

## Resources Referred to in This Study (by author's last name)

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"Commentaries on the Epistles to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians," in volume 23 of *Calvin's Commentaries* by John **Calvin** (1548)

*Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* by D. A. **Carson** (1996)

*Paul's Letter to the Philippians* by Gordon **Fee** in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (1995)

"Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon" by William **Hendriksen** in *New Testament Commentary* (Philippians 1962)

"An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians," in volume 6 of *Matthew Henry's Commentary* by Matthew **Henry**

*Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel* by R. Kent **Hughes** (2007)

"Philippians" by Homer **Kent** in Vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (1978)

"Philippians" by Robert **Lightner** in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (1983)

"Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, I & II Thessalonians, I Timothy" in volume 9 of *Maclaren's Expositions of Holy Scripture* by Alexander **Maclaren** (1959)

*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* by Richard **Melick** in *The New American Commentary* (1991)

*The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* by Peter **O'Brien** in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (1991)

*Philippians* by Moises **Silva** in *The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary* (1988)

*Philippians: Triumph in Christ* by John **Walvoord** in *Everyman's Bible Commentary* (1971)

"Philippians," in volume 2 of *The Bible Exposition Commentary* by Warren **Wiersbe** (2001)

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptural citations are from the NASB

# Introduction to Philippians

## (with corresponding discussion questions)

The book of Philippians is found among the Epistles of the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, it is one of the Pauline Epistles.<sup>2</sup> Yet more specifically, it is one of the "Prison Epistles" (along with Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon).<sup>3</sup> The Prison Epistles were written while Paul was under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:14-31; cf. Philippians 1:7, 13-14, and 17) for two years (Acts 28:30) in the early 60s A.D. awaiting trial before the Roman Supreme Court. While under house arrest, Paul was chained to a different Roman guard every 6 hours (Acts 28:16; cf. Philippians 1:13), lived in his own rented residence (Acts 28:30), received visitors (Acts 28:17-30), and freely preached the gospel (Acts 28:31). Paul's second Roman imprisonment (of the more conventional variety) in the "Mamertime dungeon" in the mid-60s A.D. resulted in his martyrdom.

### The Author of the Book

As already indicated, the author of Philippians was the apostle Paul (1:1). Paul founded the church at Philippi (the first church on European soil) in the midst of his second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22) in the early 50s A.D. After having received the "Macedonian call" (Acts 16:9-10), the second missionary team<sup>4</sup> travelled from Troas (in Asia) across the Aegean Sea (with a stopover on the island of Samothrace) to Neapolis (in Europe). From Neapolis, they travelled to Philippi<sup>5</sup>, where they stayed for "some days" (Acts 16:12). While in Philippi, they: 1) led a Thyatiran woman named Lydia (and her household) to the

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<sup>1</sup>The New Testament can be subdivided as follows: Gospels (Matthew-John), History (Acts), Epistles (Romans-Jude), and Prophecy (Revelation).

<sup>2</sup>The Epistles can be subdivided as follows: Pauline Epistles (Romans-Philemon) and General Epistles (Hebrews-Jude).

<sup>3</sup>Hiebert (p. 23) further subdivides the Pauline Epistles as follows: Soteriological Group (Romans-Galatians), Christological Group (Ephesians-Colossians and Philemon), Eschatological Group (1 & 2 Thessalonians), and Ecclesiological Group (1 Timothy-Titus).

<sup>4</sup>Paul was accompanied on his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14) by Barnabas (Acts 13:2) and John Mark (Acts 13:5). John Mark, however, quit the journey shortly into it (Acts 13:13). Because Barnabas insisted on taking John Mark (his cousin) on a proposed second journey, Paul and Barnabas severed ties, and Paul took Silas instead (Acts 15:36-40). Timothy joined the team in Lystra (Acts 16:1-3). Luke apparently joined the team in Troas (notice the change from the 3<sup>rd</sup> person in Acts 16:8 to the 1<sup>st</sup> person in Acts 16:10).

<sup>5</sup>Hughes (p. 17) describes the arrival in Philippi as "one of the great turning points in history," further stating: "Rome did not know it, but the flag of Christianity was unfurled in the Empire that day."

Lord at the banks of the Gangites River (Acts 16:13-15); 2) cast a demon out of a fortune-telling slave girl (Acts 16:16-18), provoking her masters to have Paul & Silas thrown into prison (Acts 16:19-24); and 3) led the Philippian jailer (and his household) to the Lord (Acts 16:25-34). After being released from jail (Acts 16:35-40), they departed for Thessalonica (Acts 17:1).<sup>6</sup> During his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23-21:16), Paul likely visited Philippi on two separate occasions in the mid-50s A.D. (Acts 20:1-6). It is also probable that Paul visited the church sometime between his two Roman imprisonments (based on 1 Timothy 1:3) during an assumed fourth missionary journey.

## **The Recipients of the Book**

The book of Philippians is so called because 1:1 identifies the book's intended audience as the "saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi."

The city of Philippi was a leading (not the capital, which was Thessalonica) city in the Roman province of Macedonia (Acts 16:12). It was located approximately 10 miles inland from the Aegean Sea in modern-day Greece. It can be safely surmised that the populace was predominantly Gentile, as there was no synagogue for Paul to go to when he first arrived in town (his typical practice—Acts 17:2). The city was named after Alexander the Great's father, Philip II of Macedon, in 356 B.C. The Romans captured the city in 168 B.C. In 42 B.C., the forces of Anthony (of Anthony & Cleopatra fame) & Octavian defeated the forces of Brutus & Cassius and made Philippi a Roman colony, giving the citizens of Philippi all the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship (Acts 16:21). The city was located along a major Roman road, the "Via Egnatia" (Egnatian Way), part of the main land route between Europe and Asia. Today, the city of Philippi lies in ruins.

As mentioned previously, the church at Philippi was started in the early 50s A.D. The initial membership consisted of those from the households of both Lydia and the Philippian jailer. The church apparently met in Lydia's home (Acts 16:40). As mentioned previously (see footnote 6), Luke apparently stayed behind in Philippi, while the other members of the second missionary team went on to Thessalonica. Thus, Luke may have been the church's first pastor. From the contents of Paul's epistle to the Philippians, it is clear that Paul had a special relationship with this church. Most notable was the regular financial support the church gave Paul (4:15-18; cf. 2 Corinthians 11:9). Accordingly, *The Zondervan NASB Study Bible* has called the book of Philippians a missionary letter to a supporting church.

## **The Date of Writing**

Being one of the Prison Epistles, the book of Philippians was written in the early 60s A.D. It was likely written at the end of Paul's first Roman imprisonment (62 A.D.?), Paul sensing

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<sup>6</sup>Apparently, Luke stayed behind at Philippi, as his narration in Acts shifts back to the third person beginning in chapter 17. Apparently, Luke rejoined Paul when Paul returned to Philippi during his third missionary journey (notice the shift back to the first person beginning in Acts 20:5).

the end of it to be in sight (2:24). Paul sent the book by way of Epaphroditus (2:25), whom some suggest succeeded Luke as pastor of the church.

## **The Occasion for Writing**

As they had done so often before (4:16), the Philippians sent money to Paul in Rome by way of Epaphroditus (4:18). While Epaphroditus was in Rome, he became deathly ill (2:26-27 and 30). As soon as Epaphroditus recovered, Paul sent him back to Philippi to alleviate the anxiety of all involved: the Philippians (2:28), Epaphroditus (2:26), and Paul (2:28). Epaphroditus' return trip afforded Paul an opportunity to communicate with the Philippians by letter.

## **The Purpose for Writing**

Why did Paul write what he wrote? The answer is three-fold. First, Paul wrote the book of Philippians to let the Philippians know about his present circumstances (1:12-26) and present (2:25-30) and future (2:19-24) plans. Second, Paul wrote the book of Philippians to exhort the Philippians regarding threats from within (1:27, 2:1-18, and 4:1-9) and without (1:28-30 and chapter 3), threats that had been communicated to Paul (no doubt by Epaphroditus and others). Third, Paul wrote the book of Philippians to thank the Philippians for the love offering they sent him (4:10-20). Accordingly, *The New Open Bible* has called the book of Philippians a "thank you note" from Paul to the church at Philippi.

## **The Theme of the Book**

Some suggested themes for Philippians include joy, living the Christian life (Lightner)/basics for believers (Carson), and fellowship (Hendriksen). Hendriksen probably comes closest. Paul and the Philippians are "partners in the gospel" (1:5, 7, and 4:14-15; cf. 2:17-18); Paul and Timothy are kindred spirits (2:20); Paul and Epaphroditus are "fellow workers" and "fellow soldiers" (2:25); Paul throughout the letter exhorts the Philippians to be unified (1:27, 2:1-2, and 4:2); Paul is fond of using the word, "all" (1:1, 4, 7-8, 25, 2:17, 26, and 4:22); see also 4:3.

## **Outstanding Features of Philippians**

1. Its personal tone. Philippians is one of the "warmest" of Paul's epistles. "The attentive reader of Philippians cannot fail to be impressed with its intensely personal nature" (Hiebert, p. 294). See, for example, 1:7-8, 2:12, and 4:1.
2. The predominance of "joy" in its various forms. "From beginning to end the letter is bathed in the sunshine of joy" (Hendriksen, p. 20). "Joy" and its derivatives are found 16 times in the book of Philippians (see especially 4:4). What makes this so astonishing is the fact that Paul writes while imprisoned (cf. Acts 16:25)!<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>"It is significant too that a Roman prisoner would beseech people who were free to be joyful in

3. The “Christ hymn” of 2:5-11. One of the most fascinating passages in all of the Bible is Paul’s account of the humiliation (by means of His incarnation and crucifixion) and exaltation of Christ found in 2:5-11, which many interpreters believe is an early Christian hymn.<sup>8</sup>
4. The predominance of “Christ”. “Christ plays the absolutely central role in Paul’s life and thought, and nowhere is that more evident than in Philippians” (Fee, p. 49). “Here is the absolutely predominant motif in this letter. Everything is in, of, by, and for Christ Jesus” (Fee, p. 64). For Paul, “to live is Christ” (1:21). The epistle begins (1:1) and ends (4:23) by mentioning Christ. The Prison Epistles are marked by their Christological emphasis (see footnote 3). In the 104 verses of Philippians, Christ is mentioned 51 times. Since Philippi was a Roman colony, and the Roman emperor was considered deity, some have suggested that by making Christ such a dominant part of the epistle, Paul is not-so-subtly making the point that Christ is supreme, not the emperor.
5. The predominance of the gospel. The gospel is mentioned more in Philippians (per verse) than in any other of Paul’s epistles. Notice especially 1:5, 12, 27, 2:22, and 4:3. Perhaps as good a subtitle for the book of Philippians as any other is “partners in the gospel.”

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their Savior. It seems that it should be the other way around. Paul learned what every child of God needs to learn—there can be rejoicing in the Lord even when outward circumstances are contrary to a spirit of rejoicing” (Lightner, p. 659).

<sup>8</sup>Commenting on this passage, Hiebert (p. 295) aptly notes: “This profound passage was written with an ethical rather than a doctrinal purpose. It was intended to enforce the practical Christian virtue of humility in the interest of ecclesiastical unity. It is a clear illustration of Paul’s practice of reinforcing the common, everyday duties of the Christian life by undergirding them with the most profound doctrinal truths.” BELIEF DETERMINES BEHAVIOR.

## **Other<sup>9</sup> Sources for Further Study**

*An Introduction to the New Testament* by D. A. Carson, Douglas Moo, and Leon Morris

*An Introduction to the New Testament* (Volume 2: The Pauline Epistles) by D. Edmond Hiebert

*New Testament Survey* by Robert Gromacki

*The New Open Bible, Study Edition*

*The Zondervan NASB Study Bible*

## **Discussion Questions for Introduction to Philippians**

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<sup>9</sup>Besides the resources listed earlier.

1. The book of Philippians has been considered a favorite of many Christians. Why do you think this is so/what is it about the book of Philippians that makes it so?

*Possible answers: its touching, tender tone; its joyful tone; its practicality*

Do you have a favorite book of the Bible? If so, what is it and why? Should you have a favorite book of the Bible? Why or why not?

2. The Philippian church was the first European church of all time. Why is this significant?

*Answer: Because it was the planting of the gospel in Europe that ultimately led to its spread to America*

3. A recurring emphasis in Philippians is joy. What is it about the circumstances of the human writer of the letter (Paul) and of the recipients (the Philippian believers) at the time of writing that makes this so striking?

*Answer: They were both experiencing persecution*

What does this teach us about the relationship between joy and circumstances?

*Answer: Joy is not based on circumstances (cf. Acts 16:25)*

4. What are the three dominant words in Philippians?

*Answer: gospel, joy, and Christ*

How do these three tie together?

*Answer: What is to give us joy is the gospel, and the gospel is the gospel of/about Christ*

# Philippians Verse-by-Verse

(with corresponding discussion questions)

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

Paul begins the book of Philippians in typical fashion with a salutation (vs. 1-2). The Jewish letter typically<sup>10</sup> began with a salutation consisting of 3 elements: 1) naming of the author of the letter; 2) naming of the recipient(s) of the letter; and 3) a greeting (cf. Ezra 7:12, Daniel 4:1, Acts 15:23, and 23:26). Timothy is mentioned alongside of Paul (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:1, and Philemon 1), potentially leaving the impression that he co-authored the epistle with Paul. However, it is clear that the book was written by Paul alone (the book is written in the first person *singular*, not the first person *plural*; Timothy is *written about*, not *writing*, in 2:19-23). Why is Timothy's name listed alongside Paul's? Perhaps because 1) Timothy was Paul's "amanuensis," a secretary of sorts who wrote down the contents of the book as Paul conveyed them to him (cf. Romans 16:22)<sup>11</sup>; perhaps because 2) Timothy was with Paul in Rome at the time of writing (2:19 and 23; cf. Colossians 1:1 and Philemon 1, two other "Prison Epistles"; see also Galatians 1:2); or perhaps because 3) Timothy was part of the second missionary team that helped found the church at Philippi a decade earlier (see footnote 4) and was, thus, "near and dear" to the Philippian church, as was Paul. We can only speculate. Paul calls Timothy and himself "bond-servants," a designation he often gives himself (Romans 1:1, Galatians 1:10, and Titus 1:1) and others (Epaphras—Colossians 1:7; Tychicus—Colossians 4:7; Christ—Philippians 2:7). Other writers also gave themselves this designation (James—James 1:1; Peter—2 Peter 1:1; Jude—Jude 1). All believers are bond-servants of Christ (Romans 6:22, 1 Corinthians 7:22, Ephesians 6:6, Colossians 3:24<sup>12</sup>, and 1 Peter 2:16). Salvation is a change of slave masters (Romans 6:16-22). Paul calls the Philippian believers "saints" (cf. Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1, and Colossians 1:2). The Greek word means holy, consecrated, set apart, sanctified. Saints are those who have been set apart or

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<sup>10</sup>Hebrews and 1 John are exceptions.

<sup>11</sup>Even when Paul did use an amanuensis, he himself would pen the concluding words with his own hand (1 Corinthians 16:21, Galatians 6:11, Colossians 4:18, and 2 Thessalonians 3:17).

<sup>12</sup>"Serve" in Colossians 3:24 is the Greek verb, *douleuo*, the verbal form of *doulos*, the Greek noun for slave

consecrated for a special purpose. They are pure in a *positional* sense (why Paul could call the carnal Corinthian believers "saints"). They ought to be pure in a *practical* sense, as well (1:10 and 2:15). Though the Philippian saints are "in Philippi" *physically*, they are "in Christ Jesus" *positionally*. The phrase "in Christ" appears repeatedly throughout Paul's writings. Here, it is descriptive of the doctrine known as "union with Christ." Believers are united with Christ and, thus, seated with Him in Heaven (Ephesians 1:3, 20, and 2:6). Thus, their citizenship is in heaven (3:20). Interestingly, Paul singles out two groups in the church, the overseers and deacons.<sup>13</sup> "Overseer" (NASB) or "bishop" (KJV) is the Greek noun, *episkopos* (from which we get our English word, "episcopalian"). An *episkopos* is a pastor.<sup>14</sup> Notice how Paul places the pastors and deacons on the same level as the laity ("including").<sup>15</sup>

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

Paul concludes his salutation with an unusual greeting. The typical greeting was *chairen* ("greetings"—Acts 15:23, 23:26, and James 1:1). Paul, however, was fond of using *charis* ("grace") instead<sup>16</sup>, coupled with "peace" (Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, Titus 1:4, and Philemon 3) or "mercy" and peace (1 Timothy 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:2). Commenting on the connection between grace and peace, Hendriksen in his commentary on Ephesians states: "Grace is the fountain. Peace belongs to the stream of spiritual blessings which issues from this fountain" (p. 71). Fee (p. 70) adds: "Grace . . . is what is given to God's people; peace is what results from such a gift." The believer is positionally at "peace *with* God" (Romans 5:1). He experiences the "peace *of* God" (Philippians 4:7).

