

Philippians 1
July 21, 2024

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

We are going to read a verse this morning that I'm confident you'll recognize. It's found in v.6 where Paul says, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." It's such a feel-good statement.

Q: So what do you think is the "good work" that God has started in you? What does that look like for you? [Let people engage]

Intro/Transition: We are beginning a new study in the letter to the Philippians. The church in Philippi is the first church on record that was started on a different continent! You can read about the roots of the church in Philippi in Acts 16.

Paul helped found the church and kept in close contact with them throughout his missionary journey. He saw God's hand start a "good work" in Philippi and Paul wanted to encourage them as God continued to carry it on to completion!

About a decade later, he wrote them a letter of encouragement from a prison cell. Paul had been arrested in Jerusalem and was awaiting trial in Rome where he lived in his own rented house while chained to Roman guards. This is important to keep in mind because the words Paul writes doesn't sound like sentences of a dejected prisoner. Rather they are quite the opposite. Paul writes as a joyful man sharing his joy with others! Let's begin.

BOOK:

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers (bishops) and deacons:

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

Thanksgiving and Prayer

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until

the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Paul's Chains Advance the Gospel

¹² Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

¹⁵ It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸ But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance (or salvation). ²⁰ I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

²⁷ Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰ since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Paul is reminding us again of the need for *the single mind*. There is joy in our lives, even as we battle the enemy, if we live for Christ and the Gospel and practice “Christian teamwork.” To be sure, there are some people with whom we cannot cooperate (2 Cor. 6:14–18; Eph. 5:11); but

there are many with whom we *can*—and should! We are citizens of heaven and therefore should walk consistently. We are members of the same “team” and should work cooperatively.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today’s Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 2, pp. 64-73)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

HOW TO INCREASE YOUR JOY

Philippians 1:1–11

“How about coming over to the house for some fellowship?”

“What a golf game! Man, did we have great fellowship!”

“The fellowship at the retreat was just terrific!”

That word *fellowship* seems to mean many things to many different people. Perhaps, like a worn coin, it may be losing its true impression. If so, we had better take some steps to rescue it. After all, a good Bible word like *fellowship* needs to stay in circulation as long as possible.

In spite of his difficult circumstances as a prisoner in Rome, Paul is rejoicing. The secret of his joy is the *single mind*; he lives for Christ and the Gospel. (Christ is named eighteen times in Philippians 1, and the Gospel is mentioned six times.) “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). But what really is “the single mind”? It is the attitude that says, “It makes no difference what happens to me, just as long as Christ is glorified and the Gospel shared with others.” Paul rejoiced in spite of his circumstances, because his circumstances strengthened the *fellowship of the Gospel* (Phil. 1:1–11), promoted the *furtherance of the Gospel* (Phil. 1:12–26), and guarded the *faith of the Gospel* (Phil. 1:27–30).

The word *fellowship* simply means “to have in common.” But true Christian fellowship is really much deeper than sharing coffee and pie, or even enjoying a golf game together. Too often what we think is “fellowship” is really only acquaintanceship or friendship. You cannot have fellowship with someone unless you have something in common; and for Christian fellowship, this means the possessing of eternal life within the heart. Unless a person has trusted Christ as his Savior, he knows nothing of “the fellowship of the Gospel.” In Philippians 2:1, Paul writes about “the fellowship of the Spirit,” because when a person is born again he receives the gift of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9). There is also “the fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil. 3:10). When we share what we have with others, this is also fellowship (Phil. 4:15, translated “communicate” in KJV).

So, true Christian fellowship is much more than having a name on a church roll or being present at a meeting. It is possible to be close to people physically and miles away from them spiritually. One of the sources of Christian joy is this fellowship that believers have in Jesus Christ. Paul was in Rome, his friends were miles away in Philippi, but their spiritual fellowship

was real and satisfying. When you have the single mind, you will not complain about circumstances because you know that difficult circumstances will result in the strengthening of the fellowship of the Gospel.

Paul uses three thoughts in Philippians 1:1–11 that describe true Christian fellowship: I have you in my mind (Phil. 1:3–6), I have you in my heart (Phil. 1:7–8), I have you in my prayers (Phil. 1:9–11).

I Have You in My Mind (Phil. 1:3–6)

Isn't it remarkable that Paul is thinking of others and not of himself? As he awaits his trial in Rome, Paul's mind goes back to the believers in Philippi, and every recollection he has brings him joy. Read Acts 16; you may discover that some things happened to Paul at Philippi, the memory of which could produce sorrow. He was illegally arrested and beaten, was placed in the stocks, and was humiliated before the people. But even those memories brought joy to Paul, because it was through this suffering that the jailer found Christ! Paul recalled Lydia and her household, the poor slave girl who had been demon-possessed, and the other dear Christians at Philippi; and each recollection was a source of joy. (It is worth asking, "Am I the kind of Christian who brings joy to my pastor's mind when he thinks of me?")

It is possible that Philippians 1:5 is talking about their *financial* fellowship with Paul, a topic he picks up again in Philippians 4:14–19. The church at Philippi was the only church that entered into fellowship with Paul to help support his ministry. The "good work" of Philippians 1:6 may refer to the sharing of their means; it was started by the Lord and Paul was sure the Lord would continue it and complete it.

But we will not go astray if we apply these verses to the work of salvation and Christian living. We are not saved by our good works (Eph. 2:8–9). Salvation is the good work God does in us when we trust His Son. In Philippians 2:12–13 we are told that God continues to work in us through His Spirit. In other words, salvation includes a threefold work:

- the work God does *for* us—salvation;
- the work God does *in* us—sanctification;
- the work God does *through* us—service.

This work will continue until we see Christ, and then the work will be fulfilled. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

It was a source of joy to Paul to know that God was still working in the lives of his fellow-believers at Philippi. After all, this is the real basis for joyful Christian fellowship, to have God at work in our lives day by day.

"There seems to be friction in our home," a concerned wife said to a marriage counselor. "I really don't know what the trouble is."

"Friction is caused by one of two things," said the counselor, and to illustrate he picked up two blocks of wood from his desk. "If one block is moving and one is standing still, there's friction. Or, if both are moving but in opposite directions, there's friction. Now, which is it?"

"I'll have to admit that I've been going backward in my Christian life, and Joe has really been growing," the wife admitted. "What I need is to get back to fellowship with the Lord."

I Have You in My Heart (Phil. 1:7–8)

Now we move a bit deeper, for it is possible to have others in our minds without really having them in our hearts. (Someone has observed that many people today would have to confess, “I have you *on my nerves!*”) Paul’s sincere love for his friends was something that could not be disguised or hidden.

Christian love is “the tie that binds.” Love is the evidence of salvation: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14). It is the “spiritual lubrication” that keeps the machinery of life running smoothly. Have you noticed how often Paul uses the phrase “you all” as he writes? There are at least nine instances in this letter. He does not want to leave anyone out! (Some translations read, “You have me in your heart” in Phil. 1:7, but the basic truth is the same.)

