two Greek words are very similar. *Peritemnein* means to circumcise; *katatemnein* means to mutilate. *Peritemnein* describes the sacred sign of circumcision. *Katatemnein* describes forbidden self-mutilation (see Lev. 21:5). So Paul says, "You Jews think that you are circumcised, but the fact is, you are only mutilated."

They urged human works in opposition to the faith of Christ; but Paul calls them evil-workers. He calls them the concision; as they rent the church of Christ, and cut it to pieces. The work of religion is to no purpose, unless the heart is in it, and we must worship God in the strength and grace of the Divine Spirit. They rejoice in Christ Jesus, not in mere outward enjoyments and performances. Nor can we too earnestly guard against those who oppose or abuse the doctrine of free salvation.<sup>cxxix</sup>

Those who practice baptism by immersion are keenly aware of the that if an unsaved person makes a profession of faith and is immersed in a baptistry, he has not truly baptized - he has only been dipped. He just got wet. Baptism, like circumcision, has no significance is one has not had the

experience which it signifies. Popular talk show host, Rush Limbaugh, has often used the phrase, “symbol over substance” in reference to politics and social programs. In the church we must avoid putting symbol over substance.

**3:3 - FOR WE.** This refers to true believers in Christ, the children of Abraham by faith - whether Jew or Gentile - the spiritual circumcision in contrast to that which was merely physical (Rom. 2:25-29; Col. 2:11; Eph. 2:11). Paul says, “for we (Christians) are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (as do the Judaizers).

**WORSHIP IN THE SPIRIT OF GOD.** Worshiping God in the Spirit is the true meaning of religion, not some physical mark on the body. The only true worship is the worship of God in the in the Spirit of God. One Greek word for worship (*proskuneo*) means to fall down with faces to the ground in humble adoration. The word used here is *latreuo*, which means to serve, or to offer service. The former is an inner attitude of reverence and humility, the latter is the outward expression of that reverence and fear. This word (*latreuo*) originally denoted the wages paid for service.

It came to mean service without wages, then service in the worship place. It may be translated "serve" (2 Ti. 1:3) or "worship" (Acts 24:14; Php. 3:3). Genuine worship involves committed service (Rev. 22:3). See note on Dt. 11:13. Committed service grows from a committed heart (Jn. 4:23-24).<sup>cxxx</sup>

**GLORY IN CHRIST JESUS.** We glory only in Jesus and the Jesus we glory in is the Jesus of the Bible. Popular television host, Oprah Winfrey was deluged with mail protesting her appearance on *Ellen*, the television show which brought homosexuality “out of the closet” to major fanfare by a major network. The AFA Journal reports that a young lady in her audience asked her how she could profess to be a Christian and then support something that is wrong. She responded:

“Well, I have a different view of ‘Christian’ than you do. I’m a follower of Jesus Christ, but the Jesus Christ I follow embraces and loves everybody, and the God I serve doesn’t care whether you’re tall, short, or whether you were born mentally retarded, or whether you were born black or Asian or gay.”<sup>cxxxi</sup>

A “different view” of Christian? The Jesus Christ “I follow?” Born gay? By this attitude does one glory in Christ Jesus, or simply use Him to support one’s own post-modern world view? There is but one Jesus Christ - the Jesus Christ of Scripture, Who loves sinners but hates sin. To say that one is born “gay” is to say that God creates in His own image something he abhors. Would He destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of behavior over which they had no control because they were born that way? - that is their claim: that they were born that way. Homosexuals would call me homophobic (fear of homosexuals). But would they accept my explanation - if I am homophobic, I must have been born that way, because I have had a revulsion for the behavior as long as I can

remember.

No attitude that denigrates Christ can honor Him. No world view that ascribes to Him actions, attributes, or attitudes that conflict with God's Word can ever honor Him. True Christians glory Christ - Who He is and what He does. America enjoyed a Christian consensus from its birth until the middle of the Twentieth Century, but today most Americans do not glory in the name of Christ. In fact, it now seems that the media is determined to protect us from the very name of Christ.

### **ILLUSTRATION: NO GLORY IN CHRIST.**

The print medium often intentionally distorts what we write. Over the years since I became a Christian, I have always deliberately explained that I have "accepted Jesus Christ." These words are invariably translated into "Colson's professed religious experience." I discovered that one major U.S. daily, as a matter of policy, will not print the two words Jesus Christ together; when combined, the editor says, it represents an editorial judgment - Charles Colson.<sup>cxxxii</sup>

**IN THE FLESH.** The Christian must "put no confidence in the flesh." Flesh is a technical term used in Paul's controversy with the Judaizers. Believers have privileges beyond the flesh. The Jew placed his confidence in the physical badge of circumcision, and the human performances of the ordinances, and the duties of the Law. The Jew in essence trusted himself; the Christian in essence trusts God.

### **3:4-10**

In this passage Paul uses a powerful principle of analogy. Here Paul reflects on the whole course of his life, which gave him the right to criticize the Judaizers. "Paul counted his impeccable pedigree as rubbish (v. 8), even though he could boast in the rite of circumcision (v. 5), in his race (v. 5), in his religion (v. 5), in his record of persecuting the church (v. 6), and in his righteous life (v. 6)."<sup>cxxxiii</sup>

Looking back to chapter two we find Paul saying that Jesus, the eternal God, renounced what was His by right. In this passage Paul says, "I have renounced all things for Jesus." The missionary is not making himself equal with God. He is sharing his testimony with them and appeals to them to follow his example. They are encouraged to imitate Paul who imitates Christ.

If that sounds egotistic, remember that in those days there were no Bibles (as we have them today), no Christian books, book stores, or schools. Imitation of the life of Christ by believers was absolutely essential in order to reach the lost for Christ. The best way the Gospel could be communicated was by a Christian life. Paul had lived a Christ-like life before the Philippians and he was willing to be an example to them now as he endures suffering with patience and joy, and trusts Christ for ultimate victory. The most effective witness today is still a Christ-like life.

**3:4 - CONFIDENCE IN HE FLESH.** Paul writes, “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.” If anyone had grounds for confidence in flesh Paul did. A distinction must be made between confidence in God and confidence in the flesh, and in this passage Paul will do just that. In 3:4f the apostle has just attacked the Jewish teachers (Judaizers), and has insisted that it is the Christian, not the Jew, who is truly circumcised. Christians (Jews and Gentiles) are truly the covenant people - Christians are the ones with a special relationship with God.

To the average Christian, the Jews might say, "You are a Christian and you do not know what it means to be a Jew." But they could not say that to Paul, because he could establish his Jewish credentials. He had enjoyed every privilege which a Jew could enjoy, and had risen to every attainment to which a Jew might attain and he had abandoned it all for the sake of Jesus Christ.

**IF ANY ONE ELSE.** The NKJV reads, “If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so.” Paul reasons, if these Judaizers think they have grounds for “confidence in the flesh,” I have more reason to trust in the flesh than they. Obviously, they did think they had every reason to have confidence in the flesh. The Lord wants us to trust in Him for our salvation, but these Judaizers placed their confidence in the wrong thing. Because their thinking was faulty, their teachings were faulty. Lives based on false teachings do not honor the Lord.

**I FAR MORE.** The Judaizers were trusting in what God has rejected. Paul says the Judaizers placed confidence in the flesh (works) for salvation, while he places his confidence in Christ alone. However, if the flesh could save he had far more reason to boast than they. He proceeds to prove it in verses 5-6. This is not to be seen as sinful pride, but a statement of fact.

**3:5 - CIRCUMCISED THE EIGHTH DAY.** Ishmaelites were circumcised in the thirteenth year; Gentiles in mature age; Jews on the eighth day (Gen. 17:12; Luke 2:21; Leviticus 12:3). “In ancient Israel this act was ritually performed on the eighth day after birth upon children of natives, servants, and aliens (Lev. 9:3). Circumcision was carried out by the father initially, utilizing a flint knife (compare Josh. 5:3). Later specialists were employed among the Jewish people.”<sup>cxxxiv</sup>

Various theories have been set forward to try to explain the origin and purpose of circumcision. The Holman Bible dictionary suggests four theories:

(1) initiatory rite--before marriage (as the Shechemites in Gen. 34:14-24) or at puberty; (2) physical hygiene--to prevent the attraction or transmission of diseases; (3) tribal mark of distinction; (4) rite of entry into the community of faith. In the Old Testament the origin of Israelite practice was founded upon the circumcision of Abraham as a sign of the covenant between God and the patriarch (Gen. 17:10). Physical hygiene and tribal distinction resulted from circumcision, but the aspect of covenant sign which marked one's entry into the community of Yahwistic faith is the focus in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>cxxxv</sup>

Paul makes it clear that he and his parents followed the law of Judaism. He was not an Ishmaelite, nor was he a proselyte with a Gentile background. He had been born into the Jewish faith and had known its privileges since birth.

**OF THE NATION OF ISRAEL.** The NKJV follows the KJV, “Of the stock of Israel; the NIV, “of the people of Israel.” This denotes the original stock, meaning that he was not a proselyte. He was descended, not from a bond woman, but from the favorite wife of Jacob. When Jews wanted to stress their special relationship to God in its most unique sense, it was the word “Israelite” that they used. Ishmaelites and Edomites could trace their descent to Abraham, but the Israelite alone could trace their descent through Israel (Jacob). Paul stresses the absolute purity of his race and descent.

**BENJAMIN.** Benjamin was the second son Rachel bore to Jacob. He was the forefather of the tribe of Benjamin. “His birth was difficult, and his mother named him Benoni, which means ‘son of my sorrow.’ She died giving him birth. His father Jacob, however, did not let that name stand. He gave the child the name Benjamin, which means ‘son of the right hand’.”<sup>cxxxvi</sup> The Tribe of Benjamin had a special place in the aristocracy of Israel. The first king of Israel, Saul, was of the Tribe of Benjamin (I Sam. 9:1-2). They knew the battle cry in Israel, "After thee, O Benjamin" (Judges 5:14). To be a Benjamite was something in which the flesh might boast.<sup>cxxxvii</sup>

**A HEBREW OF THE HEBREWS.** He was of Hebrew parents who retained the same characteristic qualities in language and custom as the Palestinian Jew, as compared to the Hellenistic Jews (Acts 6:1f) - non-Palestinian Jews who adopted Greek language and culture. Paul was from Tarsus and knew Greek as well as Aramaic (Acts 21:40; 22:2) and Hebrew, but he had not become hellenized. To the very core of his being Paul was a follower of the first Hebrew, Abraham. He could make a good case for being more Jewish than the Judaizers.

Saying that he was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews" is not the same as saying he was a true Israelite. Jews were dispersed throughout the world. There were tens of thousands in Rome and more in Alexandria. Those Jews refused to be assimilated into the nations in which they lived. They zealously resisted amalgamation with the Gentiles. They retained their own religion, customs and laws. But one thing frequently happened. They forgot their language. They became Greek speaking Jews. They had to learn Greek because they lived in a Greek environment and had to use the Greek language in business.

A "Hebrew of the Hebrews" was a Jew who was not only of pure racial descent, but had also deliberately (often laboriously) retained the Hebrew tongue. Paul claims not only to be a pure-blooded Jew, but also one who spoke the Hebrew tongue. In other words, he out-stripped the Judaizers in being Jewish.

**A PHARISEE.** This would distinguish him from the Sadducees (Gal. 1:14). The Sadducees were influential and exercised a lot of control over the people of Palestine. They had a lot more political with Rome, but the Pharisees were far more strict in matters pertaining to religion. Paul continued in many of the doctrines of the Pharisees (belief in the resurrection, angels, miracles). Jesus

described many Pharisees as hypocrites, but when He wished to emphasize the need for righteousness, He said, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).

As far as the Law was concerned, Paul was a trained Pharisee. There were never many Pharisees (never more than 6,000), but they were very influential among First Century Jews. The Pharisees were known for their commitment to the study and rigid application of the Law. No one knew better from personal experience what the Jewish religion was all about than Paul.

**3:6 - AS TO ZEAL.** The NRSV has, "as to zeal, a persecutor of the church." Paul had a zeal for Judaism, and he was a zealot against Christianity, persecuting the church without mercy. Paul was the ringleader of the persecution from the death of Stephen until his own conversion (Acts 8:1-9:9). In modern terms, he was a militant Pharisee, an extremist (today a "right wing fundamentalist"). Is it not interesting that only the right has a "wing" today? Who ever heard of a left-wing extremist? Liberals in congress would no doubt say that he was "mean spirited."

**FOUND BLAMELESS.** He continues: "as to righteousness under the law, blameless" (NRSV). The NIV translators translated it rather loosely, but they captured the meaning: "as for legalistic righteousness, faultless." He knew and followed all the rules of the rabbis. He scored a "100" in Judaism. In terms of Olympic scoring, he scored a perfect "10" in every category.

Barclay has an interesting comment on this word. He says, "The word is *amemptos*, and J. B. Lightfoot remarks that the verb *memptesthai*, from which it comes, means to blame for sins of omission. So Paul claims that there was no demand of the Law which he did not fulfill" (italics added).<sup>cxxxviii</sup>

**3:7 - WHATEVER THINGS WERE GAIN TO ME.** There were many - His birth, his accomplishments in Judaism, his keen intellect, and his zeal for the Law. He was the star pupil of the great Gamaliel and the bright hope of the Sanhedrin, and he had a natural pride in his Jewish position and religious accomplishments.

**HAVE I COUNTED.** The tense shows state of completion. He seems to be saying, "Not only am I willing to do this, I have already done it." All these things Paul might have claimed to set down on the credit side of the balance sheet; but when he met Christ, he wrote them all off as nothing more than bad debts.

**LOSS.** This points to the debit side of the ledger, not the credit side. Paul was not simply exchanging one religion for another. He accepted a Person. Christ, and Christ, alone meets every need of the soul. Paul, with his priorities now in order, is a good example for all believers. Philippians 3:7 presents the principle by which every Christian should live.

**3:8 - MORE THAN THAT.** In the KJV this verse begins, "Yea, verily..." Robertson notes that five participles are used (yea, indeed, therefore, at least, even) before Paul proceeds, showing the force and passion of his conviction. He repeats his affirmation with the present middle

indicative, "I still count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge (the surpassingness) of Christ Jesus my Lord." <sup>cxxxix</sup>

**I COUNT ALL THINGS TO BE LOSS.** "Loss" is literally, refuse and it comes from a contraction of four little words meaning "throw it to the dogs." This is possibly a play of the word "dogs" (vs. 2). This points out how much Paul plays down everything else (material things, wealth, human pride) in favor of his loyalty to Christ.

The key word in verses 8 and 9 is righteousness. It has to do with a right relationship with God. Paul seems to say, "All my life I have been trying to get into a right relationship with God." He had found the Law less than useless in achieving a right relationship with God. It was no better than the refuse which was thrown to wild dogs in that day.

**THAT I MAY GAIN CHRIST.** Paul testifies, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ." Paul was never satisfied with his knowledge of Christ and always craved more fellowship with Him. He was willing to give up everything for the unsurpassed worth of Christ. He clearly embraced the words of Jesus, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37). Jesus illustrated this principle in the parable of the Pearl of Great Price.