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<sup>13</sup>Following Walvoord (p. 25), could it be that Paul specifically mentions the leadership of the church because their disunity (1:27, 2:2, and 4:2) was due (at least in part) to their failure to submit to such leadership?

<sup>14</sup>There are 3 basic terms used in the New Testament to describe the office of pastor: 1) *episkopos* (overseer or bishop); 2) *presbuteros*, from which we get our English word, "presbyterian" (elder); and 3) *poimen* (shepherd or pastor). That these three are interchangeable/descriptive of the same office is seen by an examination of Acts 20:17, 28, and 1 Peter 5:1-2.

<sup>15</sup>This is, of course, in an essential (essence=who you are) sense, not a functional (function=what you do) sense (at least as far as the office of pastor is concerned). The pastor is an overseer, which by definition implies functional headship.

<sup>16</sup>Fee (p. 70) comments: "Here is a marvelous example of Paul's 'turning into gospel' everything he sets his hand to."

In keeping with the Christological focus of the book, notice that each aspect of the salutation (writer, recipients, and greeting) mentions Christ.

***I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, (1:3)***

Thanking God for his readers is typical of Paul (Romans 1:8, 1 Corinthians 1:4, Ephesians 1:16, Colossians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Timothy 1:3, and Philemon 4). Paul rightfully thanks God for them, since He is the One working in them (2:13) to produce the qualities for which Paul is thankful. Whenever God brought the Philippians to Paul's mind, Paul thanked God for them. Ask yourself: Am I the kind of person that causes others to thank God for me whenever I come to their mind?

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

Not only did the Philippians ignite gratitude in Paul, but also joy (Are you the kind of person that ignites joy in others?). This is the first mention of this oft-repeated concept (16 times) in the epistle. Joy and happiness are not synonymous. Happiness is based on *circumstance* (happenings), joy in *conviction* ("I will rejoice"—1:18; cf. 3:1 and 4:4, where joy is commanded). Paul prayed for many people (Romans 1:9-10, Ephesians 1:16, Colossians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, 2 Timothy 1:3, and Philemon 4). Needless to say, he either had a terrific memory or a prayer list.

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

In what may be considered the key verse of the book, Paul now gives the specific reason why the Philippians brought him so much joy, namely, their participation with Paul in the gospel. The word translated "participation" is the Greek noun, *koinonia* ("fellowship"). Paul and the Philippians were "partners in the gospel," primarily by virtue of the Philippians' financial support of Paul (4:10 and 14-18<sup>17</sup>; cf. 3 John 8), but also by mutual prayer (1:4, 9-11, and 19; cf. Romans 15:30) and suffering (1:29-30). This partnership began when Paul first came to Philippi ("the first day"), as evidenced by 1) the actions of Lydia (Acts 16:15), 2) the actions of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:33-34), and 3) the church's financial support of Paul right from the get-go (4:15-16). This partnership was as strong as ever a

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<sup>17</sup>"Share" in 4:14 is the Greek verb, *sugkoinoneo*, "shared" in 4:15 the Greek verb, *koinoneo*.

decade later (“until now”). The glue that bonded/the tie that bound Paul and the Philippians together and that formed the basis of their *koinonia* was a common commitment to the gospel (cf. 1:7, 27, 2:22, and 4:3; cf. 1 Corinthians 9:23).

***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.***  
**(1:6)**

Paul could pray for the Philippians with confidence, knowing that God was in the process of completing the good work He began in them, namely, their salvation (cf. 2:12-13 and Ephesians 2:10). Salvation is a process. It *commences* at a point in time (“began”), *continues* for a time (“will perfect until”), and *culminates* at a point in time (“the day of Christ Jesus”). God finishes what He starts (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). A believer cannot lose his salvation, for God is the One who justifies (*have been* saved from the *penalty* of sin), sanctifies (*are being* saved from the *power* of sin), and glorifies (*will be* saved from the *presence* of sin) the believer (John 10:28-29, Romans 8:30<sup>18</sup>, and 1 Peter 1:3-5). The believer’s salvation culminates on “the day of Christ Jesus” (cf. 1:10, 2:16, 1 Corinthians 1:8, 5:5, and 2 Corinthians 1:14), the day in which Christ will come for His church (1 Thessalonians 5:23), the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

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<sup>18</sup>One of the absolutely fascinating facts about this verse is that the Greek verb translated “glorified” is in the past tense, even though our glorification is a future reality, the reason being that our future glorification is so certain of becoming a reality that it can be spoken of as having already occurred.

## Discussion Questions for Philippians 1:1-6

1. (based on 1:1's "servants"—bond-servants or slaves) Everyone is enslaved to someone or something. Do you agree or disagree with this statement, and why?

*Answer: What either of two things does Romans 6:16-22 say everyone is enslaved to?*

2. (based on 1:1's "saints") Saints are those set apart for a special purpose. What is the purpose?

*Possible answers: the glory of God, the gospel*

3. (based on 1:4's mention of "joy," the first of 16 times this word is mentioned in Philippians) What is the difference between joy and happiness?

*Answer: happiness is based on happenings/circumstances/feelings, while joy is based in conviction/faith—Paul says "I will" in 2:18 and commands joy in 3:1 and 4:4*

Why can a believer rejoice even when happenings are not happy/why can a believer praise in the midst of pain?

*Answer: because of the purpose for the pain/what the pain produces—purification/Job 23:10; empowering/2 Corinthians 12:7-10; empathy/2 Corinthians 1:3-4; the perseverance and perfecting that leads to the prize/James 1:3-4 and 12*

4. (based on 1:5) What tied Paul and the Philippians together?

*Answer: the gospel*

What other things might tie a church together, but ultimately should not?

*Possible answers: personalities, programs, potlucks, preferences*

Follow up question: can some of these be used as a means to foster genuine fellowship in the gospel?

*Answer: yes, provided they are seen as means and not the main thing*

5. (based on 1:6) Is salvation a point or a process?

*Answer: both—it includes the points of justification/salvation from sin's penalty and glorification/salvation from sin's presence, with the process of sanctification/salvation from sin's power in between*

6. (based on 1:6) Why could Paul be so confident that God would finish the good work of salvation He began in the Phillipians?

*Answer: because of His promise of eternal security and because of His power to preserve, as well as because of the evidence of the Philippians' perseverance that Paul saw and speaks of in these verses*

***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. (1:7)***

Paul, as he does elsewhere in the epistle (cf. 2:12 and 4:1), expresses his fondness for the Philippians in verses 7 and 8. Though the words "feel" and "heart" certainly have *emotive* connotations, they also have *cognitive* connotations. In fact, the Greek verb translated "feel" in the NASB (and in the NIV) is more literally translated "think" (so KJV). Likewise, to a Jew such as Paul, "heart" primarily (but not exclusively) meant the mind. Verse 9 also portrays love in a cognitive light. The reason why ("since") the Philippians were so endearing to Paul is because they were "partakers of grace" with him (cf. 1:5). "Partakers" is the Greek noun, *sugkoinonos* (cf. the use of *koinonia*, translated "partnership," in 1:5). To what specifically is "grace" a reference? Most likely, it is referring either to 1) the grace of suffering (Acts 5:41), alluded to both in this verse ("imprisonment") and in 1:29 (the Greek verb translated "it has been granted" in 1:29 is *charizomai*, the verb form of the noun, *charis*, meaning "grace") or 2) the grace of service (Romans 1:5, 15:15-16, Galatians 2:9, and Ephesians 3:7-8). The Greek noun translated "defense" is *apologia*, from which we get our English word, "apologetics," the defense of the faith. Since both "defense" (cf. Acts 25:16 and 2 Timothy 4:16) and "confirmation" are legal terms, Paul is likely alluding to his imminent trial before the Roman Supreme Court. Paul defended the gospel (cf. 1:16) while under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:23).

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

To reiterate his fondness for the Philippians, Paul summons God as His witness, as he does elsewhere (Romans 1:9, 2 Corinthians 1:23, 1 Thessalonians 2:5, and 10). Paul longs for the Philippians (cf. Epaphroditus in 2:26 and Paul in 4:1), as he does for others elsewhere (Romans 1:11, 15:23, 1 Thessalonians 2:17, 3:6, and 2 Timothy 1:4). The Greek word translated "affection" (KJV: "bowels"; cf. 2:1) is an interesting one. It is literally translated "intestines" in Acts 1:18. Here, the meaning is figurative, analogous to our "heart." The affection Paul had for the Philippians he calls the affection "of Christ Jesus." Commenting on this phrase, Lightner (p. 650) states: "Christ's love had so overwhelmed Paul that His affection was Paul's very own." F. B. Meyer (quoted in Walvoord, p. 29) elaborates: "The Apostle had got so near the very heart of his Lord that he could hear its throb, detect its beat; nay, it seemed as though the tender mercies of Jesus to these Philippians were throbbing in his own heart." J. A. Bengel (quoted in O'Brien, p. 72) adds: "It is not Paul

who lives within Paul, but Jesus Christ [Galatians 2:20], which is why Paul is not moved by the bowels of Paul but by the bowels of Jesus Christ.”

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

Earlier (verse 4), Paul stated that he prayed for the Philippians. In verses 9-11, he specifies what he prays.<sup>19</sup> As we consider the content of Paul’s prayer for the Philippians, a practical question to ask ourselves is: Do we pray like this? Another interesting point to ponder is the fact that, though Paul was completely confident that God would sanctify the Philippians (verse 6), yet he still prayed for the same (verse 10b). Paul realized that prayer is one of the God-ordained means of perseverance.<sup>20</sup> Now to the contents of the prayer itself. Paul prays that the Philippians’ love may abound (cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:12 and 4:9-10). Love for whom? Paul does not specify. Most likely, Paul has in mind love for those within the church (cf. 2:1-2). As pointed out earlier (see comments on verse 7), Paul’s view of love is as much, if not more, cognitive than emotive. The love Paul is talking about operates in the sphere of “real knowledge” and “discernment.” To what are these two concepts referring? Based on two of his prayers elsewhere (for the Ephesians in Ephesians 1:17-18a and for the Colossians in Colossians 1:9), Paul is likely alluding to the doctrine of illumination, the ministry of the Holy Spirit whereby He illuminates/enlightens the mind of a man to help him understand the truthfulness and *significance* of Scripture. The more we do our work of discerning the *meaning* of Scripture through personal and corporate Bible study (our *responsibility*), the more opportunity the Holy Spirit has to do His work of illumination (His *response*). The more the believer studies passages in Scripture on love, the more loving he becomes, due to his thinking on the subject being changed (renewal of the mind) and the Holy Spirit’s convincing him of the need (illumination) to love others as he ought.

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<sup>19</sup>An excellent study of Paul’s prayers is *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* by D. A. Carson (see chapter 8 for a detailed analysis of Paul’s prayer for the Philippians).

<sup>20</sup>For an excellent explanation of this truth, see John Piper’s December 31, 2000 sermon entitled “Learning to Pray in the Spirit and the Word: Part 1” on Jude 17-25. This sermon can be accessed at [www.desiringGOD.org](http://www.desiringGOD.org)

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

Paul prays for the Philippians' illumination (verse 9) in order that ("so that") they might be able to "approve the things that are excellent." The Greek verb translated "approve" means to prove/put to the test for the purpose of approval. The Greek participle translated "things that are excellent" literally means things that differ. In a word, Paul is praying that the Philippians might have discernment, the ability to distinguish or differentiate the good from the bad (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22; cf. Romans 12:9), the essential from the nonessential (Romans 2:18), the Lord-pleasing from the non-Lord-pleasing (Ephesians 5:10). The more intently one studies Scripture, the more illumination he receives, the more discerning he becomes (see Hebrews 5:12-14). The more discerning one becomes, the more "sincere" and "blameless" he becomes. The Greek adjective translated "sincere" means to be pure. It is believed by some that the word is a compound, derived from the Greek noun for "sunlight" and the Greek verb for "judge." The Jewish shopper would hold a piece of pottery up to the sunlight to see if the sun's rays would reveal any patched-over cracks.<sup>21</sup> Pottery that passed this test was deemed "sincere." The Greek adjective translated "blameless" means to be free from offense, to not be the cause of another's stumbling/sinning (1 Corinthians 10:32, James 2:10, and 3:2). Paul prays that the Philippians might be sincere and blameless "until the day of Christ" (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:8, 1 Thessalonians 3:13, and 5:23). Many interpreters (such as Carson, Fee, Kent, and O'Brien) understand the Greek preposition translated "until" in the NASB to convey the idea of "with a view to." If so, Paul is using the day of Christ (the Rapture) as a motivation for right conduct (cf. James 5:9 and 1 John 3:2-3), the Rapture giving way to the Judgment Seat of Christ, at which time the believer's life will be put to the test (1 Corinthians 3:10-15 and 2 Corinthians 5:10).

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

Paul concludes the report of his prayer for the Philippians by referring to the ultimate cause and purpose of their sanctification. The cause is the "fruit of righteousness" (Amos 6:12,

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<sup>21</sup> Warren Wiersbe (*Be Real*, p. 40) suggests that the English word, sincere also has a similar idea, writing: "The word *sincere* comes from two Latin words, *sine* and *cera*, which means 'without wax.' It seems that in Roman days, some sculptors covered up their mistakes by filling the defects in their marble statues with wax, which was not readily visible—until the statue had been exposed to the hot sun awhile. But more dependable sculptors made certain that their customers knew that the statues they sold were *sine cera*—without wax."

Hebrews 12:11, and James 3:18), i.e., the fruit that is righteousness, with which the Philippians had been filled by God through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Righteousness (right living) comes through Christ (John 15:5 and Ephesians 2:10). The purpose of the Philippians' sanctification is God's glory (cf. Matthew 5:16), the purpose for the believer's existence individually (1 Corinthians 10:31, Ephesians 1:6, 12, and 14) and for the church's existence corporately (Ephesians 3:21). Notice the similarity between Paul's prayer for the Philippians here in verses 9-11 and his prayer for the Colossians in Colossians 1:9-10.

## Discussion Questions for Philippians 1:7-11

1. Notice the prevalence (and seemingly unnecessary use) of the word, "all" in the book of Philippians when used in reference to the Philippians (1:1, 4, 7, and 8, as well as 1:25, 2:17, 26, and 4:23). What might be the reason for this?

*Answer: Paul's subtle way of dealing with the disunity problem in the church there, reminding them that they are a unit and, therefore, are to function as one*

2. In 1:7-8, Paul expresses his fondness for the Philippians. In 1:9-11, he shares his prayer for them. What, if any, connection is there between the two?

*Answer: we pray for those we love, and vice versa*

3. In 1:6, Paul says that God will sanctify the Philippian believers, so why pray for it (1:9-11)?

*Answer: because prayer for the sanctification of others is one of the divinely-ordained means of their sanctification*

4. In 1:10, Paul prays that the Philippians would be "sincere and without offence (or blameless) until (or with a view to) the day of Christ" (the Rapture). What is the connection between such a future reality as the Rapture and such a present responsibility as being sincere and blameless?

*Answer: knowledge of such future realities are designed to help us live in the present; cf. James 5:9 and 1 John 3:2-3*

5. In 1:11, Paul tells us what our motivation for doing right ought to be. What might it otherwise be?

*Possible answers: to make ourselves feel good; to make ourselves look good to others*

What should it be?

*Possible answers: to make God feel God; to make God look good to others*

What, if any, part does making ourselves feel good have in doing right?

*Answer: only as a byproduct, not as a purpose or pursuit*

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

Contrary to what might have been expected, Paul's imprisonment in Rome<sup>22</sup> was a *help*, rather than a *hindrance*, an *opportunity*, not an *obstacle*, a *stepping stone*, not a *stumbling block*, to the spread of the gospel ("greater progress"<sup>23</sup>). The gospel was being advanced, not *in spite of* Paul's circumstances, but *because of* them. Some years earlier, Paul had expressed a desire to preach the gospel in Rome (Acts 19:21 and Romans 1:15). God granted his wish, but no doubt under circumstances much different than Paul had envisioned. Notice Paul's mind set at this point: not concerned about self, but about the gospel. Notice also that Paul didn't let his circumstances get the best of him, but made the best of his circumstances.