How did Paul evidence his love for them? For one thing, he was suffering on their behalf. His bonds were proof of his love. He was “the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles” (Eph. 3:1). Because of Paul’s trial, Christianity was going to get a fair hearing before the officials of Rome. Since Philippi was a Roman colony, the decision would affect the believers there. Paul’s love was not something he merely talked about; it was something he practiced. He considered his difficult circumstances an opportunity for defending and confirming the Gospel, and this would help his brethren everywhere.

But how can Christians learn to practice this kind of love? “I get along better with my unsaved neighbors than I do my saved relatives!” a man confided to his pastor. “Maybe it takes a diamond to cut a diamond, but I’ve just about had it!” Christian love is not something we work up; it is something that God does in us and through us. Paul longed for his friends “in the bowels [love] of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:8). It was not Paul’s love channeled through Christ; it was Christ’s love channeled through Paul. “God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us” (Rom. 5:5, NIV). When we permit God to perform His “good work” in us, then we grow in our love for one another.

How can we tell that we are truly bound in love to other Christians? For one thing, we are concerned about them. The believers at Philippi were concerned about Paul and sent Epaphroditus to minister to him. Paul was also greatly concerned about his friends at Philippi, especially when Epaphroditus became ill and could not return right away (Phil. 2:25–28). “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

Another evidence of Christian love is a willingness to forgive one another. “And above all things have fervent charity [love] among yourselves: for charity [love] shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).

“Tell us some of the blunders your wife has made,” a radio quizmaster asked a contestant.

“I can’t remember any,” the man replied.

“Oh, surely you can remember something!” the announcer said.

“No, I really can’t,” said the contestant. “I love my wife very much, and I just don’t remember things like that.” First Corinthians 13:5 states that “love keeps no record of wrongs” (NIV).

Christians who practice love always experience joy; both come as a result of the presence of the same Holy Spirit. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy” (Gal. 5:22).

I Have You in My Prayers (Phil. 1:9–11)

Paul found joy in his memories of the friends at Philippi and in his growing love for them. He also found joy in remembering them before the throne of grace in prayer. The high priest in the Old Testament wore a special garment, the ephod, over his heart. On it were twelve stones with

the names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on them, a jewel for each tribe (Ex. 28:15–29). He carried the people over his heart in love, and so did Paul. Perhaps the deepest Christian fellowship and joy we can experience in this life is at the throne of grace, praying with and for one another.

This is a prayer for maturity, and Paul begins with *love*. After all, if our Christian love is what it ought to be, everything else should follow. He prays that they might experience *abounding* love and *discerning* love. Christian love is not blind! The heart and mind work together so that we have discerning love and loving discernment. Paul wants his friends to grow in discernment, in being able to “distinguish the things that differ.”

The ability to distinguish is a mark of maturity. When a baby learns to speak, it may call every four-legged animal a “bow-wow.” But then the child discovers that there are cats, white mice, cows, and other four-legged creatures. To a little child, one automobile is just like another, but not to a car-crazy teenager! He can spot the differences between models faster than his parents can even name the cars! One of the sure marks of maturity is discerning love.

Paul also prays that they might have mature Christian *character*, “sincere and without offense.” The Greek word translated “sincere” may have several meanings. Some translate it “tested by sunlight.” The sincere Christian is not afraid to “stand in the light!”

Sincere may also mean “to whirl in a sieve,” suggesting the idea of a winnowing process that removes chaff. In both cases the truth is the same: Paul prays that his friends will have the kind of character that can pass the test. (Our English word *sincere* comes from a Latin word that means “unadulterated, pure, unmixed.”)

Paul prays for them to have mature Christian love and character, “without offense till the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:10). This means that our lives do not cause others to stumble, and that they are ready for the Judgment Seat of Christ when He returns (see 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 John 2:28). Here are two good tests for us to follow as we exercise spiritual discernment: (1) Will it make others stumble? (2) Will I be ashamed if Jesus should return?

Paul also prays that they might have mature Christian *service*. He wants them filled and fruitful (Phil. 1:11). He is not interested simply in “church activities,” but in the kind of spiritual fruit that is produced when we are in fellowship with Christ. “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me” (John 15:4). Too many Christians try to “produce results” in their own efforts instead of abiding in Christ and allowing His life to produce the fruit.

What is the “fruit” God wants to see from our lives? Certainly He wants the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22–23), Christian character that glorifies God. Paul compares winning lost souls to Christ to bearing fruit (Rom. 1:13), and he also names “holiness” as a spiritual fruit (Rom. 6:22). He exhorts us to be “fruitful in every good work” (Col. 1:10), and the writer to the Hebrews reminds us that our praise is the “fruit of the lips” (Heb. 13:15).

The fruit tree does not make a great deal of noise when it produces its crop; it merely allows the life within to work in a natural way, and fruit is the result. “He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

The difference between spiritual fruit and human “religious activity” is that the fruit brings glory to Jesus Christ. Whenever we do anything in our own strength, we have a tendency to boast about it. True spiritual fruit is so beautiful and wonderful that no man can claim credit for it; the glory must go to God alone.

This, then, is true Christian fellowship—a having-in-common that is much deeper than mere friendship. “I have you in my mind ... I have you in my heart ... I have you in my prayers.” This

is the kind of fellowship that produces joy, *and it is the single mind that produces this kind of fellowship!*

Jerry had to go to New York City for special surgery, and he hated to go. “Why can’t we have it done at home?” he asked his doctor. “I don’t know a soul in that big, unfriendly city!” But when he and his wife arrived at the hospital, there was a pastor to meet them and invite them to stay at his home until they got settled. The operation was serious, and the wait in the hospital was long and difficult; but the fellowship of the pastor and his wife brought a new joy to Jerry and his wife. They learned that circumstances need not rob us of joy if we will but permit these circumstances to strengthen the fellowship of the Gospel.

Philippians 1:12–26

More than anything else, Paul’s desire as a missionary was to preach the Gospel in Rome. The hub of the great Empire, Rome was the key city of its day. If Paul could conquer it for Christ, it would mean reaching millions with the message of salvation. It was critically important on Paul’s agenda, for he said, “After I have been there [Jerusalem], I must also see Rome” (Acts 19:21). From Corinth he wrote, “So, as much as in me is, I am ready [eager] to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also” (Rom. 1:15).

Paul wanted to go to Rome as a preacher, but instead he went as *a prisoner!* He could have written a long letter about that experience alone. Instead, he sums it all up as “the things which happened unto me” (Phil. 1:12). The record of these things is given in Acts 21:17–28:31, and it begins with Paul’s illegal arrest in the temple in Jerusalem. The Jews thought he had desecrated their temple by bringing in Gentiles, and the Romans thought he was an Egyptian renegade who was on their “most-wanted” list. Paul became the focal point of both political and religious plotting and remained a prisoner in Caesarea for two years. When he finally appealed to Caesar (which was the privilege of every Roman citizen), he was sent to Rome. En route, the ship was wrecked! The account of that storm and Paul’s courage and faith is one of the most dramatic in the Bible (Acts 27). After three months of waiting on the Island of Malta, Paul finally embarked for Rome and the trial he had requested before Caesar.