**3:9 - BE FOUND IN HIM.** This verse presents us with a contrast between a works-righteousness which is based in the Law, and a faith-righteousness which is based upon faith in Jesus Christ (salvation by grace through faith). Here we have Paul's Gospel in a nutshell - not having a righteousness of my own based on the Law, he found it in Jesus Christ through faith. What he has really rejected is the effort to save himself by keeping the Law. This draws a definite line of distinction between true and false religion. A clear distinction should be made between New Testament Christianity and all the religions and religious cults in the world. Comparative religion classes miss the point. Christianity is not a religion as the world knows religion. It is a relationship based on a divine revelation. Our righteousness is not in rules or philosophies, but in a Person. We do not receive our righteousness by keeping the law or observing rituals and ordinances, but by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

The late Dr. H. Leo Eddleman, a former president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, once told me that when he was a missionary to Israel in the forties, a young Jewish man demanded to know why he was preaching Christianity to them when all the major wars were started by Christians. When Dr. Eddleman asked what he meant, he replied that Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini were all Christians. They were all baptized when they were babies. It is sad when that is all a Jewish person knows about Christianity. What is worse is when an individual who professes to be a Christian does not know any more than that about what makes one a Christian.

It is worth noting that Satan is not disturbed by religion. He invented the religions of the world and he remains the power behind them. Some post-modern spiritual leaders - leaders of a few of the extreme New Age movements - even recognize Satan as their Lord. But the genuine Christian

is invited to draw near to God and experience His nearness and His power. Then the believer can resist the devil and he will flee - not from the individual, but from the Lord Who indwells him.

**THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST.** That is, on the basis of faith (the KJV has “faith of Christ”). Everything in our salvation depends upon God's righteousness, given to us freely by God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. A saving faith is a total a commitment to Jesus Christ.

Righteousness in Christ is the key to Christian ethics. There are people who proclaim (sometimes boastfully), “I live by the Ten Commandments,” or “I live by the Golden Rule.” They may adopt either as a goal for their life, but only those who are clothed in His righteousness by grace, through faith, will ever succeed. The Christ-life can only be lived by those who have Christ in their heart. Our righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ. When, by the grace of God, we believe in His Son, He counts the righteousness of Christ as ours.

This righteousness, like that portrayed in the Old Testament, is not static but is known for its application to personal and social behavior. Such faith and righteousness are difficult to separate since they move together in observable life-style and conscious choices. We cannot be righteous in our own efforts apart from Christ. We cannot receive righteousness from Christ without faith. We cannot be counted as righteous in Christ without the desire to let the Spirit create a life of righteous acts in us.<sup>cxl</sup>

It is worth repeating - a right relationship with God comes, not through works of the Law, but through faith. You will never get into a right relationship with God by your own efforts, but by the grace of God you will only get into a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Universalism is not taught in the Bible. We are not all children of God. Only those who are in Christ are children of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

A Jewish rabbi in Jackson, Mississippi once invited a group of students from Mississippi College to attend a service at Temple Beth Israel. He added, “You believe everything we believe, we just don't believe everything you believe.” Judaism, or the Law was given to Israel by God and He expected them to live by it. Furthermore, the world had never seen anything comparable. It surpassed all other codes of ethics, including the Code of Hammurabi. Jesus said it best, "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it" Luke 16:16, NAS).

This is not anti-Semitic. I love lawyer, historian, and movie critic Michael Medvid, who is also Jewish. Recently he filing in for popular radio talk show host, Rush Limbaugh, he lamented the moral decline in America and illustrated the attitude behind by pointing to movies. He said that the philosophy of many today is, “follow your heart.” He pointed to movies in which children are, in essence, told to “follow your passion.” Medved pointed to the character Humphrey Bogart played in *Casablanca*, and said, “The message you get from *Casablanca* is ‘Do what's right.’” The message you get from Gary Cooper in *High Noon* is, “Do your duty.” Jimmy Stewart, in *It's a Wonderful*

*Life*, did not do what he wanted to do, he did his duty.

A Jewish neighbor who honors the Law and does his duty will make a better citizen and a better neighbor than some professing Christians in most any community. I applaud them for it. But Jesus, in The Sermon on the Mount, reveals a higher principle by which believers are to live. The righteousness of Jesus Christ, the righteousness which He imputes to those who have faith in Him, is superior to human good. Its basis is not in human beings, but in Jesus Christ and in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Who indwells the believer.

**3:10 - THAT I MAY KNOW HIM.** This means to have a personal acquaintance, or experience with Him. This is Paul's passion - to get more knowledge of Christ through a personal relationship with Him. This comes, not through some existential leap of faith, but through daily growth in Christ through Scripture and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Who indwells the believer for that very purpose. The sure and certain foundation of God's Word and the teaching, nurturing ministry of His Spirit are indispensable. It is not that he wants knowledge of more facts, theories, or principles. It is the personal knowledge of another person that he desires. Paul wanted to know Christ more deeply.

In verses 10-11 Paul defines faith-without claiming to do so - in a way that might surprise many. Faith is not a set of doctrines to be believed, or a particular religion (Christian faith, Baptist faith, Muslim faith, or Jewish faith). Rather, he goes on to say, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection." When Paul says, "that I may know Him," he is using a word that all the way through the Bible means to have a personal experience with Him, to know Him personally. This is a relationship which comes by grace through faith, based on revealed truth.

When the Bible tells us we are to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation, it never means that we are to simply believe certain facts about Him. Those facts are important, but knowing them has never saved any one. The one element that needs to be stressed is commitment. To believe in Jesus Christ is to commit one's self to Him through faith. Faith is man's only acceptable response to God. Faith, a gift of God by grace (Eph. 2:8), is the only thing that is compatible with His grace. This faith is a commitment based on revealed truth; it is not a leap into the unknown.

I toured the Rameses Exhibit when it was in Memphis, Tennessee, so I know certain facts about Rameses. I believe he lived and that he was a remarkable leader. But I have no personal relationship with Rameses, and my knowledge of his life and times is of no spiritual benefit to me. I know a lot more about Jesus than I do Rameses. In fact, I knew many facts about Jesus before I was saved because of what I had learned at home and church. But knowing those facts did not save me. I was saved when by God's grace, through faith which He provided, I committed myself to Him.

For two and a half years while I was a student at Mississippi College, I led a Baptist Student Union (BSU) mission trip to the Hinds County Jail in Jackson every Thursday afternoon. On one particular visit, I was visiting with two juveniles I had met on an earlier visit when two other students came down the hall and interrupted me. They asked if I would try to talk with a man who was in a cell by himself, rather than the bullpen with other men. Actually, there was an empty cell on either side of his (we were a little puzzled because we did not know as much about

homosexuality then as college students do today). They said that he was very hostile toward them and asked me to trade places with them. Their comments raised some apprehensions, but since I was the leader of the mission to the jail, I knew I had to trade places with them.

I walked down to his cell and stopping before the bars, I introduced myself. When I learned his name and his home town, I told him that during the summer I worked for the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS, Department of Agriculture) in his home county and knew his area well. This seemed to open the door and after a few minutes I asked, "Mr. Davis (not his real name), do you believe in God?" He said that he did. I surprised myself with the next question. Now I know it came from the Lord. I asked, "Mr. Davis, do you believe God?"

After a minute or so, he got up from his cot and walked directly toward the bars. I recalled what the other students had said about how violently he reacted to them and when his hands came up I wondered if he might try to reach through the bars to try get to me (for what reason I could only imagine). Instead, he caught a bar in each hand and looked me in the eye and asked, "Johnny, can you get me a Bible?" I gave him my New Testament. He did not want to know certain facts about Jesus; he wanted to know Him personally. That day he prayed, asking God to forgive his sins and give him eternal life.

In this verse Paul goes on to refer to the Resurrection and suffering. Why mention His Resurrection before His suffering? He has it right. You cannot enter into an experience of suffering with Christ until you know Him by faith as the living Lord. That is how He comes into our lives. It is not only because He died, but because He arose and lives, otherwise He would not be able to come into our hearts as the living Savior. So Paul knows Him first in the power of His Resurrection. And now in the suffering he must endure, he can share a little bit of the suffering of Christ. Paul says he must fill up what is lacking in the suffering of Christ, indicating not that His sacrifice was incomplete, but that He goes on suffering through His body, the church, until He returns.

**THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION.** Robertson cites Lightfoot, who holds that power is used here in the sense of assurance to believers in immortality (I Cor. 15:14f; Rom. 8:11), in the triumph over sin (Rom. 4:24f), in the dignity of the body (I Cor. 6:13f; Phil 3:21), in stimulating the moral and spiritual life (Gal. 2:20).<sup>cxli</sup>

Henry Morris, founder and first President of the Institute for Creation Research, has authored numerous books on creation, including one of his latest, *Creation and the Modern Christian*. In the Foreward, Charles C. Ryrie says, "When the history of Christianity in the twentieth century is written, the name of Henry Morris should have a prominent place for his leadership in promoting the doctrine of creation."<sup>cxlii</sup> Dr. Morris wrote:

The two greatest events in the history of the cosmos were, first of all, its supernatural creation, and secondly, the resurrection of its Creator from the dead. The evidence for each, to one whose mind and heart are open to evidence, is overwhelming. All real science points to creation, and the best-proved fact of history is the resurrection. The Bible, of course, teaches that both are vitally true, vitally important, and vitally related, but even to one who does not believe the Bible;

the evidence is still unanswerable. He may reject it, but he cannot refute it.

Furthermore, each is necessary to the other. The creation, invaded and permeated by decay and death, heading down toward ultimate chaos, can only be saved and renewed if death is defeated and life is restored by its Creator. The resurrection, conversely, triumphing over death and promising ultimate restoration of the perfect creation, can only be accomplished by the Creator Himself. The creation requires the resurrection and the resurrection requires the Creator.<sup>cxliii</sup>

Unfortunately, the modern Christian often does not place the same emphasis on the resurrection that it was given in the early church. Apart from Easter, how often does the modern church deal with the resurrection of Jesus Christ? How much time does the modern believer study the resurrection and meditate on its consequences? Dr. Morris writes:

The first book of God's written Word begins with the mighty creation of heaven and earth (Genesis 1:1), but ends with "a coffin in Egypt" (Genesis 50:26). The final book of God's Word introduces Jesus Christ as "the first begotten of the dead" (Revelation 1:5), and ends with "all things made new" (Revelation 21:5).<sup>cxliv</sup>

Great power is demonstrated in the creation of the universe. But no less is the mighty power of Almighty God manifested in the resurrection of His precious Son from the dead. Without the creation we would not be here. Without the resurrection why would we want to be here? It would be better never to have been born than to have been born once and never to have been born again. The resurrection is far more than a seasonal theme - it is our only hope.

#### **ILLUSTRATION: THE RESURRECTION.**

A workman of the great chemist Michael Faraday accidentally knocked a silver cup into a solution of acid. It was promptly dissolved, eaten up by the acid. The workman was terribly disturbed by the accident. The chemist came in and put a chemical into the jar, and shortly all the silver was precipitated to the bottom. The shapeless mass was lifted out and sent to the silversmith, and the cup was restored to its original shape. If a human genius can do a thing like this, why should we doubt that God can raise the dead?<sup>cxlv</sup>

**THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERING.** Partnership in His suffering was an honor prized by Paul. Think how little most of us enter into this holy "fellowship of His suffering." Yet, Christians will have to go on bearing the cross and suffering along with their living Savior, Who died on the cross for them. Thousands are suffering for Christ and have suffered for decades in Communist and Islamic countries. Should Islamic extremists or radical Communists realize their

goals, Christians will be called on to suffer and die in America even as they are now suffering in various parts of the world. Americans have only recently learned of the intensity of the persecution of Christians in many parts of the world. One Islamic radical with seemingly inexhaustible funds is funding terrorism against Jews and “Crusaders” around the world.

If the enemies of the Cross could accomplish the goals of the most radical elements of those groups, there could be a blood-bath with Christians as the primary targets. Humanists, with their gospel of evolution, have been behind many restrictions placed on Christians and, unfortunately, they have persuaded many Christian leaders to support the secularization of our society. Christianity and Humanism are not two different movements on parallel tracks trying to accomplish the same thing. They are strongly opposed to each other and must clash. If we do not reach the world for Christ, the world is going to persecute the church - and the persecution is spreading, both in scope and intensity right now. Are we prepared to enter into the fellowship of His suffering?

**BECOMING CONFORMED TO HIS DEATH.** Being “conformed to His death” means “becoming like him in his death” --passing through death into a new life, dying and rising with Christ (cf. Rom. 6).<sup>”cxlvi</sup> In this passage the secret of the missionary's life is unveiled. “The agony of Gethsemane, not less than the agony of Calvary, will be reproduced however faintly in the faithful servant of Christ.”<sup>”cxlvii</sup> Being conformed to Him in His death is being like Him in His death. But what does that mean? For one thing, it means obeying the will of God even unto death. Paul would be paying that price before long and he was ready.

#### **ILLUSTRATION: PERSECUTION, APOSTLES.**

St. Matthew suffered martyrdom by being slain with a sword at a distant city of Ethiopia.

St. Mark expired at Alexandria, after having been cruelly dragged through the streets of that city.

St. Luke was hanged upon an olive tree in the classic land of Greece.

St. John was put into a caldron of boiling oil, but escaped death in a miraculous manner, and was afterwards banished to Patmos.

St. Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downward.

St. James the Greater was beheaded at Jerusalem.

St. James the Less was thrown from a lofty pinnacle of the temple, and then beaten to death with a fuller's club.

St. Philip was hanged up against a pillar at Heiropolis in Phrygia.

St. Bartholomew was flayed alive.

St. Andrew was bound to a cross, where he preached to his persecutors until he died.

St. Thomas was run through the body with a lance at Coromandel in the East Indies.

St. Jude was shot to death with arrows.

St. Matthias was first stoned, and then beheaded.

St. Barnabas of the Gentiles was stoned to death by the Jews at Salonica.

St. Paul after various tortures and persecutions, was at length beheaded at Rome by the Emperor Nero.<sup>cxlviii</sup>

As a new millennium begins, Christians are being persecuted around the world, and the persecution is expanding in scope and growing in intensity. Muslim fundamentalists in some countries are actively trying to eradicate Christianity from those countries. Communist governments always oppress and often persecute Christians. And here in America, the controlling elite pass laws and hand down decisions that erode our freedom and place us in danger of persecution. The nation that more than another in history guaranteed its people freedom of religion, seems now bent on freeing its people from religion.

Those opposed to Christianity have often been so subtle that they have even convinced a lot of Christians they are doing it for our own good. Seminary professors and liberal pastors applauded when the Supreme Court took prayer and Bible reading out of the public schools in 1962 and 1963 (I was in the seminary classroom then). Any study of the moral decline in America will show an unusual acceleration of immorality and ungodliness beginning in the early sixties, escalating through the seventies and eighties, and reaching shocking levels before the turn of the century. We have seen the movement - from endorsement of religion to toleration, to opposition in many quarters, and oppression in other quarters. Will this lead to actual persecution? Only the Lord knows for sure, but we would be very naive to assume that the direction in which we have been moving is leading to increased freedom for the spread of the Gospel.