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

In verses 13 and 14, Paul gives two ways in which his imprisonment had directly led to the advancement of the gospel. In verse 13, the advance is within the confines of his imprisonment and among unbelievers. In verse 14, the advance is without and among believers. First, Paul's imprisonment was leading to the advance of the gospel among his captors. During his Roman imprisonment, Paul had a "captive audience," being chained to a different member of the elite Roman Praetorian Guard, the emperor's personal body guard, every 6 hours. The Praetorian Guard consisted of 9,000 soldiers. As Paul witnessed to these guards directly and indirectly<sup>24</sup> by means of prayer, discussions with guests (cf.

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<sup>22</sup>At the end of his third missionary journey (mid-50s A.D.), Paul was arrested in Jerusalem on the trumped-up charge that he had brought a Gentile into the "inner court" of the temple, an area that Gentiles were forbidden to enter (Acts 21:27ff). After spending over two years (Acts 24:27) imprisoned in Caesarea (Acts 23:23) over this issue, Paul appealed his case to Caesar (Acts 25:11-12). After arriving in Rome, he was placed under house arrest (Acts 28:16) for two years (Acts 28:30). It is this imprisonment (his first of two Roman imprisonments) of which he speaks in Philippians.

<sup>23</sup>The Greek word translated "progress" was used of blazing a trail for an army (Melick, p. 70). Wiersbe (2:67) refers to it as "pioneer advance."

<sup>24</sup>Paul had to be "on guard" (no pun intended) all the time, lest he say or do something to hinder his

Acts 28:17-30), dictation of the Prison Epistles to his amanuenses, his manner of life, etc., word about him no doubt spread throughout the barracks and from there throughout the city of Rome and the Empire (particularly as soldiers were reassigned to other locales). As Walvoord (p. 38) so aptly states: "Paul's prison had become a pulpit." Apparently, some of the soldiers were converted (cf. 4:22).<sup>25</sup> Thus, Paul's being bound led to the gospel being released throughout the world. Praise God, though we may be bound, the gospel never is (2 Timothy 2:9)! Warren Wiersbe (2:67) writes: "Little did the Romans realize that the chains they affixed to [Paul's] wrists would *release* Paul instead of *bind* him!"

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

The second way in which Paul's imprisonment had led to the advance of the gospel was the stimulating effect his imprisonment had upon believers in Rome. Paul's courageous defense of the gospel (1:7 and 16), though imprisoned, encouraged (in the literal sense of the term) those around him to proclaim the gospel more boldly (cf. Acts 4:29, 31, 13:46, Ephesians 6:19-20, and 1 Thessalonians 2:2). Ask yourself: Do my actions embolden those around me to do right? The realization that Paul pens these words in the early 60s A.D. during the reign of the Roman Emperor notorious for persecuting believers, Nero (who reigned from 54-68 A.D. and under whose reign Paul would one day be martyred), gives added significance to them.

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

Sadly, among the brethren spurred on to bolder gospel proclamation by Paul's example were those doing so with ulterior motives. That these men were believers is seen from the fact that Paul calls them "brethren" (v. 14) and that they were "preaching Christ" (v. 15; cf.

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testimony to the Roman guard chained to him at that particular moment.

<sup>25</sup>One of Paul's most notable converts during his Roman imprisonment, though not a soldier, was Onesimus (see Philemon 10). It is interesting to note that Paul's imprisonment (in Philippi, no less) a decade earlier had also led to the salvation of a guard (Acts 16:22-34).

v. 17). Though believers, their motivation for preaching Christ was characteristic of unbelievers (cf. Romans 1:29 and Galatians 5:20-21, where “envy” and “strife” are used of the unbeliever). What was their problem? Based on the last half of verse 17, these men apparently had a personal vendetta against Paul. However, since Paul’s concern in these verses is the advancement of the message (not the adversity facing the messenger), the nature of the problem receives little explanation (one of many examples in Philippians of the selflessness of Paul). In contrast to these men were those preaching Christ with proper motives (“from good will”). Perhaps Paul specifically has in mind those he mentions by name at the end of his epistle to the Romans (Romans 16:3-15)?

***the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; (1:16)***

In contrast to the “bad guys,” who merely “think” or suppose (verse 17), the “good guys” “know” that Paul is “appointed” (destined, set) for the defense of the gospel (cf. 1:7). God in His providence (His placing of the right people in the right place at the right time for the right purpose or purposes—cf. Esther 4:14’s “for such a time as this” in such a place as this for such a purpose as this) had placed Paul in the most strategic place in the world, the heart of the Roman Empire. Interestingly, the Greek verb translated “appointed” was originally a military term (O’Brien, p. 101).

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

Paul refocuses on the “bad guys.” Once again (cf. v. 15), he acknowledges that their *message* was correct (“Christ”), but not their *motive* (“selfish ambition”; cf. 2:3). Their ultimate goal was to rub salt in Paul’s wounds (Fee, p. 117), kick him when he was down (Fee, p. 120), cause him distress, perhaps physical (cf. Acts 11:19), but most likely emotional/psychological (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:4). However, as the following verses indicate, Paul was anything but distressed over his imprisonment.

***What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. (1:18a)***

Typical of Paul, his concern is the advance of the gospel (cf. 1:12), not whatever adverse impact its advancement may have upon him personally. Even if the gospel is being

proclaimed by those intent on bringing personal harm to Paul, he still rejoices over the simple fact that it is being proclaimed.

### **Discussion Questions for Philippians 1:12-18a**

1. (based on 1:12) God used Paul's imprisonment in Rome to further the gospel. What are some seemingly unpleasant circumstances God might allow in our lives to advance the gospel?

*Possible answers: a health problem leading to sharing the gospel with people we otherwise would not meet—medical personnel, fellow patients, etc; a car problem leading to sharing the gospel with mechanics, etc.*

2. In this section (1:12-18a), we see Paul being gospel-centered, rather than self-centered, as he mentions his unpleasant circumstances (his imprisonment, as well as those trying to make it more unpleasant) in passing/does not dwell on them, dwelling rather on the furtherance of the gospel that his seemingly unpleasant circumstances brought about. How might have such a focus contributed to Paul's joy?

*Answer: selflessness leads to joy, while selfishness does not—it has been said that you can only have joy by putting **J**esus first, **O**thers second, **Y**ourself last*

3. In 1:18a, Paul rejoices in the right message being preached, even when it was being preached with a wrong motive. Does a right message justify a wrong motive?

*Answer: no—just as the end does not justify the means, neither does it justify the motive; even though at this point in the epistle Paul does not take time to take these men to task for their wrong motive, he will go on to denounce such a motive in 2:3*

### ***Yes, and I will rejoice, (1:18b)***

Both the NASB and the NIV make a paragraph division in the middle of verse 18, the reason being the shift in focus from the present in 1:12-18a to the future in 1:18b-26. This shift takes place within verse 18, the first "rejoice" being in the present tense, the second in the future tense. As pointed out previously (see comments on 1:4), joy is based in conviction, not on circumstance. Thus, Paul determines to rejoice ahead of time ("I will"). Paul was determined to rejoice, whether future circumstances proved to be favorable or not.

***for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, (1:19)***

Paul now gives the reason why (“for”) he will continue to rejoice in the future, namely, confidence (“I know”) in his future “deliverance,” in spite of his present circumstances (the “this”). Is Paul speaking of physical (as in Acts 7:25, 27:34, and Hebrews 11:7) or spiritual salvation/deliverance here? If the first, then “deliverance” undoubtedly means being delivered from his imprisonment. Philemon 22 seems to support this view, as does Paul’s words in Philippians 1:25. However, the immediately succeeding context (vs. 20-24), as well as 2:17, imply that Paul wasn’t so certain about his release. Furthermore, Paul’s wording here is identical to the Septuagint’s<sup>26</sup> rendering of Job 13:16, where “salvation” means “vindication” (cf. Job 13:18). Thus, deliverance here most likely means vindication.

Just as Job was confident he would be vindicated in spite of personal attack, so was Paul. Ultimately, Paul’s vindication would come at the heavenly tribunal (1 Corinthians 4:3-5), the Judgment Seat of Christ. Paul’s vindication would come by two, inseparable<sup>27</sup> means. The human means would be the prayers of the Philippians on his behalf. Paul coveted the prayers of others (Romans 15:30, 2 Corinthians 1:11, Ephesians 6:19, Colossians 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:25, and 2 Thessalonians 3:1). The divine means would be “the provision [a word that signifies a lavish, generous supply] of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” Is the Holy Spirit the provision or the provider/the supply or the supplier/the gift or the giver? O’Brien opts for the second (based on Matthew 10:19-20/Mark 13:11/Luke 12:11-12), while Fee opts for the first (based on Galatians 3:5 and 1 Thessalonians 4:8). Since Fee has Pauline usage elsewhere on his side (esp. Galatians 3:5, where the same Greek word is used), it is more likely that the Holy Spirit Himself is the provision. The presence of the “Spirit of Jesus Christ”<sup>28</sup> within Paul guaranteed his ultimate vindication (Romans 8:23, 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5, and Ephesians 1:13-14). Just as God guaranteed the perseverance of the

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<sup>26</sup>The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

<sup>27</sup>The inseparability of these two means is seen in the Greek of verse 19, “prayers” and “provision” sharing a definite article (literally “through the of you prayers and provision”). As Fee (p. 132) states: “The grammar assumes the closest kind of relationship between their prayer and the supply of the Spirit.”

<sup>28</sup>The Holy Spirit can be called the “Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:7, Romans 8:9, and Galatians 4:6) because He is in function (though not in essence) under the Son (John 15:26 and 16:7). In other words, the Holy Spirit is subordinate to the Son in what He does (and is, thus, called at times the “Spirit of Jesus,” the “Spirit of Christ,” etc.), but is equal to the Son in who He is (both are fully and equally divine).

Philippians (1:6) and used the prayers of Paul (in 1:9-11) as the means of bringing it about (see comments on 1:9), so God guaranteed the perseverance of Paul and used the prayers of the Philippians as the means of bringing it about. To summarize verses 18b-19: Paul viewed his present circumstances as part of the God-ordained means of his perseverance and, thus, could rejoice over it (cf. Romans 5:3, James 1:2-4, and 12).

***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. (1:20)***

Paul continues to express his confidence (“earnest expectation and hope”) that the prayers of the Philippians and the presence of the Holy Spirit within him would continue to (“even now, as always”) enable him to persevere in his faith, with the result that Christ would be “exalted”<sup>29</sup> through him (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:20), whether it be through continued earthly existence or a martyr’s death. If so, he would not be “put to shame” when he stood before the heavenly tribunal.

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<sup>29</sup>The Greek verb translated “exalted” is *megaluno* (notice the prefix, *mega*), which means to “make large or long, magnify” (BAGD, p. 497). Our lives are to be magnifying glasses through which God can be more greatly seen by those around us.

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

How can Paul be so positive and upbeat (vs. 18b-20) under such adverse circumstances? He gives the reason why (“for”) with this most memorable of mottos. As far as Paul was concerned, Christ was life (cf. Colossians 3:4), everything else details. Christ was “the object, motive, inspiration, and goal” of Paul’s existence (O’Brien, p. 120). Christ was the “bull’s-eye” of Paul’s life, not just a slice of the pie of his life. Not only did Paul have a radical outlook on life, but also on death, calling it “gain.” In what sense would death be so for Paul? The answer awaits in verse 23.

***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. (1:22)***

Though efforts by others to cause Paul psychological distress proved futile (see comments on 1:17), Paul did suffer some anguish of soul over an altogether different issue, as reflected in verses 22-24. At issue was whether it would be better to be freed from the fetters of imprisonment or from the fetters of earthbound existence (Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:1-8). Paul’s initial inclination was to continue bearing fruit (Romans 1:13) for the cause of Christ on earth. However, another alternative immediately impressed itself upon his mind, leaving him in a quandary, albeit a purely hypothetical one (Paul knew full well that the choice was not his to make).

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

Paul now considers the competing alternative. The intensity of Paul’s distress over this issue is captured by the Greek verb translated “hard-pressed.” In the passive voice (as here), the verb is translated elsewhere as “distressed” (Luke 12:50). O’Brien (p. 129) picturesquely describes it as “a traveller on a narrow road with walls of rock on both sides, unable to turn either way” (cf. Luke 8:45 and 19:43). If given the choice, Paul’s personal preference<sup>30</sup> was to “depart.” The Greek word, a common Greek euphemism for death (cf. 2 Timothy 4:6), was used to describe breaking camp or loosing a ship from its moorings

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<sup>30</sup>Paul is not ambivalent regarding his preference, calling it “very much better,” a “remarkable compounding of superlatives” (Fee, p. 146) in the original.

(Fee, p. 148). Thus, even in death, Paul would experience a “release.” Why was death so desirable to Paul? How could he consider it a “gain” (verse 21)? Simply because death meant being with Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8).<sup>31</sup> This is what makes Heaven Heaven (Luke 23:43, John 14:3, and 1 Thessalonians 4:17)!<sup>32</sup> Conversely, being separated from Christ is what makes Hell Hell (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

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<sup>31</sup>Verses such as 2 Corinthians 5:8 and Philippians 1:23 shatter the myth of “soul sleep,” the belief that, after death, the souls of believers “sleep” in a state of unconscious existence until reunited with the body when the body is resurrected. “This passage is of use for setting aside the mad fancy of those who dream that souls sleep when separated from the body, for Paul openly declares that we enjoy Christ’s presence on being set free from the body” (Calvin, p. 44). The most well-known adherents of the doctrine of soul sleep today are the Seventh-day Adventists.

<sup>32</sup>What makes Heaven Heaven is not its riches, but its Chief Resident! Unfortunately, popular hymns like *I’ve Got a Mansion* and *A Child of the King* (Have you ever noticed how materialistically-oriented these songs are at points?; by way of contrast, consider the words to the hymn, *Oh, That Will be Glory* and the following stanza from the hymn, *The Sands of Time are Sinking*: “The Bride eyes not her garment, but her dear Bridegroom’s face; I will not gaze at glory but on my King of grace. Not at the crown He giveth but on His pierced hand; the Lamb is all the glory of Immanuel’s land”), as well as the KJV’s rendering of John 14:2 (“In my Father’s house are many mansions”), have seemed to foster an improper perception of what makes Heaven Heaven. Regarding the Greek word translated “mansions” by the KJV in John 14:2, Merrill Tenney (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 9:143) states: “The imagery of a dwelling place (‘rooms’) is taken from the oriental house in which the sons and daughters have apartments under the same roof as their parents.” The emphasis in John 14:2 is not to be placed on the *quality* of the dwelling places, but on their *quantity* (there are “many” of them).

## Discussion Questions for Philippians 1:18b-23

1. At the end of 1:18 Paul says that he will rejoice. Based on what he goes on to say in the succeeding verses, how might this be a case of "outcome determines outlook"?

*Answer: convinced that the ultimate outcome will be good, he knows he can rejoice in what is to come*

2. In 1:18b-19, Paul says that he will rejoice because he knows that his present trying circumstances will lead to his ultimate vindication. What does this suggest about the connection between trials and the preservation/perseverance of the believer?

*Answer: trials are one of the means God uses to accomplish this end; therefore, we can rejoice in them; cf. Romans 5:3-4, 2 Corinthians 4:17, and James 1:2-4 and 12*

3. (based on 1:19) Does the provision of the Holy Spirit guarantee the ultimate vindication of the believer?

*Answer: yes*

If so, why does Paul include the prayers of the Philippians alongside it?

*Answer: because prayer is one of the means God uses to accomplish this end, the preservation/perseverance of the believer*

4. In 1:21 Paul says that to live is Christ. Rather than being segregated to a separate realm in our lives (such as our church life), how can Christ be central to all realms of our lives, such as the home? The workplace? Schooling? Recreational pursuits? Retirement?

*Possible answers:*

*In the realm of the home: making our home a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the church, with the husband being a loving leader and the wife sweetly submitting to her husband (Ephesians 5:22-33); training our children to have Christ-like submission to parental authority (Luke 2:51), which is pleasing to Him (Colossians 3:20)*

*In the realm of the workplace: seeing our workplace as a mission field; working for the Lord (Colossians 3:23-24); seeing our work as a vocation, meaning a calling from God (the word, vocation means calling)*

*In the realm of schooling: seeing our school as a mission field; being diligent in schoolwork so our schooling leads to employment, a future and further mission field, and such employment leads to income that enables us to financially support the mission through our local church*

*In the realm of recreational pursuits: seeing recreation as an opportunity to "re-create"/re-energize ourselves for sustained service in the mission*

*In the realm of retirement: not retiring from ministry; taking advantage of extra time of retirement years to do more ministry*

5. According to 1:23, what makes heaven heaven?

*Answer: being with Christ; cf. Luke 23:43, John 14:3, and 1 Thessalonians 4:17*

Conversely, what makes hell hell?