To many, all of this would have looked like failure, but not to this man with a “single mind,” concerned with sharing Christ and the Gospel. Paul did not find his joy in ideal circumstances; he found his joy in winning others to Christ. And if his circumstances promoted the furtherance of the Gospel, that was all that mattered! The word *furtherance* means “pioneer advance.” It is a Greek military term referring to the army engineers who go before the troops to open the way into new territory. Instead of finding himself confined as a prisoner, Paul discovered that his circumstances really opened up new areas of ministry.

Everyone has heard of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the famous British preacher, but few know the story of his wife, Susannah. Early in their married life, Mrs. Spurgeon became an invalid. It looked as though her only ministry would be encouraging her husband and praying for his work. But God gave her a burden to share her husband’s books with pastors who were unable to purchase them. This burden soon led to the founding of the “Book Fund.” As a work of faith, the “Book Fund” provided thousands of pastors with tools for their work. All this was supervised by Mrs. Spurgeon from her home. It was a pioneer ministry.

God still wants His children to take the Gospel into new areas. He wants us to be pioneers, and sometimes He arranges circumstances so that we can be nothing else but pioneers. In fact, that is how the Gospel originally came to Philippi! Paul had tried to enter other territory, but God

had repeatedly shut the door (Acts 16:6–10). Paul wanted to take the message eastward into Asia, but God directed him to take it westward into Europe. What a difference it would have made in the history of mankind if Paul had been permitted to follow his plan!

God sometimes uses strange tools to help us pioneer the Gospel. In Paul's case, there were three tools that helped him take the Gospel even into the elite Praetorian Guard, Caesar's special troops: his *chains* (Phil. 1:12–14), his *critics* (Phil. 1:15–19), and his *crisis* (Phil. 1:20–26).

Paul's Chains (Phil. 1:12–14)

The same God who used Moses' rod, Gideon's pitchers, and David's sling, used Paul's chains. Little did the Romans realize that the chains they affixed to his wrists would *release* Paul instead of *bind* him! Even as he wrote during a later imprisonment, "I suffer trouble, as an evildoer, even unto bonds; but the Word of God is not bound" (2 Tim. 2:9). He did not complain about his chains; instead he consecrated them to God and asked God to use them for the pioneer advance of the Gospel. And God answered his prayers.

To begin with, these chains gave Paul *contact with the lost*. He was chained to a Roman soldier twenty-four hours a day! The shifts changed every six hours, which meant Paul could witness to at least four men each day! Imagine yourself as one of those soldiers, chained to a man who prayed "without ceasing," who was constantly interviewing people about their spiritual condition, and who was repeatedly writing letters to Christians and churches throughout the Empire! It was not long before some of these soldiers put their faith in Christ. Paul was able to get the Gospel into the elite Praetorian Guard, something he could not have done had he been a free man.

But the chains gave Paul contact with another group of people: the officials in Caesar's court. He was in Rome as an official prisoner, and his case was an important one. The Roman government was going to determine the official status of this new "Christian" sect. Was it merely another sect of the Jews? Or was it something new and possibly dangerous? Imagine how pleased Paul must have been knowing that the court officials were forced to study the doctrines of the Christian faith!

Sometimes God has to put "chains" on His people to get them to accomplish a "pioneer advance" that could never happen any other way. Young mothers may feel chained to the home as they care for their children, but God can use those "chains" to reach people with the message of salvation. Susannah Wesley was the mother of nineteen children, before the days of labor-saving devices and disposable diapers! Out of that large family came John and Charles Wesley, whose combined ministries shook the British Isles. At six weeks of age, Fanny Crosby was blinded, but even as a youngster she determined not to be confined by the chains of darkness. In time, she became a mighty force for God through her hymns and Gospel songs.

The secret is this: when you have the single mind, you look on your circumstances as God-given opportunities for the furtherance of the Gospel; and you rejoice at *what God is going to do* instead of complaining about *what God did not do*.

Paul's chains not only gave contact with the lost, but they also gave *courage to the saved*. Many of the believers in Rome took fresh courage when they saw Paul's faith and determination (Phil. 1:14). They were "much more bold to speak the word without fear." That word *speak* does not mean "preach." Rather, it means "everyday conversation." No doubt many of the Romans were discussing Paul's case, because such legal matters were of primary concern to this nation of lawmakers. And the Christians in Rome who were sympathetic to Paul took advantage of this conversation to say a good word for Jesus Christ. Discouragement has a way of spreading, but so

does encouragement! Because of Paul's joyful attitude, the believers in Rome took fresh courage and witnessed boldly for Christ.

While recovering in the hospital from a serious auto accident, I received a letter from a total stranger who seemed to know just what to say to make my day brighter. In fact, I received several letters from him, and each one was better than the one before. When I was able to get around, I met him personally. I was amazed to discover that he was blind, a diabetic, handicapped because of a leg amputation (and since then the other leg has been removed), and that he lived with and cared for his elderly mother! If a man ever wore chains, this man did! But if a man ever was free to pioneer the Gospel, this man was! He was able to share Christ in high school assemblies, before service clubs, at the "Y," and before professional people in meetings that would have been closed to an ordained minister. My friend had the single mind; he lived for Christ and the Gospel. Consequently, he shared the joy of furthering the Gospel.

Our chains may not be as dramatic or difficult, but there is no reason why God cannot use them in the same way.

Paul's Critics (Phil. 1:15–19)

It is hard to believe that anyone would oppose Paul, but there were believers in Rome doing just that. The churches there were divided. Some preached Christ sincerely, wanting to see people saved. Some preached Christ insincerely, wanting to make the situation more difficult for Paul. The latter group was using the Gospel to further their own selfish purposes. Perhaps they belonged to the "legalistic" wing of the church that opposed Paul's ministry to the Gentiles and his emphasis on the grace of God as opposed to obedience to the Jewish Law. Envy and strife go together, just as love and unity go together.

Paul uses an interesting word in Philippians 1:16—*contention*. It means "to canvass for office, to get people to support you." Paul's aim was to glorify Christ and get people to follow Him; his critics' aim was to promote themselves and win a following of their own. Instead of asking, "Have you trusted Christ?" they asked, "Whose side are you on—ours or Paul's?" Unfortunately, this kind of "religious politics" is still seen today. And the people who practice it need to realize that they are only hurting themselves.

When you have the single mind, you look on your critics as another opportunity for the furtherance of the Gospel. Like a faithful soldier, Paul was "set [appointed] for the defense of the Gospel" (Phil. 1:17). He was able to rejoice, not in the selfishness of his critics, but in the fact that *Christ was being preached!* There was no envy in Paul's heart. It mattered not that some were for him and some were against him. All that mattered was the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

It is a matter of historic record that the two great English evangelists, John Wesley and George Whitefield, disagreed on doctrinal matters. Both of them were very successful, preaching to thousands of people and seeing multitudes come to Christ. It is reported that somebody asked Wesley if he expected to see Whitefield in heaven, and the evangelist replied, "No, I do not."