In June, 1997 the Supreme Court of the United States handed down a decision that will allow states and local governments to "easily limit religious activity." A spokesman for the Baptist Joint Committee for Public Affairs said, "The religious liberty of every American is in peril."<sup>cxlix</sup> The sad truth is that we are not losing our freedom, we are throwing it away. How? Apathy! The story is told of a man who asked a neighbor, "Do you know the two main things that are wrong with Americans?" The neighbor replied, "I don't know, and I don't care." He said, "Congratulations! You got them both."

**3:11 - THAT I MAY ATTAIN.** Paul has not "arrived." He has not already attained all there is to attain. The NKJV reads, "if, by any means, I may attain;" whereas the NAS has "in order that I may attain." This is not an expression of doubt, but of genuine humility. We may paraphrase it, "if somehow I might attain" (see the NIV). It is actualized through his resurrection and suffering with Christ. It is by this means that it is attained. The resurrection from the dead here is that which awaits believers who know Christ and share fellowship in His sufferings in this life. Even though it may not be clearly seen in the English, the "if" clause is more a statement of humility than uncertainty. That Paul is not in doubt may be seen from what he wrote to Timothy: "...for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day" (2 Tim. 2:12b).

**RESURRECTION.** The word Paul used is a compound word (used only here in the NT) meaning “the out-resurrection from among the dead.” The resurrection of believers is the emphasis here. Some see this as possibly referring to the Rapture of the Church. The resurrection of the believer is as certain as the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. “The only possible uncertainty for believers is whether they will have died by the return of Christ (and thereby participate in the resurrection of the dead) or whether they will be still alive when He comes (and thereby receive transformed bodies in association with being caught up to meet Him in the air).<sup>cl</sup> Unless one believes in the risen Lord, and unless he is willing to share in the suffering (take up the cross and follow Him), he will not share in the resurrection of the righteous from the dead.

### 3:12-16

In 3:12-16 we see that Paul has risked being thought proud and boastful in order to tell what he has given up for Christ. Now he goes on to warn people against feeling that they had attained either perfection or status which they had not attained. This suggests that there were some people in the church at Philippi who did think they had attained perfection or near perfection (Judaizers, mutilators of the flesh). They were saying that Gentiles must do certain things so that they would not go on being Gentile dogs, but become Jewish Christians. Paul shows that the true believer's attitude is that the Christian must keep on striving to know and to serve the Lord. The person who thinks he has attained super-saint status is demonstrating how far he is from spiritual maturity.

**3:12 - NOT THAT I HAVE ALREADY OBTAINED IT.** Paul is guarding against misunderstanding. Literally, he says, "I did not already obtain." He had not obtain perfection. While the modern student of the Word of God might think of the Apostle to the Gentiles as a “super saint,” he obviously did not have that opinion of himself.

**OR HAVE ALREADY BECOME PERFECT.** Paul pointedly denies that he has reached a spiritual impasse of non-development. Certainly, he knew nothing of the so-called sudden absolute, instant perfection by a single experience. He has made great progress in Christ-likeness, but the goal is still before him and not behind him. Paul did not claim to have attained a state of resurrection-perfection while here on earth. The word he uses means completeness.

The meaning of the Greek word for perfect (*teleios*) is not difficult in Greek, but it is not easy to translate into English. It denotes a kind of functional perfection. It connotes adequacy for some given purpose. It means being full-grown in contrast to being under developed. It means to be mature in mind as opposed to one who is a beginner in a subject. The *teleios* of an acorn is an oak tree. The *teleios* of a little boy is a grown man.

**BUT I PRESS ON.** He has not yet obtained perfection, but he is still running the race of life. He is not discouraged - in fact he is encouraged. His conversion was the beginning, not the end of the journey. He is saying, "I press on" to make it my own because Christ has made me His Own. Jesus Christ has already paid the price for our salvation and provided for our sanctification through the

Holy Spirit. He assures us that we are His. That part is settled. Now, we are to make real in our lives what Jesus has already by faith given us. We are already children of God. We are already redeemed, and the process goes on day by day actualizing what has already been given us in Christ. Paul said, "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me" (NIV).

The wedding ceremony is the beginning of the marriage, not the sum-total, and not the end. The conversion is only the beginning of the Christian experience, not the end, and not the sum-total. Unfortunately, the only testimony many professing Christians have concerns the conversion. Too few have fresh testimonies about what God is doing in and through them right now.

**3:13 - DO NOT REGARD MYSELF AS HAVING LAID HOLD OF IT YET.** The verb means to grasp completely. Absolute denial is seen. He has not yet laid hold of all that Christ provided for him (3:12). Peter states the principle: "but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18a).

**BUT ONE THING.** There is no verb in the Greek. He does not claim to have made it on his own. Paul adds a qualifier, a very important qualifier, and an important point (see below).

**FORGETTING WHAT LIES BEHIND.** He may have in mind either his old pre-Christian life, his previous progress as a Christian, or both. The born-again Christian - the only kind of Christian there is - must forget his past failures, whether sins of omission or sins of commission. But that is not all. The faithful servant of the Lord must also forget past accomplishments in one sense. While we can learn both from past mistakes and past successes, we must not continue to look back to past accomplishments (rest on one's own laurels), any more than we should hide behind past failures or disadvantages.

**REACHING FORWARD TO WHAT LIES AHEAD.** The picture is of one stretching himself out towards the goal. The metaphor is of a runner leaning forward as he runs, as an Olympic runner leans into the tape. He wants to impress upon them the fact that we have not arrived yet. "But one thing" (This is not true unless you remember this one thing), he says, "Forgetting the things which are behind..." He is not talking about memory. He is saying that the runner cannot run a race looking back to see how he is doing, or how the competition is doing. The late Satchel Page played baseball until he was reportedly in his late fifties. In response to a reporter, he explained his philosophy of life. He said, "Don't ever look back. Something may be gaining on you!"

**3:14 - I PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL.** "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Jesus is the goal to Whom we must continually look as we run the race of life (Heb. 12:2). We must run the race looking ahead to the goal (mark), and not looking back where we have been. In the hundred yard dash, the runner must be looking ahead to the tape, and not back toward he starting blocks.

Paul may have had the Roman games in mind. In the Roman arena the prize was placed at a prominent place at the finish line. They were thus motivated to lean forward and try a little harder coming around the last turn when their eyes were on the prize. Paul is not looking back at the prison

and the chains. He is reaching forward with his eyes on the prize. His prize is Jesus - Jesus Himself, not a mansion, not streets of gold, not gates of pearl.

**THE PRIZE.** To Paul the prize is Jesus, not something Jesus might do for him, and not some information about Him. Jesus is the ultimate prize. How many Christians live each day with their eyes on this Prize? How many really see the glory of heaven as Christ and want more than anything else to be with Jesus? To many people, the question is will I know my family and friends? Sometimes people anticipate seeing loved-ones more than they long to see Jesus.

**OF THE HIGH CALLING.** Literally, "of the upward calling." Unfortunately, many people think of the high calling as something pertaining to the divine call of one to the ministry. But every believer has a high calling to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. We must understand that the goal continually moves forward as we press on, but it is never out of sight.

**IN CHRIST JESUS.** We find eternal life in and through Christ Jesus. Then as Christians, all we do is in Christ Jesus. Eternal life is the gift of God, but it is only in Christ Jesus - there is no way of getting to heaven but through Christ.

**3:15 - AS MANY AS ARE PERFECT.** "Here the term teleioi means relationship perfection, not the absolute perfection so pointedly denied in verse 12."<sup>cli</sup> It has

a different sense from that of v. 12, in which Paul uses a verb in the perfect tense ("am ... perfected") to denote absolute spiritual maturity, or sinless perfection. Here he uses the word to speak of relative spiritual maturity or relative "perfection." The spiritual maturity spoken of is not a state of sinless perfection but one of completeness, as the maturity of an adult compared with that of an infant. Paul is describing those who as Christians are "mature," as contrasted with "babes in Christ."<sup>clii</sup>

It should be stressed that "relative" perfection here does not point to moral relativism, but to "relationship perfection." While this does not imply absolute moral perfection, maturity in the Christian life does mean that certain things that once hindered us will no longer master us.

**HAVE THIS ATTITUDE.** The NIV has, "All of us who are mature should take such a view of things." He is saying that we should keep on thinking that we have not yet attained absolute perfection. With this in mind, we need to confess our sins (1 John 1:9) and seek God's forgiveness and guidance as we press on to spiritual maturity (2 Peter 3:18).

**IF...YOU HAVE A DIFFERENT ATTITUDE.** This is a condition of the first class, assumed to be true. In essence, he is saying, "if you think that you are absolutely perfect, and some of you do..." Some people today claim absolute perfection. There are others who would never claim moral perfection, but cannot understand why anyone would disagree with them, any more than they can

understand why everyone does not live as they live. Paul had not arrived - he expects God to reveal more to him along the way.

True believers, in seeking this assurance, as well as to glorify him, will seek more nearly to resemble his sufferings and death, by dying to sin, and by crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts. In these things there is a great difference among real Christians, but all know something of them. Believers make Christ all in all, and set their hearts upon another world. If they differ from one another, and are not of the same judgment in lesser matters, yet they must not judge one another; while they all meet now in Christ, and hope to meet shortly in heaven. Let them join in all the great things in which they are agreed, and wait for further light as to lesser things wherein they differ.<sup>ciii</sup>

**GOD WILL REVEAL THAT ALSO TO YOU.** Is Paul simply stating the fact that God will reveal the error of their thinking to them? Or, is he saying that he is turning such cases over to God? There are individuals whom we may have to simply turn over to God for Him to deal with them. If anything we say or do seems to make the situation worse, the next step may simply be to turn them over to the Lord, continue praying for them, and let God deal with them.

On the other hand, there are individuals who simply cannot understand certain doctrines. Should we try to force our interpretation on them? Should we force them out of the church. Or should we pray that God will reveal the truth to them? A reasonable answer might well be that we should try to instruct them, but if it seems that more heat is being thrown on the subject that light, we may have to back off and pray that the Holy Spirit will lead them to the truth. Paul is not just brushing those aside who do not agree. He is saying, "If you don't agree, God will give you light on the subject." No one will be enlightened if he blinds himself to the light. If we are open to the leadership of the Holy Spirit and continue in the Word of God, He will be able to give us more light.

**3:16 - BY THAT SAME RULE LET US WALK.** Having come thus far, let us go on in the same path in which we have been traveling. We must persevere in the faith, continuing to grow in His grace and knowledge, and remain faithful to Him in all things. There is a lesson here for those who grow weary with the routine of religious life. That Paul understood that is seen in his letter to the Galatians: "Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9). The old adage is applicable here: The faith that falters before the finish was faulty from the first.

At times every believer needs to be encouraged to hold on to what he has already attained. We should hold on to that which has been verified by experience and through Scripture, but be open to new revelation (through a deeper understanding of Scripture) and new experience with Christ in the future. But we cannot stress too strongly that this does not include manifestations and experiences which go beyond Scripture, so as to imply that Christ is inadequate. We can be sure that the Holy Spirit will never lead us to violate Scripture.

### 3:17-21

Paul invites the criticism of some when he encourages them to follow him. Is this ego? Is this a holier than thou attitude? To answer that we must remember that they had no Sunday School, no Bible as we know it, no religious programs on television and no Christian book stores. They needed an example. So Paul says, "Brethren, join in imitating me." He adds that they should also imitate others who live as he lived. Would you dare say to your family and friends, "Follow my example"?

**3:17 - JOIN IN FOLLOWING MY EXAMPLE.** The Greek word (*summimetai*) means "fellow imitators." Paul inviting them to become fellow imitators with him of Christ. The English word "mimic" carries the same idea. "Just as Paul mimics Christ, so they should mimic (imitate) him. The word "Pattern" (*tupos*) means "to strike an exact image upon a blank piece of metal. The word was used of making coinage. Paul's ministry consists of following Christ so closely that in making Paul a pattern for the Christian walk, his converts would essentially be reproducing the image of their King, Jesus Christ, throughout the realm.<sup>cliv</sup> Paul had not attained perfect, but he was following a perfect Lord. We should mimic him.

Becoming imitators of Christ is the positive side of the coin, but there is a negative side to those who refuse to follow his example.

Those who refuse to conform to the image of the Suffering Servant are only reproducing the base coinage of this world, which will be further devalued when Christ returns (3:18-4:1). Paul lived what he taught. There were men in the church whose conduct was an open scandal. By their lives they showed that they were enemies of Christ. Paul's life proved his loyalty to the Lord.<sup>clv</sup>

#### **ILLUSTRATION: A BAD EXAMPLE.**

When [David] Brainerd was among the American Indians, he stopped at a place where he offered to instruct them in Christianity. He was met by the retort, "Why should you desire the Indians to become Christians, seeing that the Christians are so much worse than the Indians? The Christians lie, steal, and drink worse than the Indians. They first taught the Indians to be drunk. They steal to so great a degree, that their rulers are obliged to hang them for it; and even that is not enough to deter others from the practice. We will not consent, therefore, to become Christians, lest we should be as bad as they. We will live as our fathers lived, and go where our fathers are, when we die." By no influence could he change their decision.<sup>clvi</sup>

Good examples are important. It was a joy to hear of one of my neighbors in Bastrop, Louisiana, talk about one of our deacons. He said, "I want to tell you that you have a man in your church I have worked with every day for years and he lives his Christianity on the job. Robert Craig is the same person all week long that you see every Sunday at church." A pastor loves to hear that kind of testimony.

**OBSERVE THOSE.** "Brethren, join in following my example, and *observe those* who walk according to the pattern you have in us (italics added)." He has invited them to keep their eyes on him as a goal, to note how he lives and follow him. In addition, he points out that there were some who were already observing Paul and following his example. Now he encourages the Philippian saints to "note those who so walk" (NKJV) and follow them. Today, there are some Christians who are following the Lord so faithfully that they are good examples to follow. We should observe them and follow them. By the same token, there are some bad examples whom we should note and avoid, as he had written to the church at Rome: "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them" (Rom.16:17).

The word translated "teaching" may be rendered "doctrine," as it is in the KJV. Any compromise of sound doctrine is too high a price to pay for harmony. Unity based on false doctrine is a false unity. It is just a matter of time before the fissures in that false unity expose themselves. It is not love that holds us together, and it is not liturgy or ritual. It is the revealed truth, the Word of God - that is what sound doctrine is.

**ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN YOU HAVE IN US.** Originally, the word was used of the impression left by a stroke or blow (John 20:25), then a pattern (mold), as it is used here. Paul still remains the preeminent example of what a Christian should be. What a pattern he was! One would never expect to hear Paul say, "Do as I say and not as I do." That is Pharisaic. He was a good role model for those first century believers. Jesus is our perfect and holy pattern, and no one is a worthy example, (pattern) who is not faithfully following Him. Children and young people today need good role models, and they do not need to have to go back to the first century to find them.

**3:18 - OF WHOM I OFTEN TOLD YOU.** "For many walk, *of whom I often told you*, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ (italics added)." He had passionately warned them against the enemies of the Cross. Repetition in Paul's warning sends a clear signal as to the importance he places on it. There are two reasons for repetition in the Bible. For one thing, there are lessons we have to hear, or read, over and over before they really become a part of us. For another, it stresses the importance God places on an issue.