*Answer: not being with Christ; cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:9.*

Analyze the following songs to discern if they share this perspective: *I've Got a Mansion*; *A Child of the King*; *Oh, That Will be Glory*; and a stanza from *The Sands of Time Are Sinking*.

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

Even though Paul's personal preference is release from his earthbound imprisonment (verse 23), he concludes his contemplation by deciding that release from his Roman imprisonment is in the best interests of the Philippians and, therefore, the better "choice." "What is striking about Paul's evaluation is how deeply it is tied to the well-being of other believers, rather than to his own" (Carson, p. 29). Paul not only "talks the talk" (2:3-4), but also "walks the walk" (cf. 4:9).

***Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with  
you all for your progress and joy in the faith, (1:25)***

Being "convinced" that continued earthly existence would be in the best interests of the Philippians (the "this"), Paul expresses his confidence that this would be the case.<sup>33</sup> Paul was convinced that he would "remain," i.e., remain alive (cf. verse 24, as well as John 21:22-23, 1 Corinthians 15:6, and 1 Thessalonians 4:15) and continue his ministry to the Philippians in person. First Timothy 1:3 strongly implies that Paul indeed did so on a fourth missionary journey. Though the "all" may at first glance seem superfluous, its significance is pointed out by Fee (p. 152), who states: "This otherwise unnecessary mention of 'all' most likely points to the friction that is currently at work among them; that it occurs just before he takes up this issue [1:27 and 2:1-2] seems scarcely accidental." In like manner, Wiersbe (2:721) points out that Paul uses the Greek preposition, *sun*, meaning "together" or "with," some sixteen times in the book. Paul's reunion with the Philippians would result in their "progress," just as his imprisonment had led to the "progress" (same Greek word) of the gospel (1:12). May our ministry, like Paul's, bring others joy and result in their progressing in "the faith."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Paul's confident conviction concerning his release in verse 25 has led some to speculate that Paul had received either 1) special revelation from the Lord promising his release or 2) new, favorable information regarding his case, leading him to believe his release was imminent. However, since nothing in the context suggests either, verse 25 should be interpreted as nothing more than Paul's "personal conviction based on what seemed to be probable in the light of all the factors" (Kent, p. 116).

<sup>34</sup>"The faith" (Philippians 1:27, 1 Timothy 3:9, 4:1, 6, 5:8, 6:10, 21, and Jude 3) is a reference to the body of truth essential to Christianity.

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

The NASB translation of this verse is unfortunate, appearing to be at odds with such verses as 1 Corinthians 1:31 (“LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD”), 1 Corinthians 3:21 (“let no one boast in men”), and 2 Corinthians 10:17 (“HE WHO BOASTS IS TO BOAST IN THE LORD”). The renderings in both the NIV and the KJV are less problematic. The original literally reads “in order that the boast of you might be present in abundance in Christ Jesus because of me, through my coming again to you.” The NASB seems to misplace the prepositional phrase, “in me.” The resumption of Paul’s ministry to the Philippians in person would result in their joy and progression in the faith (v. 25), but more importantly in their giving much more (“abound”) glory to Christ (v. 26; cf. 3:3, which uses the same word used here in v. 26).

***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; (1:27)***

Many consider 1:27-30 to be the heart of the letter, a succinct summary of its contents. In keeping with his emphasis on the gospel throughout the letter (see point 5 under “Outstanding Features of Philippians” in the introductory lesson), Paul exhorts the Philippians to live<sup>35</sup> in a manner befitting it (see also Ephesians 4:1, Colossians 1:10, and 1 Thessalonians 2:12). He goes on to specify what this means.<sup>36</sup> First, it means “standing firm (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:13, Galatians 5:1, Philippians 4:1, 1 Thessalonians 3:8, and 2 Thessalonians 2:15 ) in one spirit.” There is some debate as to the precise identification of “spirit.” Is it a reference to the human spirit (small “s”) or the Holy Spirit (capital “S”)? Though nearly all interpreters opt for the first (based primarily on the immediately

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<sup>35</sup>The Greek verb translated “conduct” in the NASB literally means to “live as citizens.” Philippi being a Roman colony, Paul’s use of this verb is significant (normally, he would use a verb meaning “to walk”—as he does in Ephesians 4:1, Colossians 1:10, and 1 Thessalonians 2:12). “As Philippi was a colony of Rome in Macedonia, so the church was a ‘colony of heaven’ in Philippi” (Fee, p. 162). See also 3:20 in this regard.

<sup>36</sup>“This comprehensive exhortation stands as a rubric to the whole section 1:27-2:18, with the subsequent admonitions and statements expanding and explicating what is involved in living worthily of the gospel” (O’Brien, p. 146).

succeeding context—"one mind"<sup>37</sup>), Fee (pp. 163-166) has argued convincingly for the second (based on such passages as Ephesians 2:18, 4:4, Philippians 2:1, 4:1, and 1 Thessalonians 3:8). Paul's use of "one" with "spirit" and with "mind," as well as his use of the verb, "striving **together**," are clearly intended to help counteract the disunity problem in the church at Philippi. He employs the same tactic elsewhere in Philippians (especially in 2:2) and in some of his other epistles (1 Corinthians 1:10 and Ephesians 4:3-6). Another specific way in which the Philippians were to live in a manner befitting the gospel was to be "with one mind striving together (cf. 4:3) for the faith of the gospel" (cf. Jude 3). The Greek verb translated "striving together" is *sunathleo* (*sun*, "together" + *athleo*<sup>38</sup>, from which we get our English word, "athletic"). Their striving together, like their standing firm, was to be done in a unified fashion ("with one mind"). By so doing, they would be emulating the early church at Jerusalem (Acts 4:32).

***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. (1:28)***

Not only were the Philippians experiencing internal friction in the form of disunity, but also external friction in the form of persecution. Like Paul (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:9), the Philippians had "opponents" (*antikeimai—anti*, "against" + *keimai*, "to stand"). Who these opponents were is not specified. Perhaps they are those mentioned in chapter 3. More likely, they are governmental officials (cf. "same" in v. 30). The Roman government demanded worship of the emperor (Nero at the time). The Philippians' refusal to acquiesce no doubt brought a swift and severe response from the Empire. Paul exhorts the Philippians to stand firm (v. 27) in the face of those standing against them. Such steadfastness would be a sure sign that they would ultimately be vindicated (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5 and 2 Timothy 2:12a, as well as comments on 1:19). By contrast, the actions of their opponents would be a sure sign that such opponents would ultimately be destroyed,<sup>39</sup> most likely a reference to spiritual destruction in Hell (Matthew 7:13, John 17:12, Romans 9:22, Philippians 3:19, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, 2:3, Revelation 17:8, and 11). All of this<sup>40</sup> is "from God." For a more thorough treatment of the truths found in this verse,

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<sup>37</sup>"Spirit" and "mind" can be viewed synonymously, as a comparison of Luke 1:46 with 1:47 shows.

<sup>38</sup>*Athleo* is translated "competes as an athlete" in 2 Timothy 2:5.

<sup>39</sup>Of course, such destruction is not always inevitable, as Paul himself was once an "opponent."

<sup>40</sup>The Greek pronoun translated "that" in verse 28 is neuter in gender; therefore, it does not refer exclusively either to "sign," "destruction," or "salvation," all three of which are feminine in gender

see the parallel passage of 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10.

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

Paul gives the reason why ("for") the Philippians were experiencing persecution—it is part and parcel of the committed Christian life (John 16:33, 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4, 2 Timothy 3:12, and 1 Peter 4:12). Carson (p. 55) says it well: "In what sense could it be said of us that we follow Jesus Christ, if there is no cross-bearing in our life?" Paul's perspective on suffering was radical, to say the least. Like salvation (Ephesians 2:8), he considered it to be a gracious privilege granted by God (the Greek verb translated "it has been granted" is the verbal form of the Greek word for "grace"). This perspective no doubt accounts for the joyful response of the apostles towards their suffering in Acts 5:41. Their suffering was not without purpose, being for the sake of Christ and His cause (cf. Acts 5:41, 9:16, and 2 Thessalonians 1:5). This perspective also accounts for Paul's joyous attitude throughout the book of Philippians, in spite of the persecution he was undergoing at the time.

***experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me. (1:30)***

Paul reminds the Philippians that they are not "going it alone." Paul, their partner in the gospel (1:5), is also their partner in suffering for the gospel (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:7 and 2 Timothy 1:8). The Philippians witnessed Paul's suffering firsthand on his initial visit to Philippi (Acts 16:22-24, cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:2). They had also been informed (probably by the same individuals who went back and forth with information on Epaphroditus's condition) about Paul's current suffering by means of his imprisonment. Paul calls his suffering a "conflict" (cf. Hebrews 10:32). The Greek word is *agon*, from which we get our English word, "agony." The word and its derivatives are used elsewhere in Scripture with both an athletic ("competes in the games" in 1 Corinthians 9:25 and "race" in Hebrews 12:1) and militaristic ("fight" in 1 Timothy 6:12 and 2 Timothy 4:7) flavor. Through the use of this word, Paul may be encouraging the Philippians to, like the athlete and soldier, endure the hardship of the Christian life (2 Timothy 2:3), a form of which is persecution.

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(in Greek, a pronoun must agree in gender with its antecedent). Many interpreters (such as Kent, Hendriksen, and O'Brien) consider the antecedent to be everything in verses 27 & 28.

## Discussion Questions for Philippians 1:24-30

1. (based on 1:27) Give some ways in which we can conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel

*Possible answers: standing firm in it/not being ashamed of it, in spite of opposition (when you stand up for someone or something it shows you value that someone or something); sharing it—after all, it's worth sharing/it's good news!; living in light of it, such as displaying the graciousness, mercy, and love that God in Christ displayed that is at the heart of the gospel*

2. In 1:27, what strategy does Paul use to help the Philippians with their disunity problem?

*Answer: he exhorts them to unify around a common cause, the gospel; when any body, including a body of believers, has divergent unifying centers, disunity will result*

3. (based on 1:29) How can suffering be seen as a gift?

*Possible answers: suffering signifies that we are truly saved, and such assurance is priceless; suffering is used of God for many valuable ends: purification and, therefore, more productivity/Job 23:10; preventing pride and empowering/2 Corinthians 12:7-10; empathy/2 Corinthians 1:3-4; and the perseverance and perfecting that leads to the prize, James 1:3-4 and 12*

***Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, (2:1)***

Paul continues (the reason the “therefore” is there for) the section started in 1:27. Living “in a manner worthy of the gospel” (1:27) includes doing what Paul says here in the opening verses of chapter 2 (cf. footnote 36 in conjunction with comments on 1:27). The four conditional clauses found in verse 1 (“if . . .”) are “first class conditions” in the original, meaning the conditional clauses are making statements of fact (the “if”s can be more accurately translated “since” or “because”). The first reality is that there is “encouragement in Christ.” By virtue of the fact that the Philippians were believers (“in Christ”; see comments on 1:1), they were recipients of “encouragement” (NIV: “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ”)<sup>41</sup>, especially in the midst of suffering (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:3-7). The second reality is that there is “consolation of love.” The Philippians, being believers, were objects of God’s love (NIV: “if any comfort from his love”), a source of great consolation, especially in the midst of suffering (Romans 8:35-39). The third reality is that there is “fellowship of the Spirit” (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:14). Just as believers have fellowship with the Father and Son (1 John 1:3), so they have fellowship with the Spirit (and, thus, fellowship with one another; cf. “in one [S]pirit” in 1:27). The fourth reality is that there is “affection and compassion<sup>42</sup>.” Unlike the previous three, this one has no qualifier. In keeping with the previous three, this one likely refers to the affection and compassion shown by God toward the Philippians (which they, in turn, were to show toward others in the congregation). Paul earlier refers to the “affection of Christ Jesus” (1:8). Furthermore, God is called the “Father of mercies” in 2 Corinthians 1:3 (cf. Romans 12:1), “mercies” being a translation of the same Greek word translated “compassion” here in 2:1.

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<sup>41</sup>The believer receives encouragement from God through the Holy Spirit. The Greek word translated “encouragement” is *paraklesis* (the Holy Spirit is sometimes called the “Paraclete,” a transliteration of the Greek noun *parakletos*; cf. John 14:16, 26, 15:26, and 16:7), which can also be translated “comfort” (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:3-7). The verb form is *parakaleo*, from *kaleo*, “to call” + *para*, “alongside.” In Romans 15:5, God is called “the God who gives . . . encouragement.”

<sup>42</sup>Whereas “affection” has to do with attitude, “compassion” has to do with action, the first generating the second. Affection is the root, compassion the fruit (Motyer, in Fee, p. 182).

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

In light of the realities of verse 1<sup>43</sup>, Paul exhorts (with an affectionate, rather than authoritarian, tone; cf. Romans 12:1) the Philippians to be unified, thereby making his joy complete. The Philippians already were a source of great joy for Paul (1:4, 4:1, and 10); however, because of discord within the congregation (implicit here—“**same** mind . . . **same** love . . . **united** in spirit . . . **one** purpose”—and in 1:27; explicit in 4:2), Paul’s joy was not complete/filled-up. Paul wanted the Philippians to “fill his cup of joy to the brim” (F. F. Bruce, quoted in O’Brien, p. 176); he wanted to be able to exclaim with the psalmist: “How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity (Psalm 133:1)!”. Paul describes unity with a series of four phrases. First, unity means “being of the same mind” (cf. Romans 12:16, 15:5, and 2 Corinthians 13:11). Christians should be like-minded, having the same mind set, attitude, or outlook. Later in the epistle (4:2, where “live in harmony” is literally “think the same thing”), Paul will chide two women in the church at Philippi for not being so. Second, unity means “maintaining the same love.” Paul specifically prayed about this earlier in the epistle (1:9). Because the Philippians possessed the Holy Spirit, being believers (2:1; cf. Romans 8:9 and 1 Corinthians 6:19), God had thereby equipped them to love one another (Romans 5:5). Third, unity means being “united in spirit” (literally “joint-souled”). See also 1:27, where “mind” is literally “soul.” Christians are “soul mates”/“kindred spirits” (see 2:20) by virtue of their common possession of the Holy Spirit (cf. “in one [S]pirit” in 1:27 and “fellowship of the Spirit” in 2:1). Fourth, unity means being “intent on one purpose,” basically a restatement of “being of the same mind” earlier (“intent on one purpose” literally reads “thinking the same”).

***Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; (2:3)***

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<sup>43</sup>For example, in verse 1 Paul reminds the Philippians that, as believers, they have fellowship with the Spirit (and, hence, with one another, all of them being connected to the same Spirit). If this is the case (and it is), they should be united in spirit (v. 2), “being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit” (Ephesians 4:3).

In verse 2, Paul pointed out the problem (disunity). Beginning in verse 3, he gives the solution (humility). Humility is the key to unity (see also Romans 12:16 and Ephesians 4:2-3). Paul begins with the negative (what humility is not), commanding the Philippians to shun such arrogant attitudes as “selfishness” and “empty conceit.” Selfishness is characteristic of unbelievers, being found in the “deeds of the flesh” vice list of Galatians 5:19-21 (“disputes” in v. 20).<sup>44</sup> “Selfish ambition” (same Greek word translated “selfishness” here) produces discord (James 3:16). “Empty conceit” is literally “empty glory.”<sup>45</sup> Believers are not to be “boastful” (Galatians 5:26, same Greek word). Rather than the vice of pride, Paul wants the Philippians to be characterized by the virtue of humility. Humility is an attitude/mind set/outlook (“humility of mind”<sup>46</sup>) that views self properly (cf. Romans 12:3), i.e., from God’s perspective as revealed in His Word.<sup>47</sup> Though a humble person doesn’t have an exalted view of self, he does have an exalted view of others (in relation to himself), viewing them as more important than himself (cf. Romans 12:10b). Wiersbe (2:73) adds: “Humility is that grace that, when you know you have it, you have lost it.”