"Then you do not think Whitefield is a converted man?"

"Of course he is a converted man!" Wesley said. "But I do not expect to see him in heaven—because he will be so close to the throne of God and I so far away that I will not be able to see him!" Though he differed with his brother in some matters, Wesley did not have any envy in his heart, nor did he seek to oppose Whitefield's ministry.

Criticism is usually very hard to take, particularly when we are in difficult circumstances, as Paul was. How was the apostle able to rejoice even in the face of such diverse criticism? He

possessed the single mind! Philippians 1:19 indicates that Paul expected his case to turn out victoriously (“to my salvation”) because of the prayers of his friends and the supply of the Holy Spirit of God. The word *supply* gives us our English word *chorus*. Whenever a Greek city was going to put on a special festival, somebody had to pay for the singers and dancers. The donation called for had to be a lavish one, and so this word came to mean “to provide generously and lavishly.” Paul was not depending on his own dwindling resources; he was depending on the generous resources of God, ministered by the Holy Spirit.

Paul shared in the pioneer advance of the Gospel in Rome through his chains and his critics; but he had a third tool that he used.

Paul’s Crisis (Phil. 1:20–26)

Because of Paul’s chains, Christ was *known* (Phil. 1:13), and because of Paul’s critics, Christ was *preached* (Phil. 1:18). But because of Paul’s crisis, Christ was *magnified!* (Phil. 1:20) It was possible that Paul would be found a traitor to Rome and then executed. His preliminary trial had apparently gone in his favor. The final verdict, however, was yet to come. But Paul’s body was not his own, and his only desire (because he had the single mind) was to magnify Christ in his body.

Does Christ need to be magnified? After all, how can a mere human being ever magnify the Son of God? Well, the stars are much bigger than the telescope, and yet the telescope magnifies them and brings them closer. The believer’s body is to be a telescope that brings Jesus Christ close to people. To the average person, Christ is a misty figure in history who lived centuries ago. But as the unsaved watch the believer go through a crisis, they can see Jesus magnified and brought so much closer. To the Christian with the single mind, Christ is with us here and now.

The telescope brings distant things closer, and the microscope makes tiny things look big. To the unbeliever, Jesus is not very big. Other people and other things are far more important. But as the unbeliever watches the Christian go through a crisis experience, he ought to be able to see how big Jesus Christ really is. The believer’s body is a “lens” that makes a “little Christ” look very big, and a “distant Christ” come very close.

Paul was not afraid of life or death! Either way, he wanted to magnify Christ in his body. No wonder he had joy!

Paul confesses that he is facing a difficult decision. To remain alive was necessary for the believers’ benefit in Philippi, but to depart and be with Christ was far better. Paul decided that Christ would have him remain, not only for the “furtherance of the Gospel” (Phil. 1:12) but also for the “furtherance and joy of [their] faith” (Phil. 1:25). He wanted them to make some “pioneer advance” into new areas of spiritual growth. (By the way, Paul admonished Timothy, the young pastor, to be sure to pioneer new spiritual territory in his own life and ministry. See 1 Tim. 4:15, where “profiting” is our word “pioneer advance.”)

What a man Paul is! He is willing to postpone going to heaven in order to help Christians grow, and he is willing to go to hell in order to win the lost to Christ! (Rom. 9:1–3)

Of course, death had no terrors for Paul. It simply meant “departing.” This word was used by the soldiers; it meant “to take down your tent and move on.” What a picture of Christian death! The “tent” we live in is taken down at death, and the spirit goes home to be with Christ in heaven. (Read 2 Cor. 5:1–8.) The sailors also used this word; it meant “to loosen a ship and set sail.” Lord Tennyson used this figure of death in his famous poem “Crossing the Bar.”

But *departure* was also a political term; it described the setting free of a prisoner. God’s people are in bondage because of the limitations of the body and the temptations of the flesh, but

death will free them. Or they will be freed at the return of Christ (Rom. 8:18–23) if that should come first. Finally, *departure* was a word used by the farmers; it meant “to unyoke the oxen.” Paul had taken Christ’s yoke, which is an easy yoke to bear (Matt. 11:28–30), but how many burdens he carried in his ministry! (If you need your memory refreshed, read 2 Cor. 11:22–12:10.) To depart to be with Christ would mean laying aside the burdens, his earthly work completed.

No matter how you look at it, nothing can steal a man’s joy if he possesses the single mind! “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). Maltbie Babcock, who wrote “This Is My Father’s World,” has said, “Life is what we are alive to.” When my wife and I go shopping, I dread going to the yard goods department, but I often have to go because my wife enjoys looking at fabrics. If on the way to the yard goods section I spot the book department, I suddenly come alive! The thing that excites us and “turns us on” is the thing that really is “life” to us. In Paul’s case, Christ was his life. Christ excited him and made his life worth living.

Philippians 1:21 becomes a valuable test of our lives. “For to me to live is and to die is .” Fill in the blanks yourself.

“For to me to live is *money* and to die is *to leave it all behind.*”

“For to me to live is *fame* and to die is *to be forgotten.*”

“For to me to live is *power* and to die is *to lose it all.*”

No, we must echo Paul’s convictions if we are going to have joy in spite of circumstances, and if we are going to share in the furtherance of the Gospel. “For to me to live is *Christ*, and to die is *gain!*”

CHAPTER THREE - BATTLE STATIONS!

Philippians 1:27–30

The Christian life is not a playground; it is a battleground. We are *sons* in the family, enjoying the *fellowship* of the Gospel (Phil. 1:1–11); we are *servants* sharing in the *furtherance* of the Gospel (Phil. 1:12–26); but we are also *soldiers* defending the *faith* of the Gospel. And the believer with the single mind can have the joy of the Holy Spirit even in the midst of battle.

“The faith of the Gospel” is that body of divine truth given to the church. Jude calls it “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Paul warns in 1 Timothy 4:1 that “in the latter times some shall depart from the faith.” God committed this spiritual treasure to Paul (1 Tim. 1:11), and he in turn committed it to others, like Timothy (1 Tim. 6:20), whose responsibility was to commit this deposit to still others (2 Tim. 2:2). This is why the church must engage in a teaching ministry, so that each new generation of believers will know, appreciate, and use the great heritage of the faith.

But there is an enemy who is out to steal the treasure from God’s people. Paul had met the enemy in Philippi, and he was now facing him in Rome. If Satan can only rob believers of their Christian faith, the doctrines that are distinctively theirs, then he can cripple and defeat the ministry of the Gospel. It is sad to hear people say, “I don’t care what you believe, just so long as you live right.” What we believe determines how we behave, and wrong belief ultimately means a wrong life. Each local church is but one generation short of potential extinction. No wonder Satan attacks our young people in particular, seeking to get them away from “the faith.”