**EVEN WEEPING.** Deep emotion overcame Paul as he recalled these followers of Christ (2 Cor. 2:4) while dictating this letter. He often shed tears of joy, but like Jesus, there were times when he wept over the sins the people, or the troubles of the saints. Wiersbe's comments on this passage are worth noting.

How strange in a letter filled with joy to find Paul *weeping*! Perhaps

he is weeping over himself and his difficult situation! No, he is a man with a *single mind*, and his circumstances do not discourage him. Is he weeping because of what some of the Roman Christians are doing to him? No, he has the *submissive mind* and will not permit people to rob him of his joy. These tears are not for himself at all; they are shed because of others. Because Paul has the *spiritual mind*, he is heartbroken over the way some professed Christians are living, people who “mind earthly things.” (author’s italics)<sup>clvii</sup>

**THE ENEMIES OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST.** These “enemies of the Cross” may have been either Judaizers who denied the value of the Cross of Christ (Gal. 5:11; 6:12,14), or Epicurean antinomians whose loose living denied, or made a mockery of the Cross (1 John 2:4). That they were Epicurean libertines is suggested by the reference in 3:19 to those whose primary concern was their “appetite” (sensual indulgences, 3:19). Paul’s work was belittled, his appearance ridiculed, his apostleship denied, and his personal integrity called into question. For these enemies of the cross the end will be destruction.

Many people show by their walk that they are enemies of the Cross. Why? Because the Cross means that I die to myself and live for, and unto, Jesus Christ. The professing Christian who lives in sin is hypocritically denying what he has professed. He is dead to Christ’s fellowship and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and he is alive only to self. Instead of crowning Christ he crucifies Him daily. Instead of crucifying self he crowns self daily. This is a serious problem both for the individual and the church.

**3:19 - WHOSE END IS DESTRUCTION.** The enemies of the Cross (vs. 18) will suffer absolute destruction (not annihilation) in hell, the lake of fire which burns forever. They are going to suffer absolute rejection by the God they rejected. This is the ultimate end for all enemies of the Cross. Being a member of a local church will not save people, in Philippi or in America.

**WHOSE GOD IS THEIR APPETITE.** The NKJV renders it, “whose god is their belly” (stomach, NIV), but “appetite” is consistent with the original. The enemies of the cross of Christ care for nothing more than their sensual appetites. Sensuality in food, drink and sex, master their lives.

There are many who pose as Christians but glory in unchristian behavior. Paul describes something they were familiar with in Philippi and throughout the Roman world. Roman history records the celebration of feasts in honor of Bacchus, the god of wine, women and song, the god of lust. Parties were held with excesses in wine, food and sex. The “puking well” discovered in the ruins of a house in Pompeii illustrates their excesses. Guests would gorge themselves with food, go to the well and induce vomiting, and then return to the table to stuff themselves again. They would do this repeatedly. George Grant and Mark A Horne (*Legislating Immorality*, Moody Press, 1993) explain that the festival of Bacchus dominated the Greco-Roman calendar even more than Christmas does ours.

In ancient Greece and Rome, the festival of Bacchus was held each

year to celebrate the spring harvest. It was always a chaotic and raucous affair. During the week-long festivities, the normally sedate city states of the Peloponnese succumbed to animal passions and compulsive caprices. They profligately indulged in every form of sensual gratification imaginable - from fornication and sodomy to intoxication and gluttony. It was an orgy of promiscuous pleasure.

Bacchus was the god of wine, women, and song. To the ancients, he was the epitome of pleasure. His mythic exploits were a dominant theme in the popular art, music, and ideas of the day...

But a wild picture of immorality that only poets and mobs can understand is always simultaneously a wild picture of melancholy that only parents and emissaries can understand. Thus, even as they reveled in the streets, the ancients were troubled by a sublime sadness. It felt like an ache in their throat or a knot in their stomachs, but it was actually an abscess in their souls.<sup>clviii</sup>

**3:20 - OUR CITIZENSHIP.** This word is used only here in the New Testament. It may be translated citizenship or commonwealth. “Our citizenship” in the present verse stands in sharp contrast to those “who mind earthly things” in the previous verse. We hear a lot about the spirit-filled life today. In Paul’s letter to the Philippian church we learn what it means to be spiritually minded. There is no better simple, abbreviated description of what it means to be spiritually minded anywhere than that found in Phil. 2:5 - “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (NKJV). When you begin to think like Jesus, you will begin to act like Jesus because your values will be like His. The point is not to say that those who strive and pray for ecstatic experiences are not spiritual, but that those experiences do not make one spiritual. If one is truly spiritually minded he can simply trust the Lord to bless him with the gifts and blessings of His choosing and praise Him for it. But the contrast set forth in these two verses provides us with some food for thought. To be spiritually minded means to look at things from God’s point of view, and to be carnally minded means to look at things from the world’s point of view. Those who exercise faithfully their heavenly citizenship are spiritually minded, but those “who set their minds on earthly things” (vs. 19) are carnally minded.

The word “spiritual” has suffered as much abuse as the word “fellowship.” Too many people think that a “spiritual Christian” is mystical, dreamy, impractical, and distant. When he prays, he shifts his voice into a sepulchral tone *in tremolo* and goes to great lengths to inform God of the things He already knows. Unfortunately, this kind of unctuous piety is a poor example of true spirituality. To be spiritually minded does not require one to be impractical and mystical. Quite the contrary, the spiritual mind makes the believer think more clearly and get things done more efficiently.<sup>clix</sup>

Paul wrote the same thing to the Colossians: “Practice occupying your minds with the things above, not with the things of earth” (Col. 3:2, Williams translation). The main criticism of the nineteen sixties “Jesus Freaks” was that they were so heavenly minded they were of no earthly good. In response someone explained that they were like that because they were reacting against their parents who were so earthly minded they were of no heavenly good. Marx and Lenin were wrong in referring to Christianity as “pie in the sky, bye and bye,” but the enemies of the cross can hardly be expected to understand this principle. True spirituality is of immeasurable earthly good and of infinite heavenly value.

Paul was proud of his Roman citizenship and appreciated the protection it afforded him. The Philippians were also proud of their Roman citizenship. But Christians are citizens of a kingdom that is not of this world. They should be recognized as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven by other believers and by the world. Tee-shirts and caps advertising beer, drugs and immorality are hardly appropriate for the child of God.

Remember that Philippi was a Roman colony. Rome set up colonies at strategic military centers to control the great Roman roads and passes along which the armies must march. The colonies were made mostly of Roman soldiers and former soldiers who had served their time (21 years). They had full Roman citizenship. The main thing to remember is that wherever they were they were like fragments of Rome. Wherever they were, Roman dress was worn; Roman officials governed them; Latin was spoken; Roman justice was administered; Roman morals were observed. Regardless of place or circumstance, they remained unalterably Roman.

Paul has this in mind when he says to the Philippians, "Just as the Roman colonists never forget that they belong to Rome, you must never forget that you are citizens of heaven; and your conduct must match your citizenship."<sup>clx</sup> Wherever the believer is he must remember that first and foremost, he is a citizen of the Kingdom of God, and speak, act, and dress accordingly. We live in a vulgar and profane society with rapidly declining morals, fueled by movie, television, and music industries which relentlessly portray adultery, nudity, profanity, homosexuality, and deceit as the norm, and justify their actions by insisting that they are only reflecting reality. Pornography, we are told, is all “in the eye of the beholder.” When I was a child I remember preachers condemning the strapless bathing suit - now it is the suitless bathing strap!

People may declare their citizenship in a number of ways. Some declare their citizenship by the music they play. Many church members are playing the music of the world. A lot of rock and country music is filled with profanity, obscenity and immorality. Some rock music glorifies homosexuality and occult activities, and some songs even glamorize suicide. Some of the people who have made a study of rock music insist that the beat has a very negative effect on those who listen to it regularly. But Christian parents continue to buy the devil's music for their Christian young people.

Others declare their citizenship by their language, habits, and associates. By their language and behavior they declare that they are still more a citizen of the world than the Kingdom of God. They profess to have the Kingdom in their heart, but refuse to live in the heart of the Kingdom.

They spend so much time on the borderline, you cannot tell them from the people on the other side. “Sin is the sinner's shame, especially when gloried in.”<sup>clxi</sup>

If you travel abroad, you are an unofficial ambassador for America. There are people in the world who hate all Americans because of the behavior of a few Americans they have seen. In this world you are an ambassador for Jesus Christ. By your conduct, you either glorify the kingdom of which you are a citizen, or you dishonor it.

**WE EAGERLY WAIT FOR A SAVIOR.** This is another picture of Paul's eagerness for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This should be the normal attitude for the Christian sojourner whose real home is Heaven. Early saints longed for His return. The Bible concludes with a promise from the Lord that he is returning and a response from an eager Apostle John: “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

**3:21 - WHO WILL TRANSFORM THE BODY.** Jesus “...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.” The “body of our humble state” denotes the fact that our present body is a mortal body, and as such it is a lowly one, subject to destruction (see 2 Cor. 4:18-5:1).

There is a reason for not placing faith in the physical body - for not valuing it above the spirit. This body will be destroyed. It belongs to the realm that is passing away. Widespread use of steroids by athletes and fanatical training programs shows that many people do not understand this. We will be given, not extended life for this body, but a changed body that will be like His glorious body (See I Cor. 15). We will receive a body like the glorious body of Jesus, a body without disease, infection or handicap. Paul may be recalling the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus as he writes. With this in mind we may apply Matthew Henry's exhortation to this generation:

May we be always prepared for the coming of our Judge; looking to have our vile bodies changed by his Almighty power, and applying to him daily to new-create our souls unto holiness; to deliver us from our enemies, and to employ our bodies and souls as instruments of righteousness in his service.<sup>clxii</sup>

**BY THE EXERTION OF THE POWER.** The word rendered exertion (*energeia*) may be translated operative power, activity, exertion, or working (as in NKJV). We have mentioned the importance of repetition earlier. Here, in one line in the Greek, we have “power” powerfully affirmed and asserted: *energeia* (energy, exertion)... *dunamai* (to have power, used two times). The power to create is awesome, but no more so than the power to “transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory,” or “the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”

**EVEN TO SUBJECT ALL THINGS TO HIMSELF.** The verb means to line up under, or to rank under. Jesus has the power to rank all things under Himself - in subjection to His sovereignty.

Christ in His resurrection has been declared to be the Son of God with power. Jesus is Lord of all or He is not Lord at all. And when he comes from Heaven where our citizenship really is, He will subject all things unto Himself - and for all eternity all things will be in subjection to Him.

#### **ILLUSTRATION: THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.**

There is an inscription in the dome of our Capitol in Washington which few people know about. It says: "One far-off divine event toward which the whole creation moves." A visitor saw this inscription and asked the guide what it meant. He said: "I think it refers to the second coming of Christ." When the dome of our Capitol was erected, some God-fearing official ordered that inscription to be etched in the dome of our seat of government, believing that its truth was vital to the concern of our nation -- Billy Graham.<sup>clxiii</sup>

#### **ILLUSTRATION: THE SECOND COMING OF OUR LORD.**

Did you know that the type most newspapers use for astounding events is called "second coming" type? These are large, heavy, black letters reserved for only the most stupendous, amazing, front page news -- such as the return of Jesus Christ. Many will remember seeing this banner headline used to announce the surrenders of Germany and Japan, marking the end of World War II. It also told the news of the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the shooting of President Reagan. This bold heading style has proclaimed successful flights into space, presidential election winners, and other dramatic events of universal importance. One day mankind will witness the great event for which the "second coming" type was named for -- the return of Jesus Christ. Yes, the Savior will literally come back to this planet He left so long ago. He will fulfill the promise He gave to His disciples before He ascended to heaven. And when He does, it will command the attention of all earth's inhabitants. The whole world will know that the Lord Jesus is alive. Truly it will be a "headline event!"<sup>clxiv</sup>

The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is as certain as the Incarnation (the first coming). Assurance of the Second Coming is the believer's assurance of ultimate victory, and our assurance of ultimate victory is both a source of joy, and assurance that this joy can never be taken away from us.

Sin will rob the Christian of joy - not of salvation, but of the joy of his salvation. To sin is to take our eyes off the Cross and to fail to follow Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. That is the

reasons we are urged to seek forgiveness daily. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” When we confess our sins we may then ask the Lord, as David did, “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit (Ps. 51:12).

# CHAPTER FOUR

The warmth of Paul's affection for the Philippian believers is touching. He yearns for them because he loves them. They are his joy and his crown. As the shadows of death fall across his path, they are his greatest joy. I can identify with this up to a point. When you know you have had a severe heart attack and the surgeon explains the risks of surgery, you are aware of the fact that you are in "the valley of the shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4). Following my heart attack, visitors came to the waiting room to visit my family and asked them to tell me they were praying for me. Phone calls and cards poured in from all over the mid-south assuring us that churches and individuals were praying for me. The most trying time of my life became the time of greatest joy. I am still amazed at the grace of God.

In chapter four, the Apostle again exhorts the saints to strive for steadfastness and unity. There was an incipient heresy causing a division in the church with which he did not deal at the outset, but now that he does he is bold and direct. Such divisions were always of deep concern to Paul, and they must be a concern to us today. Every minister of the Gospel and every leader in the local church must make unity a high priority, and discourage the divide-and-conquer attitude at all cost. How do we do that? First, ask the Lord help us to yield to every impulse of the Holy Spirit and trust Him to help us to avoid that attitude yourself - no matter how much longer "you" have belonged to your church than "they" have. Senior adults are a blessing, but seniority can be a curse. Wisdom is a blessing, but a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. Second, if (or when) someone in your church says or does anything that will create harmful divisions, refuse to be influenced by them. Third, find a Christ-like way of discouraging (even rebuking) those whose actions may cause dissension.

Joy is a theme of the Epistle to the Philippians, and the greatest enemy of joy for the Christian is worry. Warren Wiersbe introduces chapter four as follows:

Worry, worry, worry! How many Christians lost their joy and peace because of worry! In this chapter, Paul tells us that the secure mind - the mind that is guarded by the peace of God - frees us from worry. Of course, the believer who does not have the single mind (chap. 1), the submissive mind (chap. 2), and the spiritual mind (chap. 3) can never have the secure mind. We must first live what Paul describes in the previous three chapters before we can claim the promises and provisions of this final chapter.<sup>clxv</sup>

**4:1 - MY BELOVED AND LONGED-FOR BRETHREN.** With this expression of deep affection, he addressed the whole congregation. They are his brethren, dearly beloved brethren for whom he yearns, and who will be, at the judgment seat of Christ, his joy and crown. He has loved them all along and now he longs for them.

**MY JOY AND CROWN.** There are two words for crown in the Greek. The *diadema* was the

royal crown, and *stephanos*, which is the word used here. It has two backgrounds. (1) It was the crown of the victorious athlete at the Greek games (as the gold medal in the Olympic games today). To win the crown was the peak of any athlete's ambition. Americans today can understand this, with the emphasis on the championship trophy in various sports. In the National Football League some players have stated that they could not stand to wear their league championship ring after losing the Super Bowl and not being awarded the Super Bowl ring. (2) It was the crown with which guests were crowned when they sat at a banquet or some other festive occasion. Paul is saying that at the final banquet of God the Philippians would be his festive crown, or crown of joy.