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

Attitude leads to action. In verse 3, Paul speaks of humility as an attitude that views self properly and others as more important than self. Here in verse 4, he specifies the type of action such an attitude generates. A humble person is one who puts the interests of others ahead of his own (contra Diotrephes in 3 John 9), something Paul did (see comments on 1:24), as did Christ (2:5-8), Timothy (2:20-21), and Epaphroditus (2:25-30). It is not improper to “look out for”<sup>48</sup> self (cf. Leviticus 19:18 and Ephesians 5:28-29). It is

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<sup>44</sup>Interestingly, Fee (p. 187) has pointed out that 8 of the 15 vices mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21 are sins of discord (enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying). See also the vice list in 2 Corinthians 12:20.

<sup>45</sup>*Kenodoxia*, from *kenos*, “empty” + *doxa*, “glory.” Such glorying is empty because human beings are inherently unworthy of it.

<sup>46</sup>The New Testament was the first piece of Greek “literature” to give this word a positive connotation.

<sup>47</sup>According to God’s Word, we are nothing (Galatians 6:3), God is everything (1 Corinthians 3:5-7). The only reason why we are anything is because of God’s grace (1 Corinthians 15:8-10 and Ephesians 3:8). Therefore, there is no room for boasting (1 Corinthians 4:7).

<sup>48</sup>The Greek verb is *skopeo*, which means to look at attentively, fix one’s attention on something with deep interest in it (O’Brien, p. 185). One of the NT words for a pastor is *episkopos*

improper, however, to look out for self more than looking out for others (1 Corinthians 10:24, 33, and 13:5).

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

To strengthen his appeal for unity rooted in humility, Paul points to the epitome of humility, Christ Himself. As before (vs. 3-4), Paul shows how a humble attitude (vs. 5-6) leads to humble actions (vs. 7-8). Christ had a humble "attitude" (cf. Matthew 11:29's "humble in heart"); the Philippians were to emulate such an attitude (cf. Romans 15:1-3).

### **Discussion Questions for Philippians 2:1-5**

1. In 2:2, Paul commands the Philippian believers to be "likeminded" and to be "of one mind." Does this mean that members of a local church have to think alike in all respects, "dotting every 'i' and crossing every 't' the same?

*Answer: no*

What does it mean?

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("overseer"), from the verb, *episkopeo* (*epi*, "over" + *skopeo*). Based on this verse, it is the responsibility of every church member (not just the pastoral staff) to look out for others in the congregation.

*Answer: when it comes to the majors [the gospel, decisive doctrines, core values, reason for existence, etc.], there is to be essential agreement*

Can a congregation have unity without unanimity or uniformity?

*Answer: yes, if there is common commitment to core values, but deference when it comes to details*

2. In 2:2, Paul speaks of the need for unity. In 2:3f, he speaks of the need for humility. What is the connection between the two?

*Answer: humility brings unity—see also Ephesians 4:2-3; conversely, pride brings disunity—see Proverbs 13:10a*

Why is it/how is it that pride brings disunity and humility brings unity?

*One possible answer: when people proudly think that their preferences are preeminent/most important and push them on others who may have opposite preferences, problems result, but when people view preferences as preferences, and humbly hold them as such, being willing to allow the preferences of others to prevail, unity can result*

3. What is humility?

*A suggested answer: based on 2:3's "mind," it is a mindset/attitude/outlook that thinks properly about oneself, as nothing—Galatians 6:3—apart from the grace of God—1 Corinthians 15:10; another suggested answer: self-forgetfulness*

Why is self-deprecation not true humility?

*Answer: because it is still centered on self*

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

"By anyone's reckoning, 2:6-11 constitutes the single most significant block of material in Philippians" (Fee, p. 39), a fact reflected in the amount of space the various commentaries devote to this section.<sup>49</sup> Most interpreters believe that 2:6-11 was an early Christian

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<sup>49</sup>For example, in a commentary of 550+ pages, O'Brien spends 85+ pages on 2:5-11 alone.

hymn<sup>50</sup> (notice the layout in the NIV), which Paul inserted (with or without modifications) at this point in the text. However, Fee (pp. 39-46) has argued convincingly that it is "exalted prose" from Paul's hand. Christ existed in the "form" of God. The NASB (and KJV) rendering, "form" can be misleading,<sup>51</sup> leaving the impression that Jesus was not God in essence. However, this is exactly what the Greek term (*morphe*) signifies (hence, the NIV's "in very nature God"). *Morphe* "denotes 'form' or 'shape' not in terms of the external features by which something is recognized, but of those characteristics and qualities which are essential to it" (Fee, p. 204). It is "the outward expression of the inward nature" (Wiersbe, 2:74). That *morphe* = essence is verified by the very next assertion: Christ is equal to God (cf. John 5:18 and 10:30; cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:15, 2:9, and Hebrews 1:3).<sup>52</sup> Contextually, the "equality" being spoken of here is not so much the essence of deity, as it is one of the privileges or prerogatives of deity (see discussion on 2:7 below). In "humility of mind" (2:3), Christ "did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped" i.e., something to be seized or held on to, "a prize, a treasure to be greedily clutched and ostentatiously displayed" (J. B. Lightfoot, quoted in F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, p. 77).

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

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<sup>50</sup>Other passages in the NT thought to be hymns include Luke 1:46-55, 68-79, Ephesians 1:3-14, Colossians 1:15-20, and 1 Timothy 3:16b.

<sup>51</sup>However, in all fairness to English translators, there is no exact English equivalent for the Greek word.

<sup>52</sup>Christ has always been equal to God the Father in being (who He is), but subordinate to Him in behavior (what He does). John 10:30 reflects the first, John 14:28 the second.

Christ's humble attitude (vs. 5-6) displayed itself in 3 humble actions (vs. 7-8): 1) incarnation (vs. 7-8a), 2) submission (v. 8b), and 3) crucifixion (v. 8c). Christ's humiliation began with His incarnation<sup>53</sup> (cf. John 1:14). In the Incarnation, humanity was added to Christ's deity (not exchanged for it). "Emptied" is the Greek verb, *kenoo*, from which we get our English word, "kenosis," the word used to describe a disputed doctrine in Christology. Of what did Christ "empty" Himself when He took on human flesh? Certainly neither His deity nor His attributes, both of which are eternally inherent to Him. Some have suggested He gave up the independent exercise of His attributes. However, He has always been and always will be the Son and, therefore, subservient to the will of the Father (Thus, can it be said He has ever independently exercised them?). The best option is to view "emptied Himself" idiomatically to mean "gave up all his rights" (Carson, p. 45; cf. NIV's "made himself nothing").<sup>54</sup> Calvin (p. 56) describes it as "being brought to nothing." The text simply reads, "emptied Himself," not "emptied Himself of x, y, or z." When Christ left the glories of heaven<sup>55</sup> to come to earth, He gave up one of the prerogatives or privileges of deity (not the deity of His person), the full display of His glory<sup>56</sup> (which He veiled<sup>57</sup> during most<sup>58</sup> of His incarnation) and the worshipful response that accompanied it, both of which He "regained" at His exaltation (cf. John 17:5). Christ laid aside "the insignia of divinity" (Walvoord, p. 53) "like a king who temporarily puts on the garments of a peasant while at the same time remaining the king, even though it was not outwardly apparent" (Walvoord, pp. 54-55).<sup>59</sup> "From His throne Jesus came, Laid aside Heaven's fame" (Ron Hamilton, from his song, *Born to Die*). Though Christ was rich, He became

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<sup>53</sup>Incarnation literally means "in flesh." Alexander Maclaren (p. 254) writes: "To be born was His supreme act of condescension . . . the most stupendous instance of condescension in the world's history."

<sup>54</sup>Along these lines, Kenneth Wuest (quoted in Hendriksen, p. 109) perceptively points out: "The only person in the world who had the right to assert his rights waived them."

<sup>55</sup>Christ "resigned the glories of heaven" (J. B. Lightfoot, quoted in Bruce, *Philippians*, p. 77).

<sup>56</sup>"Mild He lays His glory by" (from "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" by Charles Wesley).

<sup>57</sup>"Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail th'incarnate Deity!" (from "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" by Charles Wesley).

<sup>58</sup>"Most" because it was unveiled at times (see John 1:14 and 2:11), the Transfiguration being one occasion (Matthew 17:1-2//Mark 9:2-3//Luke 9:28-29; cf. 2 Peter 1:16-18). Even at such times, however, it is unlikely that His glory was displayed to the same extent or degree as it was during His pre-incarnate state or as it is now.

<sup>59</sup>Christ "beggared himself" (Frank Beare, quoted in Fee, p. 211). He "clothe[d] himself with the rags of human nature" (Henry, p. 733).

poor (2 Corinthians 8:9).<sup>60</sup> Christ's emptying took place in conjunction with His "taking the form [*morphe*] of a bond-servant<sup>61</sup>." Christ came to earth to serve (Matthew 20:28//Mark 10:45; cf. Luke 22:27 and John 13:1-15). Christ's emptying also took place in conjunction with His "being made<sup>62</sup> in the likeness of men" (cf. Romans 8:3). Whereas "form" stands for the inner essence of something (see comments on 2:6), "likeness" stands for its outer appearance (hence, its coordination<sup>63</sup> with "appearance" in verse 8). The most likely reason why Paul did not use *morphe* at this point (since Jesus Christ was not only fully divine, but also fully human) was to distinguish the God-man from humanity. Though He was fully human, He was different from humanity in that He was also fully divine.

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

Paul once again reiterates the final point of verse 7 ("being made in the likeness of men") here at the start of verse 8 with the words, "being found in appearance<sup>64</sup> as a man." Christ's humiliation began with His incarnation. It continued with His submission to God the Father (cf. Luke 22:42, John 5:30, et. al.). Humility and submission go hand-in-hand (1 Peter 5:5). Christ's humiliation culminated with His crucifixion. Christ was obedient "to

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<sup>60</sup>It is interesting to note that, just as the Kenosis is used to undergird a practical exhortation in Philippians 2 (unity), so it is used to undergird a practical exhortation in 2 Corinthians 8 (giving). Doctrine is practical. In this regard, see footnote 8 in the introductory lesson.

<sup>61</sup>C. F. D. Moule (quoted in Bruce, *Philippians*, p. 78) points out the significance of this term: "Slavery meant, in contemporary society, the extreme in respect of deprivation of rights . . . . Pushed to its logical conclusion, slavery would deny a person the right to anything—even to his own life and person."

<sup>62</sup>The Greek verb translated "being made" here is translated "born" elsewhere (Romans 1:3 and Galatians 4:4). Paul's theological precision is seen in his use of the Greek verb, *huparcho* ("existed") when referring to Christ's deity in verse 6 and in his use of the Greek verb, *ginomai* ("being made") when referring to Christ's humanity in verse 7. The first verb speaks of something that already exists, the second of something that comes into being at a point in time.

<sup>63</sup>The NASB fails to translate the Greek conjunction, *kai* ("and") found at the start of verse 8.

<sup>64</sup>"Appearance" does not in any way imply that Christ was not fully human (i.e., that He only "appeared" to be human). This is the ancient Christological heresy known as "Docetism" (from *dokesis*, "semblance").

the point of death," signifying the degree to which Christ was obedient (to the "nth degree"). Are we willing to go so far in obedience? Christ's humiliation was ultimately seen in the type of death that He died, "even death on a cross." Death on a cross was a cursed (Galatians 3:13), shameful (Hebrews 12:2) death, reserved for very few (such as slaves; cf. "bond-servant" in 2:7). Hughes (p. 87) writes: "Polite Roman society considered the mention of the cross to be an obscenity." Maclaren (p. 259) concludes: "His death is the greatest instance of unselfish self-sacrifice, and the loftiest example of looking on the 'things of others' that the world has ever seen."

***For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, (2:9)***

Just as Paul (see comments on 1:19) and the Philippians (see comments on 1:28) would be ultimately vindicated despite suffering, so would Christ (cf. Hebrews 2:9 and 1 Peter 1:11). Verses 9-11 illustrate the biblical principle that humiliation precedes exaltation, the way up is down (Matthew 23:12b//Luke 14:11b//18:14c, Luke 1:52, Romans 8:17, James 4:10, and 1 Peter 5:6). Following Christ's descent to the deepest depths,<sup>65</sup> God the Father exalted Him to the highest heights (Isaiah 52:13, Ephesians 1:20-22, 4:10, and Hebrews 7:26). The Greek verb translated "highly exalted" literally means "superexalted" (the verb for "exalt" intensified with the preposition, *huper*, "above, beyond").<sup>66</sup> Christ's exaltation commenced, paradoxically, with His crucifixion ("lifted up" in John 3:14, 8:28, 12:32, and 34), continued with His resurrection (Ephesians 1:20) and ascension (Acts 2:34), and culminated with His coronation as He took His place at the Father's right hand (Acts 2:33-34, 5:31, Ephesians 1:20, Hebrews 12:2, and 1 Peter 3:22). Christ's coronation included His receiving "the name which is above every name" (cf. Hebrews 1:4). What exactly is the name? Or is it a specific name at all? Since the definite article is used ("the name"), a specific name is likely in view. Based on verse 10, some (such as Maclaren and Walvoord) believe it to be Jesus. Most (such as Kent, Fee, Carson, Wiersbe, and O'Brien) believe it to be Lord (based on verse 11). This seems to be the better option, especially in light of Acts 2:36, where Peter declares: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." Christ's exaltation vindicated His claim to deity (made in such passages as John 8:58; cf. Isaiah 42:8). It did

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<sup>65</sup>"It was in the manner of his death . . . that the rock bottom of humiliation was reached" (F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, p. 71).

<sup>66</sup>"... [T]he downward trajectory of Christ's humiliation was followed by his soaring exaltation. A divine catapult, so to speak, had been effected as each movement downward had ratcheted the gears tighter and tighter, so that the final click created an explosive tension. Then the gear was tripped, launching his super-exaltation" (Hughes, p. 203).

not *create* the claim; rather, it *confirmed* it.

***so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (2:10)***

In keeping with Christ's exalted name and position, every human being<sup>67</sup> (no matter where—"in heaven," "on earth," or "under the earth") will give assent to His lordship, both in word (v. 11) and in deed (v. 10). In the NASB, "EVERY KNEE WILL BOW" is in all caps because it is a quotation from the Old Testament (Isaiah 45:23; also quoted by Paul in Romans 14:11).

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

Not only will Christ's lordship be acknowledged by bended knee, but also by verbal confession. Every tongue will eventually acknowledge the lordship of Christ (cf. Isaiah 45:23 and Romans 14:11). The way Paul writes this is emphatic, as it literally reads: "that **Lord** Jesus Christ is." Some will say so willingly (Romans 10:9<sup>68</sup>), the rest unwillingly (through "clenched teeth," as one has said).<sup>69</sup> The significance of Paul's words here are seen by the fact that emperor worship was expected of all Roman citizens. Thus, Caesar was referred to as "lord" (Acts 25:25-26). However, to Paul there was but "one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 8:6), the "Lord of all" (Acts 10:36), before Whom Nero himself would one day bow. God will get the last word. When the Son is exalted, so is the Father (John 13:31).

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<sup>67</sup>Though it is true that angels in particular (1 Peter 3:22) and all things in general (Ephesians 1:22) are spoken of as being subjected to Christ in conjunction with His exaltation, the fact that those spoken of here have knees and tongues seems to limit the scope of these verses to human beings only. However, it is possible that Paul is speaking anthropomorphically at this point, ascribing human features to non-human beings (see Psalm 19:1-6 and Romans 8:19-22).

<sup>68</sup> "The church bears witness to Jesus' lordship by confessing to the world 'Jesus Christ is Lord' and offering salvation to those who accept that confession and make it the central part of their lives (Rom 10:9-10)" (Melick, p. 108).

<sup>69</sup> "It ought not to be assumed that the bending of the knee by all will be in glad acknowledgment of Jesus' lordship" (O'Brien, p. 243).

### **Discussion Questions for Philippians 2:6-11**

1. This section is arguably the most doctrinally-rich section of the book of Philippians and one of the most doctrinally-rich sections in the entire Bible. Yet, its inclusion in

the book of Philippians is for what purpose?

*Answer: to reinforce the need for unity rooted in humility*

What does this suggest regarding the relationship between doctrine and living?

*Answer: behavior is based on belief/right living is rooted in right learning/doctrine determines deeds; note: the same phenomenon occurs in 2 Corinthians 8:9 and 9:15, where Paul uses Christ's giving of Himself as a basis for his call for the Corinthians to give monetarily in chapters 8 and 9*

2. What does Philippians 2:7 mean when it says that Christ "made himself of no reputation," or literally "emptied Himself"?