How can a group of Christians fight this enemy? “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh” (2 Cor. 10:4, NASB). Peter took up a sword in the Garden, and Jesus rebuked him (John 18:10–11). We use spiritual weapons—the Word of God and prayer (Eph. 6:11–18; Heb.

4:12); and we must depend on the Holy Spirit to give us the power that we need. But an army must fight *together*, and this is why Paul sends these admonitions to his friends at Philippi. He is explaining in this paragraph that there are three essentials for victory in the battle to protect “the faith.”

Consistency (Phil. 1:27a)

The old English word *conversation*, of course, means *walk* and not *talk*. “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ” (NASB). The most important weapon against the enemy is not a stirring sermon or a powerful book; it is the consistent life of believers.

The verb Paul uses is related to our word *politics*. He is saying, “Behave the way citizens are supposed to behave.” My wife and I were visiting in London and one day decided to go to the zoo. We boarded the bus and sat back to enjoy the ride; but it was impossible to enjoy it because of the loud, coarse conversation of the passengers at the front of the bus. Unfortunately, they were Americans; and we could see the Britishers around us raising their eyebrows and shaking their heads, as though to say, “Oh, yes, they’re from America!” We were embarrassed, because we knew that these people did not really represent the best of American citizens.

Paul is suggesting that we Christians are the citizens of heaven, and while we are on earth we ought to behave like heaven’s citizens. He brings this concept up again in Philippians 3:20. It would be a very meaningful expression to the people in Philippi because Philippi was a Roman colony, and its citizens were actually Roman citizens, protected by Roman law. The church of Jesus Christ is a colony of heaven on earth! And we ought to behave like the citizens of heaven.

“Am I conducting myself in a manner worthy of the Gospel?” is a good question for us to ask ourselves regularly. We should “walk ... worthy of the calling” that we have in Christ (Eph. 4:1, NASB), which means walking “worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” (Col. 1:10). We do not behave in order to go to heaven, as though we could be saved by our good works; but we behave because our names are already written in heaven, and our citizenship is in heaven.

It is worth remembering that the world around us knows only the Gospel that it sees in our lives.

*You are writing a Gospel,
A chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do
And the words that you say.
Men read what you write,
Whether faithful or true:
Just what is the Gospel
According to you?*

(source unknown)

“The Gospel” is the Good News that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (1 Cor. 15:1–8). There is only one “Good News” of salvation; any other gospel is false (Gal. 1:6–10). The message of the Gospel is the Good News that sinners can become the children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, God’s Son (John 3:16). To add anything to the Gospel is to deprive it of its power. We are not saved from our sins by faith in Christ *plus* something else; we are saved by faith in Christ *alone*.

“We have some neighbors who believe a false gospel,” a church member told his pastor. “Do you have some literature I can give them?”

The pastor opened his Bible to 2 Corinthians 3:2, “You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men” (NASB). He said, “The best literature in the world is no substitute for your own life. Let them see Christ in your behavior and this will open up opportunities to share Christ’s Gospel with them.”

The greatest weapon against the devil is a godly life. And a local church that practices the truth, that “behaves what it believes,” is going to defeat the enemy. This is the first essential for victory in this battle.

Cooperation (Phil. 1:27b)

Paul now changes the illustration from politics to athletics. The word translated “striving together” gives us our English word “athletics.” Paul pictures the church as a team, and he reminds them that it is teamwork that wins victories.

Keep in mind that there was division in the church at Philippi. For one thing, two women were not getting along with each other (Phil. 4:2). Apparently, the members of the fellowship were taking sides, as is often the case, and the resulting division was hindering the work of the church. The enemy is always happy to see internal divisions in a local ministry. “Divide and conquer!” is his motto, and too often he has his way. It is only as believers stand together that they can overcome the wicked one.

Throughout this letter, Paul uses an interesting device to emphasize the importance of unity. In the Greek language, the prefix *sun-* means “with, together,” and when used with different words, strengthens the idea of unity. (It is somewhat like our prefix *co-*.) At least sixteen times, Paul uses this prefix in Philippians, and his readers could not have missed the message! In Philippians 1:27, the Greek word is *sunathleo*—“striving together as athletes.”

Jerry was disgusted, and he decided to tell the coach how he felt. “There’s no sense coming out for practice anymore,” he complained. “Mike is the team—you don’t need the rest of us.”

Coach Gardner knew the trouble. “Look, Jerry, just because Mike gets many of the chances to shoot doesn’t mean the rest of you guys aren’t needed. Somebody has to set things up at the basket, and that’s where you come in.”

Sometimes a team has a “glory hound” who has to be in the spotlight and get all the praise. Usually he makes it difficult for the rest of the team. They aren’t working equally together, but are working to make one person look good. It is this attitude that makes for defeat. Unfortunately, we have some “glory hounds” in the church. John had to deal with a man named Diotrephes because the man “loved to have the preeminence” (3 John 9). Even the Apostles James and John asked to have special thrones (Matt. 20:20–28). The important word is *together*: standing firmly together in one spirit, striving together against the enemy, and doing it with one mind and heart.

It would not be difficult to expand this idea of the local church as a team of athletes. Each person has his assigned place and job, and if each one is doing his job, it helps all the others. Not everybody can be captain or quarterback! The team has to follow the rules, and the Word of God is our “rule book.” There is one goal—to honor Christ and do His will. If we all work together, we can reach the goal, win the prize, and glorify the Lord. But the minute any one of us starts disobeying the rules, breaking training (the Christian life does demand discipline), or looking for glory, the teamwork disappears and division and competition take over.

In other words, Paul is reminding us again of the need for *the single mind*. There is joy in our lives, even as we battle the enemy, if we live for Christ and the Gospel and practice “Christian teamwork.” To be sure, there are some people with whom we cannot cooperate (2 Cor. 6:14–18; Eph. 5:11); but there are many with whom we *can*—and should!

We are citizens of heaven and therefore should walk consistently. We are members of the same “team” and should work cooperatively. But there is a third essential for success as we face the enemy, and that is *confidence*.

Confidence (Phil. 1:28–30)

“Don’t be alarmed by your opponents!” The word Paul uses pictures a horse shying away from battle. To be sure, nobody blindly runs into a fight; but then, no true believer should deliberately avoid facing the enemy. In these verses, Paul gives us several encouragements that give us confidence in the battle.

First, *these battles prove that we are saved* (Phil. 1:29). We not only believe on Christ but also suffer for Christ. Paul calls this “the fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil. 3:10). For some reason, many new believers have the idea that trusting Christ means the end of their battles. In reality, it means the beginning of *new* battles. “In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).

But the presence of conflict is *a privilege*; we suffer “for His sake.” In fact, Paul tells us that this conflict is “granted” to us—it is a gift! If we were suffering for ourselves, it would be no privilege; but because we are suffering for and with Christ, it is a high and holy honor. After all, He suffered for us, and a willingness to suffer for Him is the very least we can do to show our love and gratitude.