**STAND FAST.** Standing firm may be difficult when panic threatens. Satan always tries to prevent the people of God from steadfastly clinging together and presenting a united front. Paul here seems to be applying his message about heavenly citizenship (see 3:17-21) to the believers in Philippi. You are citizens of heaven, he says, "Therefore," have courage here on earth. "Stand firm in the Lord" as citizens of heaven here on earth.

Paul used the figure of running, of pursuing, of walking, and now he adds that of standing. It is often very hard to stand still. Attack is said to be much easier than defense. It is difficult to stand still and be shot at. In Ephesians 6:11, 13, 14 Paul repeats the command to "stand" as soldiers of Christ. When others run away, it is hard to stand one's ground. It is not easy to stand against the flood-tide. Paul makes a plea for stability.<sup>clxvi</sup>

**IN THE LORD.** The words "in the Lord" occur three times in the first four verses of chapter four. (1) They are to stand fast in the Lord (as soldiers stand fast in the heat of battle). Only "in the Lord" can we stand fast against Satan, against the temptations of the world, against spiritual cowardice. (2) Paul urges Euodia and Syntyche to be of one mind "in the Lord." There is no unity in the church unless that unity is in the Lord. (3) Paul exhorts the Philippians to "rejoice in the Lord." Joy had nothing to do with material things or places. It has everything to do with a right relationship with the Lord and a right relationship with others.

**EUODIA.** The name means "prosperous journey," but apparently the lady with the promising name had set out on a less than promising journey in her Christian life. Paul speaks directly to the offenders. He had worked with these ladies and he loved them, but he does not hesitate to call them by name.

**SYNTYCHE.** The name means "pleasant acquaintance." She was obviously not living up to her name. It has even been suggested that the problem between these two ladies may have been one of "accidental friction." We are simply not given the details. If, however, we ask a modern pastor to speculate, he would might suggest the probability that it had to do with music, the nursery, or the color of something. Some doubt the great influence of women in Macedonia at this time, but many women have had great influence in the church without official position or title. Lydia was a business woman, and it was probably in her home that the church in Philippi was established.

Paul is direct and personal. "I beg" (I entreat) you, Euodia and "I beg" (he uses the verb again) you, Syntyche. The verb is a very strong word, from the same root word as paraclete (the Comforter, John 14, is the Paraclete). It means to call along side. So this is an earnest plea, a strong plea.

This earnest plea is needed in the church today. Churches are often known for their divisions, not often enough for their unity. I once read about a pastor who rebuked a church member who had an unforgiving spirit toward someone who had offended her. After a moment's thought she replied, "Well, I guess I'll pardon her as you suggest, but I don't want anything more to do with her!" The pastor asked, "Is that how you want God to treat you? Do you want His forgiveness and then have Him withdraw His love and fellowship? Remember, when Christ put away your sins, He cast them into the sea of everlasting forgetfulness!"

There will never be unity in any church as long as self reigns supreme in the hearts of members. There will be no unity as long as there are ego-centric, power-hungry individuals who seek their own way and disregard the feelings and thoughts of others. Unity is destroyed when someone exploits or manipulates others to get what he wants. There will be no unity when someone plays one member against another for personal reasons. There will be no unity in the church until self is dethroned and Jesus Christ is enthroned in the heart. That can only be accomplished when members yield to the divine Paraclete.

A choir member went to her pastor to complain about the young man who was serving as bi-vocational Minister of Music. She named various members of the choir who were trying without much success to get him to do various things. Two things were obvious to the pastor. First, the young man had grown up in the church and all the members felt that he needed their help. Second, there was no way he could have pleased all of them and to try to please some would upset others. The lady asked, "Do you know what the problem is?" He said, "Yes, I think I do." She hesitated and then asked, "What do you think it is?" He answered, "Too many chiefs and not enough Indians." "You are right about that!" she affirmed.

### **ILLUSTRATION: FELLOWSHIP.**

A church newsletter mentioned a man who visited eighteen different churches on successive Sundays. He was trying to find out what the churches were really like. He said, "I sat near the front. After the service, I walked slowly to the rear, then returned to the front and went back to the foyer using another aisle. I smiled and was neatly dressed. I asked one person to direct me to a specific place: a fellowship hall, pastor's study, etc. I remained for coffee if served. I used a scale to rate the reception I received. I awarded points on the following basis:

- 10 for a smile from a worshiper
- 10 for a greeting from someone sitting nearby
- 100 for an exchange of names

200 for an invitation to have coffee  
200 for an invitation to return  
1000 for an introduction to another worshiper  
2000 for an invitation to meet the pastor

On this scale, eleven of the eighteen churches earned fewer than 100 points. Five actually received less than 20. The conclusion: The doctrine may be biblical, the singing inspirational, the sermon uplifting, but when a visitor finds nobody who cares whether he's here, he is not likely to come back."

-James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) pp. 94-95.<sup>clxvii</sup>

**SAME MIND.** This expression has been used before. The emphasis is upon unity (like-minded, singleness of purpose). The word for mind means "to think, implying not only thinking but also the affections, will, or moral considerations."<sup>clxviii</sup>

**4:3 - TRUE YOKEFELLOW.** There has been a great deal of debate at this point. It really matters little who the peacemaker was. Ironside suggests that it was Epaphroditus. Obviously the person intended knew he was the yokefellow Paul trusted to help Euodia and Syntyche settle their differences.

Two things are significant. (1) When there was a problem in the church at Philippi, Paul mobilized all the resources of the church to correct it. This issue needed to be settled because no person can be at peace with God and in conflict with another member. (2) All we know about Euodia and Syntyche is that they were two women who had quarreled. Just think about it. Suppose our life was to be summed up in one sentence! What would it be?

#### **ILLUSTRATION: PEACEMAKER.**

Smith and Jones were "on the outs" over a very trivial matter. This deeply concerned Deacon Brown, so he prayed that he might be a peacemaker. He called on Smith and asked, "What do you think of Jones?" "He's the meanest crank in the neighborhood!" "But," said Brown, "you have to admit that he's very kind to his family." "Oh, sure, he's kind to his family all right; no one can deny that." The next day Brown went to Jones and inquired, "Do you know what Smith said about you?" "No, but I can imagine how that scamp would lie about me!" "This may surprise you, but he said you're very kind to your family." "What! Did Smith say that?" "Yes, he did." "Well, if you hadn't told me, I wouldn't believe it." "What do you think of Smith?" asked Deacon Brown. "Truthfully, I believe he's a lowdown scalawag." "But you have to admit that he's very honest in business." "Yes, there's no getting around that; in business he's a man you can trust." The next day Brother Brown called on Smith again. "You

know what Jones said about you? He claims you're a fellow that really can be trusted in business, and that you're scrupulously honest." "You mean it?" "Yes, I do," said Brown. "Well of all things," replied Smith with a happy smile. The next Sunday the former "enemies" nodded to each other. Brown continued his "meddling" until the next annual business meeting of the church when Smith and Jones shook hands and finally voted on the same side! Take a diplomatic page from the peacemaking notebook of this consecrated deacon and begin to practice his helpful methods, for God loves "a holy meddler!"<sup>clxix</sup>

**HELP THESE WOMEN.** From *sunlambano*, to seize (Matt. 26:55), to conceive (Luke 1:21), then to take hold together with one to help (as here). It means to "take hold with them." It is interesting to see that women played such a leading role in the affairs of one of the early churches. In Greece (Achaia) women remained in the background. It was the conviction of the Greeks that a respectable woman should see as little, hear as little, and ask as little as possible. But Philippi was in Macedonia and things were different there. Lydia was probably a leader in the Philippian church and leading women of the region were won to the Lord in Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17).

**LABORED WITH ME.** They had worked with him from the earliest days of the church in Philippi. Faithful women served Jesus during His ministry, without position, title, and praise, but never without the attention or the appreciation of the Lord. It is the same today, and has been throughout the entire history of the church.

**WITH CLEMENT ALSO.** There is no evidence that this was Clement of Rome, who wrote the first noncanonical (a book not in the Bible) Christian book of the first century. This was obviously a faithful member of the local church.

**IN THE BOOK OF LIFE.** Their salvation is sure. Paul may not include all their names, but they are included in the Book of Life. This is the only use of this term in the New Testament outside Revelation (Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8).

**4:4 - REJOICE IN THE LORD.** In 4:4-7 the emphasis is on joy and peace. In verses 4 and 5 Paul stresses two very important qualities of the Christian life - joy and gentleness. The first is joy. He says, "Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, rejoice!" Possibly he sees the irony of the situation. He is in prison with death almost certain. And these Philippian believers were setting out on a course that placed them in imminent danger of persecution. So, he says again, "Rejoice." It was as if he was saying, "Yes, I know what I am saying - and I say it again. "Rejoice!"

**4:5 - YOUR GENTLE SPIRIT.** The NRSV renders it, "Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near." The NAS has "gentle spirit." The word (*epieikeia*) is not easy to translate (patience, softness, forbearance, modesty, gentleness). The Greeks said this word was justice plus something better than justice. There are times when strict justice may become unjust

because of its generality. If we received justice before God we would all be condemned because we are all guilty of sin. We want more than justice, and He goes beyond justice. He offers us mercy and grace.

**THE LORD IS NEAR.** The NKJV has, “The Lord is at hand.” The Christian must be keenly aware of the fact that Jesus is “near” in the sense of His being with us at all times, just as He promised in the Great Commission (“I will be with you always”). While it true that these early believers anxiously anticipated Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and while many modern believers expect Him to return very soon, that is not the issue here. The point here is that the Lord was “at hand” to help them resolve the problem between Euodia and Syntyche (vs, 2).

When problems come to the local church all members will do well to remind themselves that the Lord is near with a solution. If we find His solution, He will lead those involved in such a way that the problem will be resolved, the fellowship strengthened, and His church edified. Unfortunately, at times when a problem arises - and arise they will - there is a knee-jerk reaction by one or more who seek to convince others to support them. They then pray that God will bless their action and proceed with an air of righteous indignation. If, however, we seek His solution and follow His will there is no way that He will not bless His church. In a church conflict you can win a debate and lose a generation! Sometimes it takes more than a generation to recover from a crisis in a church. In any issue in the church, remember that it is the Lord’s church, and He is near!

**4:6 - BE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING.** Literally, stop being anxious. Anxiety is a common malady of the time in which we live, but there is nothing new about it. Though people may worry about different things today, both the benefits and consequences are the same - the benefits are nil, the consequences abounding. Paul’s solution for worry is prayer. Peace is one of the fruits of believing prayer. Wiersbe asks, “What is worry?” He answers:

Our English word “worry” comes from the Anglo-Saxon word that means “to strangle”; worry certainly does strangle people physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The Bible term “be careful” or “be anxious” means literally “to be torn apart.” Worry comes when the thoughts in our mind and feelings in our heart pull in different directions and “tear us apart.” The mind thinks about problems, and these feelings weigh down the heart, creating a vicious circle that wrecks our emotional state. Our minds tell us we should not fret, but we often cannot control the anxiety in our hearts! We have to break the circle of worry before we can enjoy peace.<sup>clxx</sup>

Many modern counselors are trying to help people cope with anxiety today. No one has ever improved on the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. He said:

"For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more

than clothing?... "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'" (Matt. 6:25, 31)

**PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION WITH THANKSGIVING.** “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Thanksgiving has been called the antidote to anxiety. It simply acknowledges God as the source of all our blessings. That is the attitude with which we should make our requests.

Note the contrast between “anxious” and “with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God,” and again between “nothing” and “everything.” He says, “Be anxious for nothing,” but “in everything we should pray,” letting our earnest petitions be accompanied by thanksgiving - thanksgiving for past blessings and for petitions He will answer. Thanksgiving should be a part of all prayer, as we learn from the Model Prayer. The child of God should feel all his life that he is, as it were, suspended between past, present and future blessings. Prayer must even include thanks for the privilege of prayer. This verse calls for both gratitude and perfect submission to the will of God.

Paul shows that we can take everything to God in prayer. In everything we are to offer prayer with supplication and thanksgiving. “There is nothing too great for God's power and nothing too small for His fatherly care.”<sup>clxxi</sup> We must, in the words of the old gospel song, "Take it to the Lord in prayer." It is highly motivational to "Count your blessings" as you prepare for prayer. As you meditate you will surely want to remember three things: (1) the love of God, (2) the wisdom of God, and (3) the power of God.

**4:7 - THE PEACE OF GOD.** How often Christians are reminded of the peace of God “which *passeth all understanding*” (KJV, italics added). The NAS has “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” The word for peace, *eiraynay* (Hebrew, *Shalom*), means wholeness and well-being of life. It is a positive word; not the absence of war, but a right relationship with God and man. The antithesis of New Testament peace is the frantic, anxious atmosphere in which many live out their lives in this world. Worry and depression are impacting our society, robbing even many Christians of victory and joy. The peace of God is the answer to the emotional trauma which haunts so many people. The one and the only source of the peace which surpasses all comprehension is God Himself. In his second letter to the Thessalonians Paul wrote, “Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance” (3:16). In this epistle he refers to the Lord as “the God of peace” (Phil. 4:9). Simply put, if you want to know “the peace of God,” go to “the God of peace.”

We live in a world which places a premium on peace, but has known very little of it. People invest their years, their energy, and their fortunes in pursuit of peace - but if our observation tells us anything it is that they are looking in all the wrong places. Jeremiah spelled it out twenty-six hundred years ago, but it ought to be published in tomorrow's morning papers: "They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, Saying, 'Peace, peace,' But there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14). In the first half of the Twentieth Century nations fought two wars that were thought to be wars to end all wars - but there has been no peace among the nations. In fact, the Twentieth Century has

been the bloodiest century in the history of the world. Between the abortionists, various war mongers, the Nazis, and the Communists, more people have been slaughtered in this century than the total population of the United States at the beginning of the Second World War.

Not only has there been no peace between the nations of the world, there has been very little peace in America during this century. Consider the “Roaring Twenties” with the growth of organized crime, The Great Depression, two world wars, Korea, Viet Nam, the “cold war,” the unrest of the sixties, and riots in streets of some major cities. The social sciences have grown astronomically in the last few generations as trained social workers and counselors try to cope with stress, anxiety, and behavioral problems. There is a genuine need for Christian counseling, but Christians must be alert to the potential danger in some of the “psycho-babble” issuing from “pop-psychology.” If it is inconsistent with the Word of God, it is false. The Bible is the standard by which psychology and sociology should be tested, never the other way around.

Politicians promise peace, but unfortunately there is no peace. Why? Because masses have rejected the God of peace and there is no other source of peace. We now live in the post-Christian era in America and we are paying the consequences. People living in post-Christian times no longer look to God for anything - peace, security, or blessings. They look to trained professional, government programs, and social activists and not to God for our needs and our blessings. The New Deal and the Great Society have both, for all the good they may have done, produced increasing numbers of non-producers who vote for politicians who promise the redistribution of wealth in America. This has produced more class envy, tension, and resentment than solutions.