*Answer: made Himself nothing or gave up His rights*

Does it mean that He emptied Himself of any part of His divine essence or relinquished any of His divine attributes?

*Answer: no—He gave up a privilege or prerogative of being divine, not any part of His divine person*

In his hymn, *And Can It Be?*, Charles Wesley writes that Christ "emptied himself of all but love." What might such wording wrongly imply?

*Answer: that Christ gave up most of His divine essence when He became incarnate; note: Dr. David Doran encouraged Frank Garlock, the editor of our hymnal, Majesty Hymns, to modify Wesley's hymn text at this point, which Garlock did, writing instead: "humbled Himself and came in love"*

3. Alexander Maclaren, a 19<sup>th</sup> century British minister, has written that "to be born was [Christ's] supreme act of condescension ... the most stupendous instance of condescension in the world's history." How was the Incarnation an act of humiliation?

*Answer: Christ was willing to give up something He had a right to enjoy as the Lord of glory, being glorified in heaven, to come to earth and be despised and rejected [Isaiah 53:3] by those He created*

4. Based on the humiliation (vs. 6-8) followed by the exaltation (vs. 9-11) of Christ taught in this passage, how can the example of Christ serve as a motivation for us to be selfless, even to the point of sacrifice/suffering?

*Answer: being selfless, even to the point of sacrifice/suffering is ultimately worth it; see, for example, Romans 8:17b-18 and 2 Timothy 2:12a*

***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; (2:12)***

1:27-2:18 may be viewed as a unit (an extended exhortation), with 1:27-30 being the introduction and 2:12-18 being the conclusion. Paul begins this concluding paragraph (2:12-18) by hearkening back to 1:27 ("so then"), with "not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence" here in 2:12 corresponding to "whether I come and see you or remain absent" in 1:27. Paul, as he does elsewhere in Philippians (2:1 and 4:1) and in his other epistles (1 Corinthians 10:14, 15:58, and 2 Corinthians 7:1), couches his exhortation in tender terms (a "tender talking-to"), calling the Philippians his "beloved." The first exhortation in this section is "work out your salvation" ("Work out what God has worked in," as some have said). Wiersbe (2:77) writes at this point: "The Christian life is not a series of ups and downs. It is rather a process of 'ins and outs.' God works *in*, and we work out." The Philippians are to do so whether Paul is in physical proximity or not.<sup>70</sup> Based on the Philippians' past performance ("as you have always obeyed"<sup>71</sup>), Paul was confident they would continue to obey God and, thereby, work out their salvation. The manner in which they were to do so was "with fear and trembling." Paul's point seems to be that as the Philippians work out their salvation, they are to do so in a manner that humbly acknowledges their inability to do so in and of themselves (as v. 13 will clearly go on to point out). Working out one's salvation is descriptive of sanctification (progressive sanctification), the present tense aspect of salvation (2 Corinthians 2:15), in which one is progressively being saved/set apart/delivered from the power of sin (cf. comments on 1:6). Though God is the One ultimately behind the believer's sanctification (v. 13), the believer is nonetheless responsible to be an active participant in it<sup>72</sup> ("work out" is a command), as Paul was (Philippians 3:12-14; cf. 1 Timothy 6:12). Sanctification takes work; it is a "work out!" "The verb 'work out' carries the meaning of 'work to full completion,' such as working out a problem in mathematics. In Paul's day it was also used for 'working a mine,' that is, getting out of the mine all the valuable ore possible; or 'working a field' so as to get the greatest harvest possible" (Wiersbe, 2:77). Henry (p. 733) adds: "The word signifies working thoroughly at a thing, and taking true pains."

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

In a verse that Fee (p. 238) describes as being "loaded with theology," Paul gives the

<sup>70</sup>Most commentators (such as Bruce, Kent, Hendriksen, and O'Brien) see "not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence" as going with "work out," rather than with "obeyed."

<sup>71</sup>The Greek word translated "obeyed" is an interesting one. It is *hupakouo*, the preposition, *hupo*, "under" + the verb, *akouo*, "to hear." Obedience means doing what you are told by someone over you.

<sup>72</sup>By way of analogy, the paralytic of John 5:8-9 still had to obey Christ's command to walk, though Christ was the One who gave Him the ability to do so.

underlying reason why (“for”) the Philippians can do what verse 12 says they must do. They can work out their salvation because God<sup>73</sup> is working in them (cf. Philippians 1:6 and Hebrews 13:21).<sup>74</sup> The Greek verb translated “work” is *energeo*, from which we get our English word, “energy.” Due to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the believer possesses the power source needed to work out his salvation (Galatians 2:8, Ephesians 1:19-20, 3:20, Colossians 1:29; cf. Romans 15:18, Ephesians 2:10, and Philippians 4:13). The believer plugs into this power source by plugging into the Word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13<sup>75</sup>). God not only gives the believer the *ability* (“work”) to work out his salvation, but even the *aspiration* (cf. 2 Chronicles 30:12) to do so (“will”). The purpose for which God gives believers both the aspiration and the ability to work out their salvation is “for His good pleasure,” the ultimate reason why God does anything.<sup>76</sup>

### ***Do all things without grumbling or disputing; (2:14)***

Paul now specifies what working out one’s salvation involves, in the form of another exhortation. The Philippians were not to grumble or dispute. Apparently, this was a problem in the Philippian church, which undoubtedly contributed to their disunity problem.<sup>77</sup> God takes the sin of grumbling very seriously, as the Israelites found out (1 Corinthians 10:10; cf. Numbers 14:1-38). The reason why grumbling is so heinous is because it ultimately calls into question the character of God (“God is too loving to be unkind and too wise to make mistakes”). It reveals a “failure to really trust God and failure

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<sup>73</sup>In the original, “God” is first in the sentence, for emphasis.

<sup>74</sup>Divine sovereignty, rather than suppressing human effort, stimulates it (cf. Acts 18:9-10). “Far from this being a *disincentive* to press on, Paul insists that this is an incentive. Assured as we are that God works in this way in his people, we should be all the more strongly resolved to will and to act in ways that please our Master” (Carson, p. 62). Henry (p. 734) adds: “...[T]he operations of God’s grace in us are so far from excusing, that they are intended to quicken and engage our endeavours.”

<sup>75</sup>“Performs its work” in this verse is the Greek verb *energeo*.

<sup>76</sup>“Many find this usage difficult, as though God’s effecting something ‘for the sake of his own good pleasure’ were awkward or theologically offensive” (Fee, p. 239). If a creature acted in such a self-aggrandizing fashion, he would be acting improperly. If God did not act in such a fashion, He would be acting improperly. Everyone, including God, must glorify God, because God is worthy of glory (Revelation 4:11).

<sup>77</sup>Following O’Brien (pp. 291-292), Hughes (p. 100), and Silva (p. 144), it may very well be that their grumbling and disputing was directed toward the leadership of the church (cf. footnote 13).

to be submissive to His providential provision" (Walvoord, p. 65). Disputing is translated "dissension" in 1 Timothy 2:8. In Luke 9:46, dissension broke out among the disciples as they argued "as to which of them might be the greatest." In light of Paul's immediately preceding exhortation to selflessness (2:3-11), perhaps the Philippians were guilty of the same, for it is pride that produces dissension (Proverbs 13:10).

***so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, (2:15)***

Paul now gives another reason (besides obedience) why ("so that") he wants the Philippians to stop grumbling and disputing—doing so hinders one's testimony before an unbelieving world. Such actions are incompatible with living in a manner worthy of the gospel (1:27). By refraining from these sins of the tongue, the Philippians would give evidence ("you will prove yourselves to be") that they were truly God's children (cf. the NASB's marginal note on Matthew 5:45a), unlike the Israelites, whose grumbling contradicted their status (Deuteronomy 32:5). Being believers, the Philippians already were God's children positionally (Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:5-6); they needed to become more so practically. Paul uses three adjectives to describe what the Philippians were to be like: "blameless," "innocent," and "above reproach." You may recall that Paul prayed for the Philippians along these lines earlier in the epistle (1:10). "Blameless" is descriptive of "observable conduct, which one can find no fault with" (Fee, pp. 244-245). Zacharias and Elizabeth are so designated in Luke 1:6. Whereas "blameless" is more *externally*-oriented, "innocent" is more *internally*-oriented; the first has to do with *outward conduct*, the second with *inward condition*. "Innocent" was used to describe something that was pure or unmixed/unmingled, such as undiluted wine or unalloyed metal (O'Brien, p. 293). "Above reproach" is virtually synonymous with "blameless."<sup>78</sup> An impeccable testimony is so important because believers live in the midst of "a crooked and perverse generation" (cf. Deuteronomy 32:5, Matthew 17:17//Luke 9:41, and Acts 2:40). "Crooked" is the Greek adjective, *skolios*, from which we get our English word, "scoliosis" (curvature of the spine). The unbelieving world in which we live is "morally warped" (Hendriksen, p. 124).<sup>79</sup> "Perverse" is virtually synonymous with "crooked." In Acts 13:10, Elymas the

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<sup>78</sup>Fee (p. 245) is among those who see "blameless" as being in the sight of God and "above reproach" as being in the sight of men.

<sup>79</sup>It is for good reason that criminals are sometimes called "crooks"—they are morally crooked or warped.

magician sought to “make crooked the straight ways of the Lord,” “crooked” being the same Greek word translated “perverse” here in verse 15. In a sin-darkened world, believers are “lights.” Based on Daniel 12:3 and the literal rendering of the Greek word<sup>80</sup>, Paul likely has stars in mind (so NIV). Just as Christ is the “Light of the world” (John 8:12 and 9:5), so are believers (Matthew 5:14).<sup>81</sup> Believers are to “brighten the corner” where they are.

***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 or toil in vain. (2:16)***

If the Philippians were truly going to be partners with Paul in the spread of the gospel (1:5), it would not be enough for them to *protect their testimonies* (v. 15); they would also have to *proclaim the truth* (v. 16a).<sup>82</sup> There is some disagreement as to the exact rendering of the Greek verb translated “holding fast” by the NASB (and the NKJV). A better rendering would be “holding forth” (so KJV, NIV, and NASB margin). The verb was used in secular Greek literature for the offering of wine to a guest at a banquet (Lightner, p. 656). The gospel is called the word “of life”<sup>83</sup> because of its life-giving power (Acts 5:20 and 2 Timothy 1:10). If the Philippians were to heed Paul’s admonition regarding grumbling and disputing (v. 14), their practice and position would become more closely aligned (v. 15), resulting (“so that”) in Paul having “reason to glory” “in the day of Christ”<sup>84</sup> (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:14 and 1 Thessalonians 2:19). Paul would be able to glory in that day because the Philippians’ sanctification would be evidence that they were truly saved and that, therefore, Paul’s efforts were not in vain (cf. Galatians 2:2, 4:11, and 1 Thessalonians 3:5).<sup>85</sup> Paul describes his ministry in terms of running (“run”), as he does elsewhere (1

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<sup>80</sup>The Greek word translated “lights” is *phoster*, from *phos*, “light” + *aster*, “star.”

<sup>81</sup>The question isn’t: Are we a light? We are. The question is: How bright is our light? Is it a flickering flame or a blazing bonfire?

<sup>82</sup>“Show and Tell.” Show (v. 15) and tell (v. 16a); lifestyle (v. 15) and lips (v. 16a); verbal (v. 16a) and non-verbal (v. 15) witness; live it (v. 15) and give it (v. 16a).

<sup>83</sup>Jesus is called “the Word of Life” in 1 John 1:1.

<sup>84</sup>Cf. 1:6 and 10 and comments on these verses. The “day of Christ” is a reference to the Rapture, at which time Paul (as well as all other church-age believers) would stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ.

<sup>85</sup>Ultimately, no labor done for Christ is “in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Corinthians 9:24-27 and 2 Timothy 4:7). He also describes his ministry as “toil.” The same word is used in John 4:6, where Jesus is said to have been “wearied from His journey” from Judea to Galilee (through Samaria). Ministry is toilsome (1 Thessalonians 2:9, 5:12, and 2 Thessalonians 3:8).

***But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. (2:17)***

Verses 17 and 18 are somewhat mysterious.<sup>86</sup> The drink offering (or libation) consisted of wine poured either upon or around the sacrificed animal (Numbers 15:1-13). Paul views himself as the drink offering (as he does in 2 Timothy 4:6), the Philippians as the sacrifice. Paul once again “practices what he preached” in 2:3 by viewing the Philippians as more important than himself (they are the sacrifice, while he is merely the drink offering that accompanies it). Is Paul referring to potential martyrdom? The imagery seems to suggest so (as well as the parallel in 2 Timothy 4:6). However, it seems more likely that Paul is referring to his *present ministry*, not to his *potential martyrdom*. First, the “if” clause is a first class condition, making a statement of fact. In other words, Paul is being poured out. Accordingly, “poured out” is in the present tense. Second, though the sacrificial imagery suggests martyrdom, it can also suggest ministry (so Romans 12:1 and 15:16). Third, the immediately preceding context (the end of v. 16) speaks of Paul’s ministry. “Sacrifice and service” is likely a hendiadys<sup>87</sup> for “sacrificial service.” The Philippians’ sacrificial service stemmed from their faith (so NIV’s “coming from your faith”). As he does earlier in the epistle (1:18), Paul rejoices over his suffering (cf. Acts 5:41), a joy he can’t keep to himself, but shares with the Philippians, his partners in suffering for the gospel (1:28-30).

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<sup>86</sup>As Fee (p. 251) confesses: “In a sentence which was undoubtedly perfectly clear to Paul and probably reasonably understandable to the Philippians as they heard it read, the distance of time and circumstances has left us to wonder both what the imagery denotes and how the sentence fits into the letter. The certain evidence of this, pity the poor reader, is the contradictory nature of so much that is found on the passage in the commentaries, while using many of the same data and grammars. Perhaps we should confess that we are fishing for answers to a very difficult metaphor, on which certainty will be hard to come by.”

<sup>87</sup>Hendiadys is literally one by means of two, the communication of one concept by means of two words. Examples of hendiadys in English would be “nice and warm” and “good and ready.”

***You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me. (2:18)***

Paul exhorts the Philippians to likewise rejoice in their sufferings and to not keep such joy to themselves, but to share it with Paul, their partner in the gospel.

### **Discussion Questions for Philippians 2:12-18**

1. (based on 2:12-13) According to Paul, does divine sovereignty in sanctification negate human responsibility?

*Answer: no*

How might knowing God's sovereignty in our sanctification stimulate it?

*One possible answer: by knowing that our sanctification is certain, being backed by omnipotent, infallible power, we can pursue it confidently, being confident of success; note: a similar dynamic is at play in Acts 18:9-11, where Paul is given confidence to pursue the human responsibility of evangelism in Corinth based on God's sovereignty in salvation*

2. According to 2:13, God's work in our sanctification has as its goal His pleasure. Is it improper for God to do what He does for His own pleasure?

*Answer: no*

Why or why not

*Possible answer: if we acted for our own pleasure, we would be acting improperly, for we are inherently/by nature unworthy or undeserving of it, but if God did not act for His own pleasure, He would be acting improperly, for He is inherently/by nature worthy or deserving of it—remember, He's not called the I AM for nothing*

3. (based on 2:14) Why is complaining such a severe sin?

*Possible answer: because it essentially calls God's character in question, suggesting that He is unloving or unkind, unwise/made a mistake, etc.*

4. There are some who tend to view evangelism as only "show"/evangelism of life, while there are others who tend to view it as only "tell"/evangelism of lip. What does Paul have to say about this in 2:15-16a?

*Answer: it is not an either/or, but a both/and*

How do the two impact one another?

*Possible answer: failure to witness with our lives blunts the witness of our lips, while failure to witness with our lips buries the reason for the witness of our lives*

***But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. (2:19)***

Having concluded the “extended exhortation” of 1:27-2:18, Paul turns once again (as in 1:12-26) to personal matters, sharing with the Philippians his plans for both the future (2:19-24) and the present (2:25-30). Starting here in verse 19, Paul shares his plan to send Timothy<sup>88</sup> to the Philippians. Paul hopes to do so “in the Lord Jesus,” i.e., Lord willing (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:7).<sup>89</sup> Paul’s primary purpose for sending Timothy would be to find out how the Philippians were doing (especially in regards to the issues about which he had exhorted them in the epistle, which they would have already received). Assuming the report from Timothy would be a good one, Paul would be encouraged (cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:5-8).