A third encouragement is this: *others are experiencing the same conflict* (Phil. 1:30). Satan wants us to think we are alone in the battle, that our difficulties are unique, but such is not the case. Paul reminds the Philippians that he is going through the same difficulties they are experiencing hundreds of miles from Rome! A change in geography is usually no solution to spiritual problems, because human nature is the same wherever you go, and the enemy is everywhere. Knowing that my fellow believers are also sharing in the battle is an encouragement for me to keep going and to pray for them as I pray for myself.

Actually, going through spiritual conflict is one way we have *to grow in Christ*. God gives us the strength we need to stand firm against the enemy, and this confidence is proof to him that he will lose and we are on the winning side (Phil. 1:28). The Philippians had seen Paul go through conflict when he was with them (read Acts 16:19ff), and they had witnessed his firmness in the Lord. The word “conflict” gives us our word “agony” (*agonia*), and is the same word that is used for Christ’s struggle in the Garden (Luke 22:44). As we face the enemy and depend on the Lord, He gives us all that we need for the battle. When the enemy sees our God-given confidence, it makes him fear.

So, the single mind enables us to have joy in the midst of battle, because it produces in us consistency, cooperation, and confidence. We experience the joy of “spiritual teamwork” as we strive together for the faith of the Gospel.

Lightner, R. P. (1985). *Philippians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 648-652) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

I. Encouragement for Living the Christian Life (1:1–30).

A. *Paul's praise of the saints at Philippi (1:1–8)*

The Apostle Paul frequently began his epistles with words of greeting, praise, and commendation. Philippians was no exception. The tender tone of the entire letter is apparent at the outset.

1. INTRODUCTION (1:1–2)

1:1. **Paul** was the author's Gentile name and Saul his Hebrew name. As the apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7–8) he used his Gentile name. Instead of referring to his apostleship, as he frequently did in the beginning of a book, here Paul called himself a servant of the Lord. **Timothy** had a special interest in the Philippian saints (Phil. 2:20) and was associated with Paul's imprisonment (2:19, 23). Timothy was not a coauthor of this epistle, since he is spoken of in the third person (2:19–24). Both of these men of God, who had been Roman captives, were **servants** (lit., "slaves") of **Christ Jesus**. By calling the Philippian believers saints, Paul was not saying his readers were sinless. The Greek word he used, *hagioi*, means "those set apart." The saints at Philippi were set apart for God. They were **in Christ Jesus** so far as their relationship to God was concerned, though they lived at **Philippi**.

The apostle made special mention of **the overseers and deacons**, who were included among **all the saints**. The "overseers" or bishops, were also called "elders" (Titus 1:5, 7); and they were responsible for shepherding or pastoring the flock (cf. Acts 20:17, 28). The "deacons" were those church leaders who had special service responsibilities in the assembly (cf. Acts 6).

1:2. In his greeting to the Philippians, Paul used two words descriptive of Christian graces: **grace** and **peace**. The order in which he used them is significant. Before there can be any genuine peace there must be a personal response to God's grace, His unmerited favor manifested climactically at Calvary. Both grace and peace find their source in **God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**.

2. PRAISE FOR THEIR CONSTANT WITNESS (1:3–6)

1:3. It must have brought great joy to the Philippians' hearts as they read how the apostle often thanked God for them. Here was a letter of commendation from one who was in Roman chains some 800 miles away. About 10 years had passed since Paul had first worked among them. But the passing of time had not diminished his love or his interest in them. Every time Paul thought of them he thanked God for them.

1:4–6. None of the believers was excluded from Paul's prayers. Coming from a prisoner, this is especially significant. It was with **joy** that the apostle also besought God on their behalf. Paul's hardships made him better, not bitter. They always do one or the other to a child of God.

The Philippian saints and Paul were partners in the things of Christ. This was true because they shared with him in his need. They gave of themselves to Paul and in turn to the cause of Christ for which he labored. But not only did they share with him in his need as a prisoner. They had also fellowshiped with him **from the first day** they trusted Christ. This brought great joy to the apostle's heart.

Great confidence gripped the apostle as he thought and prayed for the Philippians. The perfect tense of the Greek word translated **being confident** indicates that Paul had come to a

settled conviction earlier and that he still was confident it was true. What was he so confident and sure of? It was that God would most certainly continue on to **completion** the **good work** He had begun in them. That good work was their salvation. It may also have included their fellowship and sharing of their bounties with Paul.

Paul had no doubt that God would continue in the Philippians what He had begun to do in them. God would work in them **until the day of Christ Jesus**. In 2:16 Paul called this “the day of Christ.” Though Paul did not know when that day would occur—when all believers would be caught up to meet the Lord in the air—he did know that God would continue the work He had begun in His own children.

3. PRAISE FOR THEIR CONCERN FOR THE GOSPEL (1:7)

1:7. The first part of this verse is a sort of apology or defense for the way Paul felt about the Philippians, as expressed in verses 3–6.

The Greek allows for the phrase **since I have you in my heart** to read “since you have me in your heart.” Certainly both Paul and the Philippians were in each others’ hearts. However, in view of the specific reference to himself (v. 7) it seems better to accept the NIV rendering. His affection for the saints is also stated in 1:8 and 4:16.

It did not matter whether Paul was under arrest (**in chains**; cf. “chains” in 1:13–14, 17) or free; his friends at Philippi shared with him in what God was doing through him. That work concerned primarily the spread of the gospel. It was because of their partnership with him that he could propagate God’s grace. Paul praised them for their concern that this good news be spread abroad.

4. PRAISE SHOWN BY HIS LOVE FOR THEM (1:8)

1:8. Paul called on God to witness to his feelings toward the Philippians. Paul was aware—as were his readers—that they could not know his heart. But God knew it perfectly. The **affection** Paul had for his readers was no mere human interest or attraction. It originated with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Christ’s love had so overwhelmed Paul that His affection was Paul’s very own. The fact that Paul told this to the Philippians demonstrates the reality and intensity of his praise for them.

B. Paul’s prayer for the saints at Philippi (1:9–11).

1. PRAYER FOR LOVE (1:9–10)

The apostle assured the saints that he prayed regularly for them (v. 3). Now here (v. 9) he reported what it was he prayed for.

1:9. It was Paul’s **prayer** that the Philippians’ love for other believers would **abound**, run over as a cup or a river overflows. But that love should be more than sentimental; it should be knowledgeable and discerning. Having genuine spiritual **knowledge** (*epignosis*) of God and **depth of insight** into His ways enables Christians to love God and others more. (This Gr. word for “insight” [*aisthēsis*] occurs only here in the NT.)

1:10. Paul stated two purposes for his prayer. The first is a near purpose: **to discern what is best**; and the second is a remote one: **to be pure and blameless until the day of Christ**. The idea of testing is clearly in view in the Greek word *dokimazō*, translated “discern.” The testing is

with a view to approving. The word was used in testing metals and coins, to determine whether they met the specified standards.