The peace of God is readily available today to each and every Christian - notice that I did not say every church member or religious person. Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace and apart from Him there can be no true and lasting inner peace. There are many things I may know a little about, but confess that my knowledge is either second-hand knowledge or limited knowledge. But I thank God that I do not just know *about* the peace that surpasses comprehension - I *know* that peace. The doctor’s announcement, “You have just had a heart attack and it was a big one” did not shatter the peace God had already given me - it did not diminish it. In fact, I became more fully aware of that peace and rejoiced in it. I was fully prepared to die and go home to be with Lord, or to live and return to His service and to my family. I preferred to live, but I was perfectly at peace trusting in His providential care. That kind of peace is a gift from the God of peace.

If you want the peace of God you must have personal knowledge of, and a relationship with the God of peace through Jesus Christ. Then pray for the peace of God “which surpasses all comprehension.” You are invited to pray, even when you do not understand. When you do not understand, trust the God of peace to provide the peace you seek. When trials come to your life - when, not if, for come they will - do not waste your time wringing your hands and crying, “Why me, Lord?” Pray, “Lord, help me to understand why all this has come upon me, and teach me to trust You to lead me through it.”

One reason we place high value on peace in the world in which we live is that peace is a such a precious commodity. There is very little of it! The world had never known any significant peace

since the Fall, and therefore cannot grant peace to its inhabitants.

A group of academics and historians has compiled this startling information: since 3600 B.C., the world has known only 292 years of peace! During this period there have been 14,351 wars large and small, in which 3.64 billion people have been killed. The value of the property destroyed is equal to a golden belt around the world 97.2 miles wide and 33 feet thick. Since 650 B.C., there have also been 1,656 arms races, only 16 of which have not ended in war. The remainder ended in the economic collapse of the countries involved. We human beings seem to have an endless capacity for conflict!<sup>clxxii</sup>

When we received the phone call informing us that my mother was hospitalized after she had suddenly lost her voice while teaching her Sunday School class, I wondered what I would say to her when I got to her room. The symptoms sounded serious, and indeed they were (she had a malignant tumor on the brain). I had thought of a number of things I might say, but before I could use any of them, she looked at me and with great difficulty formed the words, "It's not what happens to you, it's what you do with it that counts." She did more for her Lord and enjoyed more of His peace from that time until her death than most healthy people will ever know. It is important to know that God's peace will be with us when we cannot understand the circumstances. There is a well-being of soul, spirit and mind which cannot be based upon our understanding.

**GUARD YOUR HEARTS AND YOUR MINDS.** God's peace, as a sentinel, guards every area of our lives. "Heart" in the Bible usually refers to the will as much as the emotions. Mind refers to the control center of one's life. There will be times when you have very strong feelings about something, but you just cannot get your mind and your heart to agree. Paul was inspired to write that the mind and the heart must be brought together. They must be in harmony. The writer is describing what we might call, in psychological terms, mental health.

**4:8 - FINALLY.** Finally is literally, "for the rest." This is important. Paul could possibly picture this being read before the church and he wants their undivided attention. What follows is a beautiful way of describing the way Christians ought to live, and a practical standard for the believer. He writes, "Finally, brethren,"

whatever is true,  
whatever is honorable,  
whatever is right,  
whatever is pure,  
whatever is lovely,  
whatever is of good repute,  
if there is any excellence and  
if anything worthy of praise,  
dwell (think) on these things.

**WHATSOEVER.** With this word Paul introduces six adjectives picturing Christian ideals. They are old fashioned, familiar words, not necessarily from any philosophical list of moral excellence, but deserving a place on such a list. Early in the twentieth century, A. T. Robertson said, "They are pertinent now when so much filth is flaunted before the world in books, magazines and moving pictures under the name of realism."<sup>clxxiii</sup> If he had only known! In his wildest imagination Dr. Robertson could not have foreseen how much worse society would become before the end of the century.

Regardless of the evil Robertson witnessed, there was still a Christian consensus in America. Francis Shaeffer, in a number of his books, stressed that the loss of the Christian consensus leads to moral, social and spiritual disintegration. He was one of the first to refer to ours as a post-Christian culture. In Shaeffer's day America was controlled by a humanistic consensus. Today there are those who are striving for a New Age (or postmodern) consensus. Is it possible that in one century we could move from a Christian consensus to a humanistic consensus to a postmodern pantheistic consensus? That is exactly what has happened.

The predominant world view at the turn of the Twentieth Century was theistic (pre-modernism) - almost everyone believed in a God, a god, or gods. The dawn of the post-Christian period in America (about 1935, possibly 1946 in the Bible Belt) ushered in a Humanistic world view (modernism), held by the cultural, political, and social elite ("the Anointed" is the term Thomas Sowell uses for them in *The Vision of the Anointed*). The gospel of Humanism was, and is strongly influenced by evolution with all its ramifications. The third major world view in the history of mankind is New Age spirituality (postmodernism), which is a shift from post-Darwinian atheistic evolution to pre-Darwinian pantheistic evolution.

Humanism (some prefer secular Humanism, or modernism) religiously inserts random chance in place of the Creator as the cause behind the origin of life. Post-modernism (New Age spiritualism) offers a compromise as subtle as the second beast of Chapter 13 of the Revelation - a way to believe in God, a god, or many gods, and still believe in the various tenets of Humanism (including evolution). Many who were not deceived by modernists were quick to embrace postmodernism. Every person holds either one of these three world views, or a compromise between two of them (i.e. theistic evolution) - a position which both Scripture and Humanism would reject!

**WHATEVER IS TRUE.** When Paul stresses the importance of the Christian life, it is interesting that he puts truth first. Truth - absolute truth - is at the very foundation. Truth is the foundation of our relationship with God, the foundation of a right relationship with others, the foundation of peace, and the foundation of joy. If there was deception in any way, in any place, it would invalidate everything else. "True" means without deception or illusion and can never co-exist with a lie. One should always set his thoughts on that which is true, the things on which he can always rely, the things which will never fail him.

**WHATEVER IS HONORABLE.** "Whatsoever things are honest" (KJV); "Whatever is noble"(NIV). It is from *semnos*, meaning reverend, i.e. venerable, dignified, honorable. It is related

to an old word, *sebo*, meaning to worship. It may be rendered revered or venerated (I Tim. 3:8, "grave"). Moffatt has "worthy." Barclay translates it, "whatever things have the dignity of holiness on them."<sup>clxxiv</sup>

There are certain characteristics that men and women, whatever their background, consider worthy of honor. The word comes very close to reverence. It is what causes people to say, "This I respect (revere)." This word points to that about which we hold deep religious convictions. It suggests a respect for the deepest religious feelings of other believers. It implies thoughtfulness, kindness toward others.

**WHATEVER IS RIGHT.** The NKJV has "just." The just person is the righteous person who gives both God and man that which is due. The root meaning of the word is straight. All through the Old and New Testament, the justice of God is made the foundation of all true religion. We are to be just (1) because our heavenly Father is just and (2) because He demands it of us. "But let justice" He says, "run down like water, And righteousness like a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24, NKJV).

No matter how pious a person might be, if he does not treat his fellow man with justice and relate to him in a fair way, he does not have a right relationship with God. Justice in dealing with a fellow human beings is an essential part of the Christian life and a prerequisite to worship. Jesus clearly taught that a right relationship with one's fellow man is absolutely essential to worship. Worship is corrupted and one's witness is destroyed no matter how pious he is, if he does not treat others justly.

**WHATEVER IS PURE.** The word denotes that which is free from defilements and impurities. It refers to clean thoughts, words, and deeds - that which is without any moral taint or stain. It has to do with the impeccable moral purity expected of all believers. Throughout the New Testament this word has to do with singularity of purpose. "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Matt. 5:8) means blessed are those who are deeply committed to the Lord. The one dominating purpose in that person's life is to honor and glorify the Lord. The believer's life must be pure, without mixture.

**WHATEVER IS LOVELY.** The word denotes that which is pleasing, winsome. Moffatt has "attractive." Barclay prefers "winsome." It might be paraphrased, "that which calls forth love." Agape is the word for the sacrificial love of God. It points to that kind of love which is characteristic of God's affection for us. Whatever invokes that kind of love ought to be cherished.

The Christian should be pleasing, or winsome in his, or her, daily life. An ill-tempered, arrogant, sarcastic, critical, bitter, or negative church member is a sad commentary on the Christian life. That applies to his attitude at church, at work, or at home. Unfortunately, there are some church members who cultivate, nurture, and delight in a spirit and attitude which God abhors. How often one hears one of the "pillars of the church" boast about "telling someone off." They express pride in their position, their money, their influence. Some even boast of their ability to "take shortcuts" which give them an advantage over others. There is nothing lovely about arrogance, conceit, or a haughty spirit.

**WHATEVER IS OF GOOD REPUTE.** The word translated “repute” is an Old word (used only here in the N.T.) meaning good report, fair-speaking, attractive. Williams translates it “whatever has a good name.” We should place great value on whatever is of good report.

**IF** - Paul continues, “if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise.” This is a condition of the first class, assumed to be true. There is excellence and there is something worthy of praise.

**ANY EXCELLENCE.** The NKJV renders it, “if there is any virtue.” The word rendered excellence is from an old word meaning to please, used often in a variety of senses by the ancients for any mental excellence or moral quality or physical power. Its vagueness may explain its rarity in the New Testament (four times: Phil. 4:8; 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 1:3, 5). Paul is probably using it in the sense of God's splendor and might. It describes the excellence of a tool for a job, the excellence of the courage of a soldier, or the excellence of a man.

**IF ANYTHING WORTHY OF PRAISE.** “Excellence” and “praise” are both words from stoic philosophy. That Paul understands their philosophy is evident from Acts 17. He uses some of their language but he uses it differently. He will speak of things that are excellent and worthy of praise, but unlike the Stoics, he does not claim to have this excellence and worth of praise in himself. Rather, he does all things through Christ Who strengthens him. He does not claim to have power in and of himself. He humbly acknowledges that his power comes from Christ.

**DWELL ON THESE THINGS.** Now he adds the verb. Think about these things. Meditate on them (NKJV). He does not mean to turn them over in your mind. He means to so concentrate on them that they determine your course of action - not simply brainstorming. Think about it in such a way that your mind-set determines your course of action.

The Greek word (logizesthe) underlying “think” means, “to calculate,” “to reckon carefully.” To think then is to weigh seriously the cost of incorporating the virtues listed in verse 8 into one's daily life. Thus, the Christian is to grapple with these concepts, not just reflect on them passively.<sup>clxxv</sup>

It is not enough to say, “I admire the truth,” or “I love the truth.” You must order your life in such a way that it is in accord with the truth. It is not enough to respect honor. One must seek to do those things which are honorable. You are responsible for your thoughts because your mind-set will determine your course of action.

Having done what the Scripture demands - “dwell on these things” - I cannot help but consider each word or phrase in this verse in light of recent scandals in the nation's capitol. Like millions of other Americans, I have been sickened by the behavior of President Bill Clinton - gross immorality, lies, unscrupulous power plays, support for deviancy, fighting for abortion (even partial-birth abortion), and his loathing of the military. When I dwell on these things I am finding it impossible to associate any of them with President Clinton. Whatever is true. Whatever is honorable. Whatever is right. Whatever is pure. Whatever is lovely. Whatever is of good repute.

They just do not go together!

Sadly, in our post-Christian culture, millions could care less. The media no longer looks for the truth, but speculates on the “spin” the White House will put on each new story. In response to the President’s lying to cover up yet another adulterous relationship - this time in the oval office - the attitude of millions (if we are to believe the media) is, “So what? Everybody lies about adultery.” One obvious problem with telling lies is that liars lie. If a liar will lie about one thing, he will lie about another. For the Christian, it is enough to know how much God hates lying (see. Rev. 21:9).

**4:9 - THINGS...SEEN IN ME.** “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” Paul is calling on them to apply in their daily life all they had learned from him, and to follow his example in moral and spiritual matters, and in church and community life.

Paul dares to point to his life in Philippi as an illustration of this high thinking. It has often been said, “You may be the only Bible someone will ever read.” This was especially true in the early church because the New Testament had not been completed and no one had ever seen a complete Bible as we have it today. Unfortunately, that is true for too many lost people today because they never pick up a copy of the Word of God. All the world knows of Christianity is what they see in the lives of those who profess to be Christians. It is also unfortunate that some of the professing Christians they observe are not good examples of the believer in Christ.

I was attending a meeting of the Executive Board of the Louisiana Baptist Convention in 1993, when Roger Freeman, President of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, asked, “Do you think we are in the Post-Christian era in America?” I was surprised that he seemed to be intrigued by that possibility. It was also interesting that some members were discussing it after the meeting as though it was a new idea to them. One even said, “I believe it started in 1962 and 1963 with Supreme Court decisions which took prayer and Bible reading out of the schools.” Little did those present realize that Francis Shaeffer had been trying to get America to understand that we had entered the post-Christian era in America about 1935 (1895 in England). I stressed that we would never have had those Supreme Court decisions if we had not already been in the post-Christian era for many years. We should have seen the signs in the late forties.

Christianity for many people is little more than a memory - a memory of references to God in the home when they were children, of Sunday School classes when they were young, of a Bible in the home. They may even think of themselves as Christians, based on their memory of church or Christian parents, or Bible verses. They have a memory but no personal relationship with Christ.

Relying on your memory can be dangerous. My brother James asked me to help him with a project. I do not remember what happened to him (he probably hit the wrong nail with a hammer), but he said, “That hurt about as much as anything I remember since having a pitchfork stuck in my foot.” I immediately responded, “I know what you mean because I stuck a pitchfork in my foot one time.” He said, “I don’t remember your sticking a pitchfork into your foot, but I know you stuck one

into mine.” Before he finished the sentence I began to remember and started to laugh. He said, “That wasn’t your foot you stuck the pitchfork in, it was mine!” My memory had just been adjusted. I had on a number of occasions recalled how painful it was to stick a pitchfork into your foot, but as we talked about it I realized that what I remembered was how concerned my parents were about James (they were often concerned about things I did to him!).

Over the years I had forgotten about the accident - I just remembered his pain and all the comments about how much it hurts to stick a pitchfork into your foot. Memory can be faulty, but in this case I had learned from the experience even though my memory was faulty. Spiritually speaking, a faulty memory of God, His Son, His Word, and His church may lead to catastrophic consequences. David was about twelve or thirteen when his mother brought him to my house. He was under conviction of sin and he was worried about whether or not he had been saved when he made a profession of faith as a young child. When he asked his parents and his grandmother, they told him about his profession of faith and his baptism. All he remembered was being baptized. He wondered whether or not he had understood what he was doing since he did not remember it. He said, “They remembered it, but I didn’t.” He trusted Jesus Christ to come into this life later that evening. Fortunately, he questioned his memory and theirs.

Paul is keenly aware of the fact that these early Christians were dependant upon his preaching, his teaching, and his example as a guide for their lives.

Being confident of his own standing with Christ, Paul was able to suggest they imitate his life-style. What they had seen, they should do. His suggestions of acting on what we know of the will of God--and thus gaining more light--continues to be a valid principle. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.<sup>clxxvi</sup>

The preacher is the interpreter of the spiritual life and should be an example of it. What an awesome responsibility! Paul is not being egotistical here. Such an example was needed and he was willing to be that example. Who has ever lived the Christian life more powerfully and convincingly?