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

Paul couldn’t visit the Philippians personally, so he did the next best thing—sent a “kindred spirit.” The Greek adjective is *isopsuchos*, from *isos*, “equal” + *psuche*, “soul” (cf. “one mind” in 1:27, where “mind” is *psuche*; cf. “united in spirit” in 2:2, the Greek word being *sumpsuchos*). In terms of being selfless in spirit like Paul, Timothy was incomparable (“no one else”). As Paul contemplated whom he might send to Philippi as his representative, no one but Timothy “fit the bill.” Once Timothy arrived in Philippi, his selflessness would be manifested in his being genuinely concerned for the Philippians’ well-being.

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

Paul says negatively about all others here in verse 21 what he has just said positively about Timothy in verse 20. In contrast to Timothy’s selfless spirit, all others were self seeking. Who is included in the “all”? “Without more information a satisfactory explanation seems impossible” (M. R. Vincent, quoted in O’Brien, p. 321). Perhaps the best answer to this question is that of all the individuals at Paul’s disposal at the time<sup>90</sup>, Timothy was the only

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<sup>88</sup>Paul sent Timothy on special missions to other local churches, such as to Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:17) and to Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:1-5).

<sup>89</sup>As O’Brien (p. 315) translates: “But I hope, if the Lord Jesus wills . . . .”

<sup>90</sup>Epaphroditus would have already been sent to Philippi (2:25-30) and Paul’s other (besides Timothy) associates during his first Roman imprisonment (listed in Colossians 4:10-14 and Philemon 23-24) perhaps had been sent on special missions (they were with Paul when Ephesians,

one who met the criterion of selflessness.<sup>91</sup> By being self seeking, all others were failing to emulate the selfless spirit of Christ (cf. 2:5-8). To seek after the interests of others is to seek after the interests of Christ (cf. Matthew 25:34-45), as the songwriter has said: "Help me to live for others, that I might live like Thee." "One must 'look out for number one' . . . Agreed, as long as one recognizes the cross to dictate that 'number one' is one's neighbor and not oneself" (Fee, p. 271).

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

Paul resumes his commendation of Timothy (begun in verse 20 and "interrupted" in verse 21). Timothy had proved<sup>92</sup> his "mettle" over the previous ten years as Paul's associate. The Philippians could vouch for this ("you know"), Timothy having helped start the church at Philippi on the second missionary journey (Acts 16) and having spent some time in Philippi on the third one (Acts 19:22 and 20:4). Timothy and Paul, like the Philippians and Paul (1:5), were partners in the gospel, having "served" (literally "slaved") together (cf. 1:1) in it. Paul and Timothy's relationship was like that of father and son (1 Corinthians 4:17 and 1 Timothy 1:2), much like that of Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2:12). Paul also had such a relationship with Titus (Titus 1:4).<sup>93</sup> Apprenticeship is the idea. In that day, a father taught his son his trade.<sup>94</sup>

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Colossians, and Philemon were written, early on in his first Roman imprisonment, but apparently were no longer so when Philippians was written, later on in his first Roman imprisonment, no mention of them being made in Philippians—admittedly, an argument from silence), as Timothy often was (see footnote 88) and as Tychicus was (2 Timothy 4:12).

<sup>91</sup>Timothy's selflessness was manifested right from the start, as he was willing to leave home to join Paul in his missionary endeavors (Acts 16:1-3).

<sup>92</sup>The Greek word translated "proven worth" was used to describe metals that had been proved (put to the fire test) and approved (passed the test). The word is translated "proven character" in Romans 5:4, proven character being a result of "tribulation" (Romans 5:3). The verbal form of the word is found earlier in Philippians (see comments on 1:10).

<sup>93</sup>Paul also refers to Onesimus as his "child" (Philemon 10), as Paul was the one who led Onesimus to Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:15). Timothy may also have been Paul's child in this sense. Timothy and Titus were Paul's "children" in that he personally trained them for the ministry. How many children of either type do we have?

<sup>94</sup>Discipleship is an apprenticeship of sorts, the more mature believer (the "father") showing the

***Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; (2:23)***

In light of Timothy's sterling character (the reason why the "therefore" is there for), Paul reiterates (cf. v. 19) his intention to send Timothy to the Philippians. This Paul will do as soon as he has more definitive information regarding his status.

***and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly. (2:24)***

Paul's future plans not only included sending Timothy to Philippi (vs. 19-23), but also visiting Philippi himself, Lord willing ("in the Lord"; cf. comments on v. 19). It is generally agreed that the Lord was willing and that Paul personally visited Philippi after being released from his imprisonment (cf. 1 Timothy 1:3).

### **Discussion Questions for Philippians 2:19-24**

1. (based on 2:19 and 24) Should you always say, "Lord willing" when speaking of a future contingency?

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less mature believer (the "son") how to live the Christian life.

*Possible answer: not necessarily, but it is not a bad practice; Paul most often did so—see Acts 18:21, Romans 1:10, 15:32, 1 Corinthians 4:19, 16:7, but not always—see Romans 15:28 and 1 Corinthians 16:5; see also Hebrews 6:3 and especially James 4:13-17; even if one does not always so say with his mouth, he should always think so in his mind*

What benefit might there be in actually saying so?

*Possible answer: it can remind you and others that ultimately the future is always in God's control, not ours*

Note: in the early 1900s, signatures at the end of English letters often included the initials D.V., representative of the Latin words, *Deo Volente*, meaning "God willing"

2. (based on 2:22). Paul and Timothy had a father-son relationship, or we might say a mentoring relationship (note: other such relationships in Scripture included Moses & Joshua; Elijah & Elisha; Christ & The Twelve; Barnabas & Paul; and Peter & Mark). What are some things you can do with others as a way of spiritually mentoring them?

*Possible answers: pray with them; memorize Scripture together; serve together in a ministry in your local church; spend time together outside of church, perhaps doing a hobby together*

Share with the class some specifics of any mentoring relationships you have been a part of in the past or are currently a part of

***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; (2:25)***

Though Paul wasn't able to send Timothy immediately, he was able to send Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus had been sent by the Philippian church (their "messenger"; literally "apostle"; cf. 2 Corinthians 8:23) to deliver a love offering (cf. 4:18) to Paul in their behalf.<sup>95</sup> Epaphroditus is not only Paul's "brother" in Christ<sup>96</sup>, but also his "fellow worker" (cf. Romans 16:3, 9, 21, 1 Corinthians 3:9, 2 Corinthians 1:24, 8:23, Philippians 4:3, Colossians 4:11, 1 Thessalonians 3:2, Philemon 1, and 24). Epaphroditus was also Paul's "fellow soldier" (cf. Philemon 2). Christian ministry is warfare (1 Corinthians 9:7, 2 Corinthians 10:4, and 2 Timothy 2:3-4); we are all soldiers in the Lord's army. Epaphroditus had been "wounded in battle" (cf. vs. 26-27 and 30).<sup>97</sup> Epaphroditus now having recovered, Paul thought it "necessary" (first in the Greek sentence, for emphasis) to return him to the Philippians prematurely<sup>98</sup>, the reasons being given in verses 26 and 28. Paul's "need" (cf. 4:16) was real, as the Roman government did not provide for the needs of its prisoners. Being under house arrest, Paul could not earn a living to provide for his own needs. Thus, he was dependent on the financial support of the Philippians and others to help him survive.

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

Paul gives the first of three reasons why ("because") he was so eager to return Epaphroditus to the Philippians. The first reason was for Epaphroditus' sake. Epaphroditus

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<sup>95</sup>"Epaphroditus had been sent both to bring a gift and to be a gift from the Philippians to Paul" (Hendriksen, p. 140).

<sup>96</sup>It may be that Epaphroditus was saved out of a pagan background, the assumption being that his parents named him after "Aphrodite," the Greek goddess of love

<sup>97</sup>There is much speculation among commentators as to when Epaphroditus fell ill, whether on the journey from Philippi to Rome, a journey of 40 days by foot (F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, p. 94), or after his arrival. Following Fee (p. 278), the most likely scenario is that Epaphroditus fell ill on the way, but risked his life (cf. v. 30) by finishing the journey in such a condition.

<sup>98</sup>This is implicit in the text. Paul unilaterally made this decision ("I thought it necessary"), the implication being that the Philippians weren't expecting him back yet. It may be that the plan was for Epaphroditus to not only deliver the love offering, but also to stay with Paul for awhile to minister to him in any way he could. Paul's sending Epaphroditus back to the Philippians prematurely is yet another example of Paul's selflessness, as Paul undoubtedly would have liked to have had Epaphroditus around for as long as possible.

(like Paul in 1:8) longed<sup>99</sup> for his home church.<sup>100</sup> Not only that, Epaphroditus was “distressed,” another strong term (cf. Matthew 26:37 and Mark 14:33, where the same verb is used of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane), concerned over the Philippians’ concern over news of his illness.

***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. (2:27)***

Paul shares with the Philippians the severity of Epaphroditus’ illness<sup>101</sup>; it was life-threatening. Death was “knocking on Epaphroditus’s door.”<sup>102</sup> Just as Christ was “obedient to the point of death” (2:8), so Epaphroditus was “sick to the point of death.” God in His mercy spared Epaphroditus’ life<sup>103</sup> and, thereby, spared Paul further sorrow.<sup>104</sup>

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

Once Epaphroditus recovered from his illness (the reason why the “therefore” is there for),

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<sup>99</sup>The Greek verb translated “longing” is *epipotheo*, an intensified form of *potheo*, “desire.”

<sup>100</sup>Some have speculated that Epaphroditus was the pastor of the Philippian church at the time.

<sup>101</sup>Knowing Epaphroditus’ selfless nature, Paul probably surmised that Epaphroditus would downplay the severity of his illness when telling the Philippians about it (if he would tell them at all).

<sup>102</sup>The Greek adjective translated “to the point of” is *paraplesios*, an intensified form of *plesion*, “near, close by”

<sup>103</sup>“As usual, therefore, Paul can hardly speak without reflecting on everything from its theological perspective” (Fee, p. 280). It is only by God’s mercy that any of us exist (see Lamentations 3:22 in the NIV, KJV, and NASB margin; Luke 13:1-5; and Romans 6:23). The means by which God spared Epaphroditus’ life is not revealed. Fee (p. 279) thinks it was miraculous, but admits the silence of the text in this regard.

<sup>104</sup>The “sorrow” that Paul was already experiencing was likely sorrow over Epaphroditus’ illness. Had Epaphroditus died from his illness, Paul would have had added sorrow.

Paul sent him on his way. Paul gives a second and third reason why (“so that”) he was so eager to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi. The second reason was for the Philippians’ sake, that they might rejoice over Epaphroditus’ presence. The third reason was for Paul’s sake,<sup>105</sup> that he might be less concerned about the Philippians, as their concern over Epaphroditus dissipated.

***Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; (2:29)***

As he did with Timothy earlier (verses 20 & 22), Paul commends Epaphroditus to the Philippians, exhorting the Philippians to “receive” him (cf. Romans 16:1-2). “Receive” means to wholeheartedly accept, welcome, embrace, accept with pleasure (cf. Luke 8:13, 15:2, Acts 17:11, 1 Corinthians 2:14, 1 Thessalonians 1:6, and 2:13). Accordingly, the Philippians were to receive Epaphroditus joyfully; they were to give him a “hero’s welcome.” Not only were the Philippians to embrace Epaphroditus, but they were also to esteem him (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:17-18 and 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). In John 12:26, Christ said that those who serve Him will be honored by the Father. In Epaphroditus’ case, God the Father will use Paul’s command here in verse 29 and the Philippians’ obedience to it to do just that.

***because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me. (2:30)***

Paul gives the reason why (“because”) the Philippians were to embrace and esteem Epaphroditus. It was because Epaphroditus had risked his life<sup>106</sup> for the cause of Christ (cf. Acts 15:26). Since the Philippians were not able to minister to Paul in person (the “deficiency” in their service to him—cf. the NASB’s marginal note for 1 Corinthians 16:17),

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<sup>105</sup>Not surprisingly, Paul mentions the benefit to himself last, another example of his selflessness.

<sup>106</sup>The Greek word translated “risking” is *paraboleuomai*. In the early church, there were societies of men and women who, like Epaphroditus, risked their lives for the cause of Christ. They called themselves “the parabolani,” meaning “the riskers” or “the gamblers” (Hendriksen, p. 144). “Taking risks is primarily related to ‘business ventures,’ rather than to genuinely personal risks related to one’s love for Christ and for his people” (Fee, p. 284).

they sent Epaphroditus to do so in their behalf (cf. v. 25).<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>O'Brien (p. 328) translates verse 30: "Because it was on account of the work of Christ that he nearly died, risking his life in his eagerness to discharge fully that service which you would have all liked to render, but could not because you were not with me."

## Discussion Questions for Philippians 2:25-30

1. Paul begins the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Philippians with an exhortation to unity (v. 2), followed by an exhortation to humility (vs. 3-4), the secret to unity. In the remainder of the chapter, he gives examples of humility, including Christ Jesus (vs. 5-11), himself (vs. 17-18), Timothy (vs. 19-24), and Epaphroditus (vs. 25-30). Looking back over the chapter, list specific ways these individuals demonstrated humility

*Possible answers:*

- *Christ Jesus thought of us and our salvation more than Himself by:*
  - *being willing to give up the prerogative of adoration in heaven to come to earth (vs. 6-8a)*
  - *being so willing to submit to the will of God the Father that He gave up His life (v. 8b)*
  - *being willing to submit to the humiliation of crucifixion (v. 8c)*
- *Paul thought of Christ and the Philippians more than himself by being willing to pour out his life in sacrificial service to Christ and to them (v. 17)*
- *Paul thought of the Philippians more than himself by viewing himself as secondary (he's just the drink offering), while viewing the Philippians as primary (they're the sacrificial animal) (v. 17)*
- *Paul thought of the Philippians more than himself by being willing to give up Timothy by sending him to the Philippians (v. 19)*
- *Like Paul, Timothy thought of Christ and the Philippians more than himself (vs. 20-21), including being willing to make the dangerous journey from Rome to Philippi*
- *Paul thought of Christ and the Philippians more than himself by being willing to make the same journey (v. 24)*
- *Paul thought of the Philippians more than himself by being willing to give up Epaphroditus by sending him back to the Philippians (v. 25), as had the Philippians, who thought of Paul more than themselves when they had first sent Epaphroditus to him*
- *Epaphroditus thought of Christ and Paul more than himself by being willing to make the dangerous journey from Philippi to Rome and by ministering to Paul's needs once he arrived in Rome, as well as thought of Christ and the Philippians more than himself by being willing to make the dangerous return journey from Rome to Philippi (v. 25)*
- *Epaphroditus thought of the Philippians more than himself by evidently being more concerned over their concern of him than over his condition (v. 26)*

- *Paul thought of Epaphroditus and the Philippians more than himself by being concerned about the condition of Epaphroditus (end of v. 27) and by being concerned about the concern of the Philippians over the condition of Epaphroditus (end of v. 28)*
- *Epaphroditus thought of Christ and Paul more than himself by being willing to risk his life in order to meet Paul's need (v. 30)*

2. Why could/would Epaphroditus risk his life for Christ (v. 30)?

*Possible answers:*

- *Because he knew where he was going/his soul was secure*
- *Because he, like Paul, understood that to die is not a loss, but a gain (see Philippians 1:21, as well as Matthew 10:39; as Jim Elliot once said: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose")*
- *Because he considered pleasing the Lord to be more dear than preserving his life (as did Paul in Acts 20:24)*
- *Because he had already lost or laid down his life (Matthew 10:39), as had James Calvert, 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary to cannibals in Fiji, who, after being told that he and his fellow missionaries would lose their lives there, replied, "We died before we came" (we might call this a "living martyrdom")*

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

Paul begins to conclude the epistle, or does he? There is much debate among commentators as to the significance of the Greek phrase that begins this section, translated “finally” in the NASB (as well as in the NIV and KJV). Paul uses it when winding down some of his other epistles (2 Corinthians 13:11, Ephesians 6:10, and 2 Thessalonians 3:1). However, here in Philippians (as well as in 1 Thessalonians), he goes on for two more chapters!<sup>108</sup> Several explanations have been given. Robert Mounce (quoted in Walvoord, p. 75) calls this “an interrupted conclusion.”<sup>109</sup> Others (such as Carson, Kent, and O’Brien) claim that the Greek phrase translated “finally” indicates reiteration (“so then”<sup>110</sup>), not conclusion. If so, Paul is likely reiterating his words in 2:17-18 (i.e., coming back to them after taking time to discuss personal matters in 2:19-30). The “finally” that indicates that the letter is concluding is rather found in 4:8. The exhortation to “rejoice in the Lord” (cf. 4:4) has its roots in the Old Testament (Psalm 32:11, 33:1, 21, 35:9, 40:16, et. al.). “In the Lord” indicates the only sphere in which true rejoicing can take place. Believers can rejoice regardless of circumstance because they are “in the Lord,” i.e., saved (cf. Romans 5:11). Those outside of Christ have no reason to rejoice. Following this exhortation, Paul quickly switches gears. There was a threat on the horizon, of which the Philippians needed to be aware. Paul had apparently warned the Philippians about this threat before (“again”), perhaps with a previous letter or on a previous visit (cf. 3:18), but sees the need to do so again. “The diseased craving for ‘originality’ in the present day tempts us all, hearers and speakers alike, and we ever need to be reminded that the staple of Christian teaching must be old truths reiterated, and that it is not time to stop proclaiming them until all men have begun practicing them” (Maclaren, p. 314).