“Pure” is the translation of a Greek word used only here and in 2 Peter 3:1. It is *eilikrineis*, which comes from the words for “sun” and “to judge,” thus indicating purity that is tested by the light of the sun. Paul wanted his readers to be rightly related to God and in fellowship with Him. Paul also was concerned that their relationships with others be what God would have them to be. The word *aproskoptoi*, translated “blameless,” also appears in 1 Corinthians 10:32 where the same writer urged, “Do not cause anyone to stumble.” Paul’s desire for his friends at Philippi ought to be the concern of all believers—to be morally pure, not causing others to stumble.

2. PRAYER FOR THE FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (1:11)

1:11. Paul also prayed that the believers in the church at Philippi would be **filled with the fruit of righteousness**. A righteous stand before God, resulting from being clothed in Christ’s righteousness, ought to produce fruit for God. Such inner qualities, partially described in Galatians 5:22–23, will be evident to others. The fruit of the Spirit comes **through Jesus Christ**, for it is really His life lived out through believers. Such fruit magnifies God, not self. So a life that exhibits such traits is to **the glory and praise of God**.

C. Paul’s presentation of himself to the saints (1:12–30).

The apostle faced opposition from those outside the church and misrepresentation from some within. But this did not dissuade or distract him from fulfilling God’s call. Through it all, Christ was being preached, which brought him great delight. So his bonds, instead of hindering his outreach, resulted in a greater spreading of the gospel of Christ. Paul’s friends back in Philippi were apparently quite concerned about him, thinking he was discouraged and that God’s plan had gone awry. Not so, the apostle responded.

1. STALWART TESTIMONY (1:12–18)

1:12–14. From his own experiences Paul wanted the believers at Philippi to learn an important truth: there are no accidents with God. Instead of Paul’s ministry being curtailed because of his bondage, it was being advanced.

The advance came partly because **the whole palace guard**, as well as others, were hearing about Christ (vv. 12–13). The “palace guard” (*praitōriō*) likely refers to the praetorian guard, made up of Roman soldiers. Though Paul resided in his own rented facility (Acts 28:30), he was guarded by these soldiers all the time. The custom was for a prisoner to be chained at the wrist to a soldier.

All in Rome who came in contact with Paul heard about Christ. It was well known that he was not under guard for being a lawbreaker. Instead he was **in chains for Christ** (Phil. 1:13). In an effort to silence the truth, the authorities had incarcerated the one who spoke it, but their plan did not work.

Paul’s incarceration had another effect: it encouraged those who had been reluctant about speaking for Christ (v. 14). Large numbers of believers became bold for Christ when they saw how God was spreading the gospel through Paul. The positive response Paul received in the face of opposition caused others to speak **more courageously and fearlessly** for Christ. Paul’s confinement was doing what his circumstances outside of prison could never do.

1:15–18. The people who were emboldened to speak God’s Word were of two kinds. Some preached Christ **out of envy and rivalry**, but others preached Him **out of good will** (v. 15). Those who preached out of good will did so **in love** (v. 16), knowing that Paul was in chains because of his **defense of the gospel**. The word “defense” is the Greek *apologia*, also used in verse 7.

The group that preached Christ out of envy and rivalry (v. 15) had **selfish ambition** (v. 17) as their motive. They purposely wanted to **stir up trouble** for Paul while he was in bondage. They were probably not Judaizers, as some suppose, because Paul said they were preaching Christ, though insincerely. The Judaizers believed that keeping the Old Testament Law was a means of salvation. Paul had sternly rebuked them as preachers of “a different gospel” (Gal. 1:6). However, since he did not accuse these in Philippi of presenting “another gospel,” it seems that they were believers who for some unknown reason did not love the apostle or appreciate his work. Though they were doctrinally sound, they promoted themselves.

What rejoiced Paul’s heart was that Christ was being preached, even though it was from wrong motives by some (Phil. 1:18). Since the content of the preaching was the same for both groups, the apostle could rejoice. He did not **rejoice** because there was a faction among members of Christ’s body, for this brought him grief. Instead, it was the preaching of Christ that brought him joy.

2. SETTLED CONVICTIONS (1:19–26)

1:19. As a man of convictions, Paul shared his assurance that his fetters would eventually result in his **deliverance**. The Greek word translated “deliverance” here was used in different ways in the New Testament. It often meant spiritual deliverance—salvation, being born again. Here (v. 19) Paul used the word to refer to either the final stage of his salvation (cf. Rom. 5:9) or future vindication in a Roman court. It seems unlikely that he had his release in mind since in the next two sentences he wrote of the real possibility of his near death.

The bases on which the apostle’s assurance rested were the **prayers** of the saints and the **help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ** (Phil. 1:19). He knew he could count on the Philippians’ prayers, and also on the Holy Spirit’s ministry (cf. Rom. 8:26–27). “Help” (*epichorēgias*) carries the meaning of “support,” much as a ligament provides support in a physical body. (This Gr. word is used in the NT only here and in Eph. 4:16.)

1:20. Paul was not sure whether he would experience release or martyrdom for his faith. He was certain of one thing though, that he wanted Christ to be **exalted** in his **body** either way (cf. “in the body,” vv. 22, 24). This was Paul’s expectation and hope. The apostle also knew full well that it would take courage to face death with the proper attitude. **Eagerly expect** is the translation of a unique word. It describes straining one’s neck to catch a glimpse of something that is ahead. (*Apokaradokia*, a noun, is used only here and in Rom. 8:19.) Paul’s concern was not what would happen to him but what testimony would be left for his Lord. Release would allow him to continue preaching Christ. But martyrdom would also advance the cause of Christ.

1:21. Paul’s main purpose in living was to glorify Christ. Christ was the essence of his life. Yet Paul knew that if he were martyred, Christ would be glorified through the promotion of the gospel which would result from his testimony in death. And Paul himself would benefit, for death would result in his being with Christ (v. 23). The words **to die** suggest the act of dying, not the state of death.

1:22–24. The apostle’s seeming frustration of mind is apparent in these verses. He knew if he could **go on living** there would certainly be fruit from his labor (v. 22). God would bless his

work and continue to use him as He had in the past. Yet if Paul had a choice between going on living or dying for Christ, he was at a loss as to how to decide. He simply did not know which to choose. Of course the choice was really not up to him anyway.

Paul was distressed. He was hard-pressed to know which would bring the most glory to God and therefore be to everyone's advantage in the long run. His personal desire was **to depart and be with Christ** (v. 23). This he knew would be **better by far** for him since it would mean his release from the persecutions and other hardships that he suffered. But he also knew that the Philippians needed him. For them it was **more necessary** that he **remain in the body**, or stay alive (v. 24). Paul's selfless attitude is revealed here by his placing his friends' needs above his own desires.

1:25–26. New confidence of his release appears to have come to Paul. (The word **convinced** is the same word rendered “being confident” in v. 6.) By his release and return to them they would **progress ... in the faith** and would experience great **joy** (v. 25).

The rejoicing of the Philippians would **overflow** (v. 26; the same word is rendered “abound” in v. 9), and that exulting would be **in Christ Jesus**, the source of true joy for all believers. (“Joy” in v. 26 is the word “exulting” [*kauchēma*] which differs from the more common word for “joy” used more often in Phil., including v. 25.) They would exult because the one who had taught them about Christ would be with them again.