**THESE THINGS DO.** This means to practice them as a habit. Do them habitually. What one does springs from what he thinks, so positive action comes from positive thinking. This is not an endorsement of Norman Vincent Peale’s *Power of Positive Thinking*, but a reminder of what Paul had already written in this epistle: Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (2:5). There must be a conscious commitment to do the things the Lord wants us to do. James is not in conflict with Paul, who taught that we are saved "by grace, through faith” (Eph. 2:8).

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works (James 2:14, 17, 18).

Obedience to God is a sacred obligation. A popular saying with some today is, "If you are going to talk the talk, you gotta' walk the walk." Samuel rebuked Saul after the king had disobeyed God: "And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).

#### **4:10-20 - Paul's gratitude to the Philippian Church**

In 4:10, Paul comes to a major concern of the letter; their gift. He has hinted at it before. Now, delicately, he directly expresses his gratitude in such a way as to show his sincere appreciation to this wonderful church. At the same time he wants to give the praise and glory to the Lord rather than to the Philippians.

In these verses, Paul graciously acknowledges the Philippians' generosity in supporting his ministry. Even though he had learned to be satisfied with his circumstances as a missionary in various parts of the Roman Empire, he was grateful for their gifts. He had been blessed by their generosity in two ways. Their financial gift had blessed him with his physical needs. His greatest benefit, however, seems to have been in the joy their generosity had brought to his heart. He also shows how the church benefits by supporting the minister financially. The church is never more like its Lord than when it manifests love for Christ, the Head of the church, and for those whom He has called to serve Him.

**4:10 - I REJOICED IN THE LORD GREATLY.** Robertson notes that this is a timeless aorist: I did rejoice, I do rejoice.<sup>clxxvii</sup> Paul thanks the church at Philippi for the practical way in which they manifested their fellowship in the Gospel. As the letter draws to a close, the expression of joy and gratitude is understandable. It is also apparent that Paul is trying to be as tactful as possible in dealing with a very delicate matter - the minister and money.

There are those who believe that Paul expresses his attitude toward their gift here because of slanderous charges made against him by the Judaizers and possibly by Gentile non-believers.

The "cloak of covetousness" was the phrase flung at him in Thessalonica that stuck and hurt this proud and sensitive man (I Thess. 2:5). It is an old canard that preachers peach for money. If so, very few get the object of their ambition. Paul defended his right to full pay for his preaching (I Cor. 9:3-18; Gal. 6:6), but because of the foolish misrepresentation of his work in Corinth he made the gospel message there without charge.<sup>clxxviii</sup>

Some even criticized Paul for refusing to accept pay in Corinth, but he insisted in working without pay in order to avoid criticism (2 Cor. 11:8-12). He tells us that he even "robbed other churches" - let other churches supplement his income - in order to work for nothing in Corinth. But

that was not enough to avoid their attacks because he was accused of using Titus to raise money for him under the pretense of raising money for destitute believers in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 12:16-18). Robertson is right:

It is a humiliating experience for a preacher to have to make public appeal for his own support. Paul refused to stoop to that level and worked with his own hands ) I Thess. 2:9; Acts 20:33f.) In order to be independent of those who were so ready to impute wrong motives to him. He rejoiced in the church at Philippi because they trusted him and understood him.<sup>clxxix</sup>

One of my closest friends is a retired pastor who invested more than half of his ministry in one church which he characterized as a “cheap” church. He says that they were stingy with everything - from the pastor’s salary to, Christmas bonuses for staff, to honorariums for visiting speakers and evangelists. I agreed that some churches are not very generous, but he assured me that he did not mean that they were not generous - “they were cheap!” After a few examples one would have to agree with his assessment. I had the privilege of sharing with him some of my experiences with a generous church. After my heart attack, Providence Baptist Church asked Jerry Brossett to preach for me until I could return to the pulpit, and they paid all the pulpit supply for me. When they adopted a new budget they included a generous increase in salary and benefits, and enough under “pulpit supply” to allow me to be out ten weeks in addition to time off for revivals, Bible studies, and denominational meetings. I am thankful that I have not missed a service because of illness since I was able to return to the pulpit, but their gesture was both generous and very considerate. This is definitely not a “cheap” church.

Most ministers receive much less for their work than they might receive in the secular world, but they can often avoid much of this type of criticism if they are both prudent and frugal. It seems ironic that some of the most acidic criticism I have ever experienced came in the nineteen seventies and eighties when I tried to caution a few people about sending their tithes and offerings to the ministries of people like Jimmy Swaggart, and Jim Bakker, rather than giving it to the local church. I also noticed that after the scandals which brought down those televangelist, not one person who had criticized me for my warnings ever came back and apologized. But then, I really do not recall very many slanderers who ever showed very much remorse - only embarrassment when confronted with it.

**NOW AT THE LAST.** The missionary says that he is rejoicing “that now at last your care for me has flourished again” (NKJV). At first glance, this seems like a rebuke. He seems unappreciative, but that is not the case. It may seem that he is saying, "It was about time I was hearing from you." As we continue we see that he was aware that they could not have done anything to help him before this. He does not blame them. Understanding fully, he gives the Lord credit for the help they had sent "at the last."

Something had hindered them from helping earlier. Possibly Epaphroditus had passed along their regret for the delay in sending help. Now, he wants to let them off the hook. It may mean that

they did not know where he was for a time. They may not have known his location in Rome for some time, or even when he arrived in Rome. He had been shipwrecked, snake-bitten, and stranded on the island of Melita for three months on the voyage from Caesarea to Rome (Acts 27-28). Also, they may not have had anyone to send for a while. This was a real problem in that day. You could not wire money, or drop a check in the mail. And they had to choose a messenger (delivery man) with care. It is also possible that conditions in Philippi were so grave that they could not gather an offering for some time. So, it is to their credit that they located him and sent him the gift. He acknowledges that any interruption in their support had not been their fault: "you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity" (NKJV).

**4:11 - I HAVE LEARNED TO BE CONTENT.** Paul reassures them that he has not wanted for anything because of any interruption in their support: "Not that I speak from want." Even under his circumstances, he is tactful and considerate of their feelings. The interruption in their support had not caused a hardship for him. The word translated "content" denotes independence or self-sufficiency. Socrates taught that he who is content with least is wealthiest, for this is "nature's wealth."

Here Paul uses one of the great words in pagan ethics. The word, *autarkes*, means "entirely self-sufficient." This was a favorite word and the highest aim of the Stoics, but used only here in the New Testament. The Stoics sought to reach the state in which he needed nothing (or no one), and they sought to reach that point by a certain pathway of the mind. First, the stoic sought to eliminate all desire. Second, they sought to eliminate all emotion, all feeling, until he had come to a stage when he did not care what happened, either to himself or to anyone else. In order to achieve contentment, the Stoic had to abolish all desires and eliminate all emotions. The Stoic was self-sufficient; Paul was God-sufficient. "Stoicism failed because it was inhuman; Christianity succeeded because it was rooted in the divine."<sup>clxxx</sup>

#### **ILLUSTRATION: CONTENTMENT.**

Once when Diogenes was sunning himself, Alexander the Great visited him and said, "Ask any favor you wish from me."

Diogenes responded, "Please move out of the sunlight." To which Alexander said, "If I could not be Alexander, I would be Diogenes."

What a great example of contentment.<sup>clxxxi</sup>

**4:12 - I KNOW HOW.** Paul could be contented with wealth or without it:

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 (NAS).

This verse needs little commentary, for Paul had learned through experience to be satisfied with much or little. Circumstances could neither add to, nor depreciate his joy. Whatever the circumstances of this world, he is looking beyond this world - the long view rather than the short

view. Jesus knew from personal experience what Heaven is like. Paul knew by faith and because of what he knew, the circumstances of this life could never rob him of his hope and joy. While the verse needs little commentary, Paul's attitude toward life's circumstances should claim the attention of the modern world. This philosophy would either put a lot of psychologists out of business - or if they taught it, make them very popular

**I HAVE LEARNED THE SECRET.** Robertson notes that the word translated "secret" means to initiate with secret rites (used here only in N. T.).<sup>clxxxii</sup> Paul draws this word from the initiation rites of the pagan mystery religions, with which the Philippians were familiar. The secret is about to be revealed in the next verse.

**OF BEING FILLED.** This is from a word meaning grass or hay, and so to fatten like an animal. Over-abundance is the idea. When I was working with the ASCS (USDA) in summers while I was a student at Mississippi College, I found it amusing when we received word that we should use the term "abundant supply" rather than surplus. But in this context "abundant supply" is appropriate because Paul had known God's richest blessings, even during times when his faith was put to the test.

**OF GOING HUNGRY.** The word pointed to the poor man who earned his daily bread by the sweat of his brow. Many who lived through the Great Depression talked of "living from hand to mouth." Many said they "never knew where the next meal was coming from." Unemployment was very high and those who had jobs worked "from can 'til can't" to try to feed their family on fifty cents a day. I once asked a cousin, Clyde Miller, when and why he and his family had moved to Oklahoma. He told me that he had been asked to share this with a class at a major university and after the class the professor urged him to write a book which would not only include his rags-to-riches story, but also his World War II heroism. He has no desire to write about his heroism and seems a little surprised with the interest in his success. But he told me that his older brother had gone to Oklahoma during the Depression, looking for work for himself, but also hoping to find work for other family members. When he finally found work, he put in long hours for little pay. He found a place to stay five miles from his job. One morning when he started to work he discovered that his engine would not start, so he ran the five miles to work because he knew if he was late someone else would get his job. If he had lost his job, he would have been without food or a place to stay.

Paul's circumstances were different but he understood what it meant to go hungry - and he could be content with it! Circumstances did not master him. Through Christ, he mastered circumstances whenever possible and when it was not he learned to cope with them with absolute faith that his Lord would provide for him. With this attitude he could, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, write his young son in the ministry, Timothy:

Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness" (2 Tim. 2:19).

This is one of the verses I have often used as a prayer-verse, and I have shared it with others who were facing trials, experiencing grief, failure, or disappointment.

Surely, this verse should teach us that an abundance of material things is not always a sign of God's blessings, His favor, or His approval. Nor is the lack of material things a sign that God has withdrawn His favor or His blessings. Many factors are involved in a cause, so we are ill-advised to point to any one factor and say that another person is prospering, or failing to prosper, because of that one factor. It has occurred to me, however, that there is a logical reason why some ungodly people prosper here on earth while some righteous people struggle throughout their entire life. In computer terminology, the world is user-friendly to those who are of the world. We would be foolish to try to apply that principle to each and every person we know, but I do believe it is a principle that holds true in a general sense.

**4:13 - I CAN DO ALL THINGS.** This is one of the best known verses in the Bible: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (NKJV). I wonder how often it is recalled or quoted by people who may not even remember where in the Bible it is found. Paul is about to reveal the secret of his contentment at all times, including times of adversity (vs. 11). This verse gives the reason Paul could make such a claim: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." "I can do" is from an old word (*ischuw*) meaning to have strength, to have power. Paul begins the sentence by using this word twice consecutively, and then he concludes the statement with word *endunamow*, which means to empower, to grow strong, increasing in strength. He has the power to do all things for Christ because he does all things through Christ. He is empowered by the Holy Spirit to do all things for Christ (Acts 1:8).

You cannot defeat a person with this attitude, and you cannot intimidate him. But we must stress that what Paul had is more than an attitude - he has a Person. He has Christ and Christ is enough, whether in wealth or want. But without Him man is powerless, even if he had all the wealth in the world. That is the bottom line to Paul and it is the thought running through this passage. It is also the key to contentment - and joy - for believers today..

Paul was a good example for the saints at Philippi, and his life and ministry remain an example for us today. He probably lived the Christian life more fully and faithfully than anyone else ever has, but the confidence expressed here is available to every single believer. Paul may have lived on higher ground than most believers, but the opportunity is there for every single Christian who desires it and is willing to pay the price. There is no mystical (i.e., Gnostic, New Age) formula involved. The key is faith and God supplies that.

**THROUGH HIM WHO STRENGTHENS ME.** Scholars point out that this is a causative verb, meaning to empower, to pour power into someone. Paul has such strength so long as Jesus keeps on putting power into him. He is not the source of this strength, he is the recipient of a power far beyond natural human strength (see Acts 1:8). The world is in awe of power, many are fascinated with tales of strength and prowess, and some are mesmerized by stories of the supernatural. There is nothing occult about the power of which Paul writes. What he is dealing with here is truly supernatural, but it is a supernatural power available to every believer in Jesus Christ.

**4:14 - YOU HAVE DONE WELL.** Paul has just made the amazing declaration, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” But to show his gratitude, he is quick to add, “Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction.” How had they shared in his affliction? They had sent monetary gifts (vv. 10, 16), but they had also sent Epaphroditus to minister to him. They had surely prayed for him, as he had prayed for them. These were expressions of their sincere love for Paul and their commitment to God. The generosity of the Philippian church to Paul went back a long way (see Acts 16 and 17). This was a poor church and their gifts were sacrificial in nature. There was a bond that existed between them which existed between him and no other church.

**4:15 - THE FIRST PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL.** This verse sheds further light on Paul’s special relationship with the Philippian church, as well as the spiritual character of the church itself. Paul writes, “You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone” (NAS). They had followed his ministry from the first worship service “down by the riverside” (Acts 16:13). They recalled the time when Paul and Silas were thrown into jail for the cause of Christ, as well as the earthquake and the conversion of the jailer. They recalled the conversion of Lydia and the establishment of the church, possibly in her home.

**NO OTHER CHURCH SHARED WITH ME.** The word Paul uses here for share (*koinwnew*) is translated “communicated” in the KJV. It means “to have a share of,” with the idea of contributing, or participating. Here it carries the idea of a continued partnership or fellowship with him in The Great Commission, the preaching of the Gospel as he went throughout the world (see 2 Cor. 11:7-12). No other church had entered such fellowship, or partnership in the Gospel with Paul. This was the dearest church to his heart. They had sent him a gift to help in his work at Thessalonica, and another after that. This is, at the very least, their third love offering (4:16), but they had probably sent gifts on a number of occasions after he left Philippi.

**IN THE MATTER.** The Greek means word or account, and here it might be paraphrased, “as to the account.” No other church opened an account with Paul. He is careful to acknowledge their generosity and their partnership in the Gospel. Often missionaries today express the same idea. They preach, serve, and minister, and we support them with our prayers and our tithes and offerings. We, in a real sense, enter a covenant with our missionaries to support them so they may devote their time and attention to the work to which they were called and to which they are committed.

**OF GIVING AND RECEIVING.** The Greek words mean just that - giving and receiving, but in this context denote credit and debit. This is a mercantile metaphor repeated in verse 17 (*eis logan humon*, to your account). Paul had to keep books with no other church, though Thessalonica and Berea did join Philippi in support of Paul's work in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:8ff).

**BUT ONLY YOU.** Does this mean no other church contributed to his ministry after he left Philippi, or that no other church had ever contributed to this ministry? It may surprise students of

the three missionary journeys of Paul that no other church, including Antioch of Syria, contributed anything more than prayers and good wishes for his work (Acts 13:1-3), but that is what he implies here. According to the Scripture, Paul and Barnabas were ministering at Antioch when God called them to go on the first great missionary trip, and this church “sent them” on their way. When the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention sends out missionaries, they are sent out with salary, expenses and benefits. Many other denominations and a number of missionary societies assure their missionaries of financial support. With this in mind we may assume that the church at Antioch supported Paul and his co-workers financially, but that is only an assumption. The Scripture simply says:

While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away (Acts 13:2-3).

**4:16 - MORE THAN ONCE.** The KJV has “once and again,” which seems to imply that they had sent two gifts. But the NAS and NRSV render it, “more than once.” The NIV has, “you sent me aid again and again.” They began their gifts immediately after he left them - “even in Thessalonica.”

Thessalonica was the first place Paul and his companions (Silas, Luke and Timothy) stopped after leaving Philippi, so they had helped him from the beginning - before they reached Corinth where he depended on their gifts to keep from taking money from the Corinthians.

Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? *I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you; and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so (2 Cor. 11:7ff, italics added).*

**4:17 - NOT THAT I SEEK.** Paul words this very carefully, as any minister must when dealing with any reference to contributions: “Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.” Robertson notes that Lightfoot calls this “the Apostle’s nervous anxiety to clear himself” of seeming to want more gifts. Robertson prefers “delicate courtesy.”<sup>clxxxiii</sup> Paul says, in essence, “It is not that I desire a gift from you for my own sake, although your gift touches my heart. I do not need anything. But I am glad for your own sake, for your kindness and your thoughtfulness and your generosity will stand greatly to your credit in the sight of the Lord.” Their generosity made him happy, not for his own sake, but for their sake. The most important thing about this gift was the effect it was going to have on the saints in Philippi.

**4:18 - I HAVE RECEIVED EVERYTHING IN FULL.** He continues the accounting metaphor. The word Paul used (*apecho*) was commonly used in the papyri for “received in full.” Paul has marked their account “Paid in Full.” We need to read the entire verse together in order to

sense the depth of Paul's appreciation for their gifts. But there is more to it than that. This is inspired Scripture - the Holy spirit is the divine Author, Paul is the human agent. We see here not only how Paul viewed their gifts, but also how the Lord looks upon them.

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

**A FRAGRANT AROMA.** Paul is now using the language of the temple: "You shall take them (offerings) from their hands, and offer them up in smoke on the altar on the burnt offering for a soothing aroma before the LORD; it is an offering by fire to the LORD" ( see Exodus 29:25). "Here Paul compares the Philippians' generosity in supporting his ministry to an O.T. sweet-aroma offering (see Lev. 1:1-17; Rom. 12:1, 2), reminiscent of the sacrificial offering made by Christ."<sup>clxxxiv</sup> The pleasant aroma rising from the altar and symbolizing the prayers of His people were pleasing to the Lord. "The gifts to Paul, the man of God, were a gift of worship and praise to God Himself."<sup>clxxxv</sup> He sees their gift to him and to his ministry as a gift to the Lord. This might remind us of gracious act of the disciple who anointed the feet of Jesus with a fragrant ointment: "Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume" (John 12:3).

**4:19 - AND MY GOD WILL SUPPLY ALL YOUR NEEDS.** It is a divine call - not material rewards - which leads men into the ministry and it is the spiritual reward which keeps them in it. But no one has ever been made poorer because of a gift for the cause of Christ. A possible exception which, unfortunately needs to be pointed out, is the sad case of some innocent (ignorant?) person who is duped by some false prophet - whether on TV or in person. But this principle applies to both the Philippians and Paul. Even as God has supplied all Paul's needs, He would supply all their needs. They could trust Him to supply their needs. Remember that "the cattle upon a thousand hills" belong to the Lord. If He feeds the sparrows He will provide for us.

It should also be remembered that a gift like the one the Philippians sent Paul cannot produce righteousness. God's righteousness comes by faith. But those who experience God's righteousness are motivated to give to help others and to support the preaching of the Gospel. Paul used these believers as an example when he said of their giving, "they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God" (2 Cor. 8:5, NKJV). Jesus taught, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).

Those who serve Him may expect riches beyond measure. Unfortunately, the health and wealth gospel proclaimed by some (certainly not all) radio and television preachers has clouded the truth. All believers, even those who contribute to some radio or television ministry, are not going to be healthy, wealthy, or wise. Paul was neither wealthy, nor healthy, as the world views wealth and health. But no one has ever been blessed with greater spiritual health or wealth. As to his spiritual health, probably no one has ever been so conformed to the image of Christ than he. As to wealth, fortunes are spent in pursuit of what he was given as a free gift.

**ACCORDING TO HIS RICHES IN GLORY.** God has an abundant treasure in glory and will bless the Philippians for what they have done for His servant. Paul has expressed confidence that he could "do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (v. 13), now he affirms that "God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." As he closes his letter, Paul reaffirms:

(1) the centrality of Jesus Christ as the source of every blessing and benefit from God; (2) the essential nature of personal union with God through Christ; and (3) God's commitment to meet the needs of those who give sacrificially to meet the needs of others. So wonderful is the truth of v. 19 that Paul cannot refrain from breaking forth with a doxology of praise in v. 20. This should be our continuous response to the ever-present riches bestowed upon us in Christ Jesus.<sup>clxxxvi</sup>

His awareness of the fact that the Philippians were very limited in resources heightened his appreciation for their gift. Even though Paul appreciated their generosity, he looked first to God Who is not limited in any way. Why should Paul look to the Philippians with their limited resources, when he can turn to God the Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer and Provider Who has unlimited resources. Think how many today look to sources that are limited for their help and reject the One Who can provide all their needs.

**4:20 - THE GLORY.** The doxology here flows out of the joy expressed throughout the epistle: "Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen." Paul frequently included in his letters doxologies, or statements of praise to God. "Doxology is a form of prayer exalting and praising the essential nature of God."<sup>clxxxvii</sup>

#### **4:21-23: Paul Ends The Letter With Greetings.**

**4:21 - GREET EVERY SAINT IN CHRIST JESUS.** This letter is addressed "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi" (Phil. 1:1b). Who is a saint? What does the term denote? How does one get to be a saint? Every time I hear someone say, "I'm a Christian, but I'm no saint," I cringe a little, realizing how little they know the Word of God and how much the church has failed to teach them. The word for saint (*hagios*) means holy, set apart for God. Ananias (Acts 9:13) and Peter (Acts 9:32) use this word for believers in Christ, and Paul uses it in the same sense throughout his epistles. Saints are people who name Jesus as Lord. "Saints not only name Jesus as Lord, but they are faithful and true witnesses for Jesus."<sup>clxxxviii</sup>

The overall spiritual church is the body of Christ and it is made up only of saints, those set apart for His glory. The local church may have members who are not saints - not born-again Christians - but those who are in the true church are there because they have received Jesus Christ as Savior and He has placed them in His church.

Morally, the church is holy because members have been made holy

by Christ and live pure lives for Him. Thus, church members are saints or holy ones. That saints are not super Christians in a separate category from others is clearly shown here. Paul addressed the Corinthians as holy or saints, then dealt with all their moral and spiritual problems. Saints are all Christians in all churches in every place.<sup>clxxxix</sup>

Paul, ever considerate of others, includes his co-workers in his greetings to the church: “The brethren who are with me greet you.” This not only attests to the heart of Paul, but to his wisdom as well. Wise leaders designate responsibility and that is good. But it is not good if they do not share recognition in such a way as to (1) show appreciation and (2) recognize and affirm the call and ministry of co-laborers.

**4:22 - THEY THAT ARE OF CAESAR'S HOUSEHOLD.** Not only does he send a greeting from his co-workers, he also includes “all the saints,” and adds “especially those of Caesar's household.” This probably does not denote members of the imperial family, but some people connected with the imperial establishment, or employees in the emperor's palace. “There is no evidence of the conversion of a member of the imperial family until a generation later.”<sup>cxc</sup> The term can apply to slaves, free men, or even high ranking officials.

In a sense, Christianity had begun to undermine the throne of Caesar! It absolutely undermined Caesar's claim to divinity. And the day was coming when Christianity would sit on that throne (by Constantine's decree). It is interesting to observe how often the Gospel works upward from the lower classes. That is what happened in Rome and the pattern has repeated many times since.

Older members of many evangelical churches can remember brush arbor meetings, tents with sawdust on the ground (the sawdust trail), baptizings in the creek, river, or farm pond. Others can recall simple buildings with crude pews and a big noisy window fan. Some may still recall services in those buildings before electricity or indoor plumbing. I remember setting up blocks and placing planks on them for seats in a mission. As a very young child, I recall attending a revival meeting in a brush arbor, even though I probably would not have remembered it if a friend had not excited the crowd by running in with a snake he had just caught. It became painfully obvious that no one there had planned a snake-handling service!

I also remember the used pews we finally received from another church. In the summer when you started to stand, your shirt would be stuck to the pew. I remember the bugs, wasps and mosquitoes. But the thing that really stands out in my mind is the fact that during those days people filled that little building and souls were saved regularly. Revival time was so important to people that most church members planned their schedule around the revival. We even stopped work in the fields early enough to go to prayer meeting every Wednesday evening.

Our Associational Missionary, M. C. Waldrup, who founded our mission church, baptized me in Six Mile Lake, between Sledge and Lula, Mississippi. I saw him baptize a lot of people in that

lake before we began using the baptistry of a nearby church. I vividly remember how concerned parents were about the salvation of their family members. They were more concerned about the salvation and baptism of their children than baseball, football or beauty pageants. People talked about what was going on at church, sermons, Sunday School lessons, Bible memory work, and who was saved the previous Sunday or during the revival in those days the way many church members today talk about bass boats, hunting clubs, little league, rodeos, and other forms of recreation today. Let me be quick to add that none of the above is evil unless it gets between the believer and God. But good things may distract the believer from the best things. In fact, Christians are much more likely to be distracted from God and His service by good things than bad things.

When I recall seeing forty or forty-five people saved in a one week revival in very a small, and very rural mission church - without a single pizza or hot dog - I am deeply burdened for the modern child or youth growing up with all the distractions he, or she faces today. I am burdened by Christian parents who seem to place more emphasis on recreation and entertainment than they do their child's salvation or spiritual growth. They watch their children and young people can go to hell in front of the television set, in the saddle, in a deer stand, or at the ball park.

The danger of going to hell is not the only problem. Often the children and young people whose parents keep them out of church for recreation, or to visit friends and relatives every other week have already professed their faith in Jesus Christ. Their parents were excited about their child's salvation, but care nothing about their sanctification - their spiritual growth and development. Dear friends, I have seen a lot of parents who are going to have a lot to answer for some day. Throughout my ministry I have also seen a lot of parents suffer for the sin of neglecting their children's spiritual development. It breaks a pastor's heart to see the consequences.

It is a burden to a pastor when parents come to him and tell him their child is in trouble, and then proceed to say, "I don't know what happened. We had him in church all his life." How do you say to these grieving, broken parents, "No. You had a warm body on a hard pew, but your child was not in worship." A pastor grieves for those who sit there because their parents make them come to the service, but they can hardly wait to get out so they can go play.

Today Baptists and other evangelicals are more affluent, but we no longer fill buildings and pack pews the way we did then. I remember attending revivals when the building was filled and people stood at open windows, dripping with perspiration and swatting mosquitoes. But they were hanging on to every word the preacher said. Then we stood amazed; now we sit amused. Then we stood on the promises; now we just sit on the premises. Fortunately, there are notable exceptions.

What has happened? Does this contradict the earlier statement about the upward spread of the Gospel? Not at all. In the early days of our history, the Gospel did spread from the down trodden, persecuted masses who came to the new world seeking religious freedom, to ranking university officials, prominent citizens and leading politicians. But, look what is happening today. The Gospel is no longer "good news" to Americans. We have lost the Christian consensus. The Bible is no longer the standard to our society. People have become so indoctrinated with humanistic and New Age values and methods that when a Christian questions any of them, he is dismissed as "a

right-wing extremist," a fundamentalist, or a radical.

One illustration of this is the popularity of the gospel of self-esteem. It sounds so good, and the theologians and pop-psychologists who advocate this theory sound so sincere that many people accept it without going to the Scripture to see if the theory is Scriptural. Jay Adams deals with this subject in a book entitled, *The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love and Self-Image*.<sup>cxci</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, in his book, *Christian Countermoves in a Decadent Culture*, presents a balanced treatment of the subject in a scholarly and practical study.<sup>cxcii</sup>

Many Christians are accepting the world's view on abortion, homosexuality, divorce and remarriage and other issues of our day. Most modern Christians seem to be more interested in the "thus reasoneth the mind of man" than the "thus saith the Word of God." Christians are compromising on issues ranging from alcohol, drugs, entertainment, adultery, homosexuality, language, and integrity in general.

In reference to Caesar's household, A. T. Robertson suggests that it is doubtful if Nero had yet heard of Paul for his case may have been delayed by a lapse of time. He wrote, "... this obscure prisoner who has planted the gospel in Caesar's household has won more eternal fame and power than all the Caesars combined. Nero will commit suicide shortly after Paul is executed. Nero's star went down and Paul's rose and rises still."<sup>cxiii</sup>

**4:23 - THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST BE WITH YOUR SPIRIT.** I love that! - He does not simply say, "may the grace of God be with you; but "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." I often hear the expression, "the supremacy of grace." While I have no problem with the term, I personally ascribe supremacy to a person rather than an emotion or even a motivation. Therefore, I like to say that I believe in the supremacy of God and the sufficiency of grace. Grace is the unmerited love or favor of God. By grace we are saved, through faith (Eph. 2:8). It is by His grace that we must live, by His grace that we are sanctified, by His grace we are both blessed and protected.

The saints at Philippi had sent Paul a gift, a deeply appreciated sacrificial gift. He had but one gift to send them - his blessing. There is one gift a child of God can always give to another person - that is to remember that person in prayer. There is one prayer you can always pray for another - and that is that "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." Amen!

## PARTING THOUGHTS

Or, "parting shots!" In the Book of Philippians, Paul deals with issues readily recognizable in local churches today: rivalry between members, jealousy, envy, strife, divisions, pride, arrogance. He warns them to beware of evil workers in the church. He also offers suggestions in dealing with some of these problems.

The Book of Philippians is not a negative letter. It is so positive, in fact, that it will always

be like an oasis in the spiritual desert in which we live. It is there for our illumination and edification any time we want to pick it up and read it. It magnifies our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It offers practical advice and timely inspiration for those who want to live the Christian life in such a way as to glorify Jesus Christ.

In Philippians the saints are encouraged to support the ministers of the Gospel. They are to encourage and assist each other. They are challenged to press on in the Lord's service. They are urged to maintain a high and holy lifestyle. They are also promised a peace which passes all understanding.

Philippians is the Epistle of Joy! Those who are born again by the grace of God have an opportunity to know both the peace that surpasses all understanding, and unconquerable joy. Remember the formula for the child of God: grace + anything = joy. Why not make it personal: God's grace + \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank) = joy. Come what may - broken health, financial failure, divorce, death of loved ones, conflict with children or parents, catastrophic circumstance, natural disasters - when you give God's grace an opportunity to work in your life you will discover that your joy in Jesus Christ is unquenchable. It just does not get any better than that.

It works! We have God's Word for it, and I will add my personal testimony. I have searched my heart - and my memory banks - and I can truthfully say that the greatest joy and the greatest peace I have ever known came after my heart attack. If you can say with Paul, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain," you can live without paralyzing fear and anxiety because nothing can defeat you and no one can intimidate you.

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

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