3. SOLEMN EXHORTATIONS (1:27–30)

1:27. The apostle had the believers in Philippi on his heart. Regardless of what would happen to him—release from bonds or martyrdom—he wanted them to honor and glorify Christ. The words **conduct yourselves** translate a political word which would mean much to the Philippian believers. Literally it means “live as citizens.” Because Philippi was a Roman colony, the Christian inhabitants of the city would appreciate Paul's use of that verb. To live in a way that is **worthy of the gospel of Christ** (cf. Eph. 4:1) is indeed the responsibility of every child of God. This Paul exhorted the Philippians to do.

The saints embraced a common cause, for they each shared in the same body of Christ. Therefore Paul was burdened that they **stand firm** (cf. Phil. 4:1) **in one spirit** and contend **as one man** (lit., “in one soul”) **for the faith of the gospel**, the body of truth (cf. “faith,” Jude 3). Their **contending** (*synalhountes*) for the faith suggests a joint effort, like that of an athletic team.

1:28. Paul wanted his readers to live courageously for Christ in the midst of opposition and persecution. True, they would be opposed but this should not frighten them **in any way**. Instead they were to be reminded at such times that their own victorious Christian response would be a sign that their opposers would eventually be destroyed. At the same time it would be **a sign** that the saints of God would be delivered **by God** Himself. This assurance would doubtless be the Holy Spirit working in their hearts.

1:29–30. So that being opposed would not come as a surprise, he gave them a reminder. Both believing on **Christ** and suffering **for Him** had been **granted to** them (v. 29). Suffering for Christ was not to be considered accidental or a divine punishment. Paul referred to a kind of suffering that was really a sign of God's favor. The Greek word *echaristhē*, translated “granted,” is derived from a word which means “grace” or “favor.” Believing on Christ and suffering for Him are both associated with God's grace.

Paul and his readers shared a similar **struggle** (v. 30). So Paul encouraged them as they had him. They wanted to know how he fared in Rome. He told them, so they could also be encouraged as they faced hardships.

Dockery, D. S. (1998). The Pauline Letters In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 583-584). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

GREETINGS (1:1–2)

The letter addressed the church in Philippi. Paul and Timothy, who were servants of Christ Jesus, wrote to the saints. “Saints” refers to all believers set apart for God’s service. The mention of overseers and deacons indicates a developing maturity in the organization of young church.

PAUL’S JOY (1:3–11)

Paul’s concern and love for the church was evidenced by his thanksgiving and prayer for them. His prayer is full of joy because of their fellowship in the gospel, the confidence of God’s continued work in their lives, and because they also shared in God’s grace along with Paul. Paul desired for them to abound in richer and deeper spiritual understanding so that they will be blameless until the day of Christ. The day of Christ will be a time of judgment of the believers’ works at the Lord’s appearing when their faithfulness will be rewarded.

DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES (1:12–26)

Paul demonstrated a confident joy in the midst of his situation. If Paul was writing from Rome, his tribulations included mob violence, imprisonment, shipwreck, personal stress, and long detention under the palace guards (2 Cor. 11:23–33). Paul rejoiced that in spite of his circumstances the gospel was being preached, even by those opposing him.

Paul informed them of his past and present situation and consciously weighed the alternatives for his future. The joy of Paul’s life was grounded in his Christ-centered life. He stated, “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Dying was gain because it meant to be with Christ, the better by far. Yet it was the Lord’s will for Paul to remain in this life because it was more helpful for the Philippians’ progress and joy in the faith.

CHRISTIAN UNITY (1:27–1:30)

In this very significant section of the letter, Paul urged the church members to dismiss their pride and to live and serve together in unity. Anything less falls short of the gospel’s standards. True unity will be realized by authentic meekness and selflessness, ultimately exemplified in the earthly life of Jesus. The attitude the church should exhibit was the one Jesus maintained.

Fields, W. C. (1972). Philippians. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher’s Bible Commentary (pp. 749-750). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Paul’s Introduction (Phil. 1:1–11)

Timothy is associated with Paul in the message of the letter (1:1). He was with Paul and Silas on their first visit to Philippi. Although Timothy is mentioned again (2:19) Paul uses the first person singular throughout the letter. His writing style is informal. Both men are characterized as “slaves” of Jesus Christ.

The church at Philippi has three identifiable groups. This indicates a development in the church structure. First, are the “saints” (“God’s people,” TEV). This is a title brought over from the Old Testament and from Judaism. Every Christian is a saint. The main idea in the title is not moral purity and perfection, but a consecrated, covenant people. The believer accepts as a duty the struggle toward holiness.

Second, he addresses the “bishops.” These are the leaders, the overseers in the church.

Third, he singles out the deacons. *Today’s English Version* translates this title as “helpers.” They are mentioned in Acts (6:2) and 1 Timothy (3:8, 12 f.). The word signifies those who serve.

Paul’s affection surfaces immediately (1:3). He acknowledges their partnership (v. 5) and expresses thanks in advance for their continual faithfulness. Their “fellowship” (*koinonia*) in the gospel is much more than civic club comradery. It was a deep personal commitment to each other as fellow Christians.

Paul prays that they might develop mature character as a result of their discipleship (vv. 9–11). Love for God inevitably means a more understanding love for one another. He urges them to link emotion and mentality. They are to be discerning. He wants them to have the skill to be able to search among that which is good and choose the best.

News (Phil. 1:12–26)

Knowing their concern for him, he tells them news of himself. His imprisonment has resulted in spreading of the gospel through the palace guard assigned to him. Each change of the guard is a new opportunity. A further gain for the cause was the new confidence and boldness his experience inspired among the believers.

This thought leads Paul to mention that there is a mixture of motives in the witness of the Christians. Some believers agreed with his views and were sympathetic. Others were antagonistic and jealous. The latter group seems to be the Judaizers who wanted all Gentile Christians to become Jewish proselytes and be subject to the Jewish law. In Galatians Paul opposes them fiercely. Here he is much more broad-minded toward them. Even if their understanding of the gospel is imperfect, he rejoices that at least Christ is preached by them (vv. 15–18).

Paul the prisoner shares with the Philippians his confidence that all his present circumstances will work eventually for his “salvation,” his deliverance. “I shall be set free” (TEV). This thought leads him, however, to make quite clear that neither imprisonment nor death can defeat him. Life is Christ! Death is gain (v. 21). This key verse indicates Paul’s sense of triumph in the midst of what some, viewing his imprisonment, would call defeat.

Paul’s quandary about living or dying is the rationale which has been a guideline for persecuted Christians for centuries. Death means a release from life’s inconveniences. It means freedom at last to be in the presence of the Lord. He admits to a longing for this exalted state. At the same time, he has a sense of unfinished work, a feeling of obligation to his friends. Christ has given meaning and coherence to both life and death. His outlook is bright (vv. 22–26).

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Philippians 1. Grand Rapids, MI:
Zondervan.**

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