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<sup>108</sup>This has provided much homiletical fodder. Carson (p. 80) writes: “There have been a lot of jokes leveled at preachers because of that ‘Finally.’ One child allegedly asked his dad what the preacher meant when he said ‘Finally,’ and his father muttered in reply, ‘Nothing.’” R. E. O. White (quoted in Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, p. 252) states: “An apostle may say, ‘Finally, brethren . . .’ and go on for two more chapters: but not you. A troubled English vicar asked a farm-labourer why he came to church only when the assistant preached. ‘Well, sir,’ said the labourer, ‘young Mr. Smith, he says “in conclusion” and he do conclude. But you say “lastly” and you *do* last.’”

<sup>109</sup>“Something suddenly occurred to [Paul] which prompted the warning of verse 2 with its sequel” (F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, p. 101).

<sup>110</sup>Fee (p. 290) calls “finally” a “purely gratuitous translation.”

***Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; (3:2)***

The threat that the Philippians had to look out for<sup>111</sup> was a group known as the “Judaizers.” The Judaizers taught that one had to observe the Mosaic Law in order to be saved, the key being circumcision (see Acts 15:1). Paul gives them three derogatory labels here in verse 2. First, he calls them “dogs.” The significance of this label is usually lost on Westerners.<sup>112</sup> What makes this label even more “biting” is the fact that the Jews regularly used it when referring to Gentiles (Matthew 15:26). The Judaizers were dogs in that they continually “dogged” (Fee, p. 294) and “hounded”<sup>113</sup> Paul and tried to scavenge his converts; they snapped at Paul’s heels and barked their false doctrines (Wiersbe, 2:84). Second, Paul calls the Judaizers “evil workers,” a description found frequently in the Psalms (cf. 5:5, 6:8, 14:4, 36:12, 53:4, 59:2, 92:7, 9, 94:4, 16, and 125:5). Third, Paul calls the Judaizers “the false circumcision.” This, too, is a “cutting” (Fee, p. 296) remark. The Greek word for “circumcision” is *peritome* (literally “to cut around”), but the word Paul uses here is *katatome* (literally “to cut to pieces”) (Fee, p. 296). The circumcision of the Judaizers was purposeless, a mere cutting of the flesh (hence, the NIV’s “mutilators of the flesh”).

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

In contrast to the Judaizers, the “false circumcision” (the *katatome*), are Paul and the Philippians (“we”), the “true circumcision” (the *peritome*). Paul and the Philippians were truly circumcised in that they were spiritually so (even though some of them were not physically so), while the Judaizers were falsely circumcised in that they were not spiritually so (even though they were physically so). Paul and the Philippians were “circumcised in heart” (Leviticus 26:41, Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6, Jeremiah 4:4, 9:25, Ezekiel 44:7, 9, Romans 2:25-29, and Colossians 2:11), the Judaizers were not. Paul and the Philippians

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<sup>111</sup>The Greek verb translated “beware” has as its basic meaning “to see.”

<sup>112</sup>“A culture that spends millions of dollars on dogs as pets can scarcely appreciate the basic contempt that ancient society had for dogs, who were both scavengers (eating whatever street garbage they could find) and vicious (attacking the weak and helpless). They get nearly universally bad press in the Bible and thus are metaphorically applied to humans only pejoratively” (Fee, p. 295). See, for example, Deuteronomy 23:18 and Revelation 22:15.

<sup>113</sup>John Witmer, “Romans,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 2:437.

placed their faith "in Christ Jesus" (cf. Romans 5:11, 1 Corinthians 1:31, 2 Corinthians 10:17, and Galatians 6:14), the Judaizers "in the flesh," i.e., in human works such as circumcision. To do the latter is to commit "spiritual suicide" (Fee, p. 302).

***although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I more:  
(3:4)***

Having concluded verse 3 by describing himself and the Philippians as those who "put no confidence in the flesh" (in contrast to the Judaizers, who do), Paul continues to ride this "train of thought." Paul challenges the Judaizers to a "showdown" (Lightner, p. 659), as he does in 2 Corinthians (see especially 11:22-23). Paul knew firsthand what it was to place his faith in the flesh. Paul had "been there, done that." He had been the "poster child" for works righteousness.

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

Paul builds his case in verses 5 and 6, showing himself to be the quintessential Jew, both racially (first four items) and religiously (last three items). Not only was he circumcised, but he was circumcised on "the eighth day" (cf. Genesis 17:12 and Leviticus 12:3). He was an "eighth-day-er" (Hendriksen, p. 156). In other words, he was born a Jew; therefore, he was not a proselyte<sup>114</sup> (which undoubtedly some of the Judaizers were). Not only was he "of the nation of Israel," but "of the tribe of Benjamin" (cf. Romans 11:1). Why was this special? Perhaps because Israel's first king (and Paul's namesake) hailed from this tribe (Acts 13:21). Perhaps because Benjamin (like Joseph) was the son of Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife. Perhaps because the Holy City was located within Benjamin's territorial boundaries. Perhaps because Benjamin was the only son of Jacob actually born in the Promised Land. We can only speculate. Paul was a full-blooded Jew, "a Hebrew of Hebrews," i.e., born to Jewish parents.<sup>115</sup> Paul was a Pharisee (Acts 26:5), as were his parents (Acts 23:6), and was trained by the master Pharisee, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3, cf. Acts 5:34). The Pharisees and Judaizers were "two peas in a pod" (Acts 15:5); thus, Paul knew where the Judaizers were coming from.

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<sup>114</sup>“Proselyte” meaning a Gentile who had converted to Judaism later in life.

<sup>115</sup>O'Brien (p. 365) translates: "a Hebrew son of Hebrew parents."

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

Paul was religiously zealous (Acts 22:3 and Galatians 1:14), so much so that he persecuted Christians (Acts 8:1, 9:1-2, 13-14, 22:4-5, 26:9-11, 1 Corinthians 15:9, Galatians 1:13, 23, and 1 Timothy 1:13). How "ironic" that he became a part of the church while on a church-persecuting mission (Acts 9). Paul was "blameless" (cf. 2:15 and comments on) in conduct, a Law-abiding Jew.

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

At one time, Paul, like the Judaizers, considered ("counted") the things about which he facetiously boasted in verses 5 and 6 (or anything like them—"whatever things") to be "gain." Now, however, he viewed them as "loss." Assets had become liabilities; credits had become debits; the helpful had become the harmful. What caused the change? "Christ." Maclaren (p. 327) describes it as "the expulsive power of a new affection."

## Discussion Questions for Philippians 3:1-7

1. According to verse 1, why can we rejoice?

*Answer: because we are "in the Lord," meaning that we have a saving relationship with Him, cause for rejoicing if ever there was—see also Romans 5:11*

If we are not rejoicing at all times (as 4:4 goes on to say), what might be implied?

*Possible answers: either we are not in the Lord/saved, or, if saved, we are not properly applying our position/not conducting ourselves according to our connection to Him—see John 15:1-11, especially verse 11*

2. (based on 3:2) Who are some of the "dogs" (false teachers) we need to beware of in our day (especially those who teach righteousness by works)?

*Possible answers: the various cults, other religions, and Catholicism*

Why might such individuals be considered "enemies of the cross of Christ," as Paul will go on to call some false teachers in 3:18?

*Answer: because they essentially say that the Cross was unnecessary—as a bumper sticker I once saw read: "If you could save yourself, why did Jesus have to die?"*

3. (based on 3:6) Is it wrong to be zealous?

*Answer: no—see Romans 12:11, especially in the NIV; cf. Paul's post-conversion zeal in Philippians 3:12-14*

What was the problem with Paul's pre-conversion zeal?

*Answer—he was passionate about/zealous for the wrong thing; cf. Romans 10:2*

***More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, (3:8)***

Everything pales in comparison to “knowing [not just knowing about] Christ,” i.e., having a personal relationship with Him (cf. v. 10 and John 17:3), as Paul did (“my”). Paul’s faith cost him dearly (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23-28), the circumstances under which he wrote these words being one of the ways in which it did so. But if that is what it took to “gain Christ<sup>116</sup>,” Paul welcomed the “trade-off.” The value of knowing Christ was so “surpassing” that, compared to it, the value of everything else was like the value of “rubbish.”<sup>117</sup>

***and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, (3:9)***

Salvation is not based on one’s personal (“of my own”) righteousness (it cannot be, since there is none righteous—Romans 3:10), but on the righteousness of Christ<sup>118</sup> judicially given to the one who believes in Christ (cf. Romans 10:3). What the Law could not do (provide “the righteousness His righteousness requires Him to require”), God did by sending His Son (Romans 3:20-22, 8:3-4a, and Galatians 2:16).

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<sup>116</sup>Paul had already gained Christ (at conversion), yet he speaks of gaining Him (v. 8); he was already in Christ, yet he speaks of being found in Him (v. 9); he already knew Christ, yet he speaks of knowing Him (v.10). Though Paul already possessed these realities and was currently experiencing them to a degree, he wanted to experience them in ever-increasing degrees of intensity until the day he would experience them to the fullest degree (cf. v. 11). As O’Brien (p. 393) states: “[Paul] desires to gain Christ completely, to be found in him perfectly, [and] to know him fully.”

<sup>117</sup>The Greek word is *skubalon*, believed to be derived from *kusi*, “to dogs” + *ballo*, “to throw.” By using this word, “Paul is taking a parting shot at the ‘dogs’ in v. 2” (Fee, p. 319).

<sup>118</sup>O’Brien translates: “through the faithfulness of Christ” (rather than “through faith in Christ”) and gives several reasons for doing so (pp. 398-400). “If this line of interpretation is correct, then the apostle is asserting that the righteousness he possesses is based on Christ’s faithful obedience to the Father” (O’Brien, pp. 399-400). Theologians call this Christ’s “active obedience” (they call Christ’s death His “passive obedience”). At the moment of salvation, this righteousness is applied to the believer’s account, causing God to justify him (declare him righteous).

***that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; (3:10)***

Paul wanted to know Christ's person, power, and pain. Salvation not only involves knowing Christ in an ever-increasing experiential (as opposed to merely theoretical; cf. v. 8 and comments on) way ("that I may know Him"; cf. footnote 116; cf. 2 Peter 3:18), but also in experiencing "the power of His resurrection." The Greek word for "power" is *dunamis*, from which we get our English word, "dynamite." The "divine dynamite" of which Paul is speaking here is "the power that works within us" (Ephesians 3:20; cf. Ephesians 1:19-20), i.e., the power to be delivered from sin's domination (Romans 6:18 and 22). Salvation also results in experiencing "the fellowship of His sufferings" (cf. Romans 8:17, 2 Corinthians 1:5, Colossians 1:24, and 1 Peter 4:13). Just as Paul and the Philippians were partners in suffering (cf. 1:30 and comments on), so are Christ and Christians. As Paul told the Philippians earlier (see 1:29 and comments on), suffering "comes with the territory" of being a Christian (see also Acts 14:22). As believers suffer, they become more like Christ (cf. John 15:20), "being conformed to His death" (cf. Romans 6:5 and 2 Corinthians 4:10-11). Fee (p. 327) explains this final phrase as "living a cruciform existence"<sup>119</sup> (cf. Galatians 2:20 and 6:14).

***in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (3:11)***

The end of the salvation "process" is attaining to the "resurrection from the dead" (cf. Luke 20:35). "The dead" here is most likely a reference to all unbelievers. Paul, being a Christian, would be resurrected out from among this group, either by translation or resurrection at the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

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<sup>119</sup>“Christian life is cruciform in character; God’s people, even as they live presently through the power made available through Christ’s resurrection, are as their Lord forever marked by the cross. The heavenly Lion, one must never forget, is a slain Lamb (Rev 5:5-6)” (Fee, p. 335).

## Discussion Questions for Philippians 3:8-11

1. In this section, Paul speaks of gaining Christ (end of 3:8), though he was already saved/had gained Christ; of being found in Christ (start of 3:9), though he was already saved/was in Christ; and of knowing Christ (start of 3:10), though he was already saved/knew Christ. What is he saying?

*Answer: that he wanted to experience these things in increasing degrees of intensity, to, in the words of Peter O'Brien, "gain Christ completely, to be found in him perfectly, [and] to know him fully"*

2. In 3:8 and 3:10, Paul speaks of knowing Christ. What's the difference between knowing Christ and knowing about Christ?

*Answer: to know about Christ is to know information in relation to Him, while to know Christ is to have an individual relationship with Him (John 17:3)*

What are some things a believer can do to know Christ better?

*Possible answers: spend time with Him by talking to Him in prayer and listening to Him through His Word; find out more about Him by seeing what His Word says about Him; develop common interests by finding out in His Word what interests Him*

3. (based on 3:8) Why could Paul bear the loss of all things?

*Possible answers: because he had already counted them loss, so that when he lost them, he didn't feel that he had ultimately lost anything; because by having Christ, he knew that he had all that he really needed, so he didn't need the things that he lost (if you have everything but Jesus, you ultimately have nothing, while if you have Jesus, but nothing else, you have everything)*

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

Paul, not wanting his previous comments (in verse 11) to be misconstrued (“not that”; cf. 4:11 and 17), readily admits that he has not yet attained practical<sup>120</sup> perfection (he will not until the transformation he speaks of in 3:21 takes place; cf. 1 John 3:2). He is, nevertheless, actively pursuing (“press on<sup>121</sup>”; cf. v. 14) it<sup>122</sup> (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:1, 1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Timothy 2:22, and Hebrews 12:14), desiring to “lay hold of”<sup>123</sup> it (cf. 1 Timothy 6:12), practical perfection being the ultimate goal or outcome of his salvation, his salvation having taken place when Christ “laid hold of” him on the Damascus road (Acts 9).

***Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, (3:13)***

Paul reiterates what he has just said in verse 12, using the imagery of a runner in a race in verses 13 and 14. Paul briefly used this imagery earlier in the epistle (2:16). The Christian life can be viewed as a race (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, 2 Timothy 4:7, and Hebrews 12:1). Paul was a focused runner (“one thing”; there is no “I do” in the original text). Like any good runner, he did not look over his shoulder (“forgetting what lies behind”). The past (whether past failures or successes) was inconsequential. Paul forgot about it, not that he did not remember or learn from it, but paid no attention to it (Fee, p. 347). He did not let the past (“what lies behind”) hinder his present progress (“reaching forward” in v. 13;

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<sup>120</sup>“Practical” is in distinction from “positional” perfection. The believer strives for the first, but already possesses the second.

<sup>121</sup>Melick (p. 139), commenting on the Greek verb translated “press on,” says that it means “‘to run swiftly in order to catch some person or thing.’ (ThayLex, 153). It was used in both hunting and athletics. As to the former, it described the pursuit of game, stalking it with relentlessness. In athletics it meant to run so as to gain the victory.”

<sup>122</sup>The advertising slogan, “the relentless pursuit of perfection” (Lexus) captures the idea perfectly.

<sup>123</sup>The Greek verb translated “lay hold of” is *katalambano*, an intensified form of *lambano*, “to take.” Accordingly, Fee (p. 345) renders it “take aggressively” or “seize,” while O’Brien (p. 424) renders it “attack.”

“press on” in v. 14) toward the future goal (“what lies ahead”), for which he was “reaching forward,” like “a runner with his eyes fixed on the goal, his hands stretching out towards it, and his body bent forward as he enters the last and decisive stages of the race” (O’Brien, p. 429). Paul was so focused on the future that he could not help but forget the past.

***I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (3:14)***

Paul kept his “gaze on the goal<sup>124</sup>”/his “eyes on the prize.” He was “in it to win it” (see 1 Corinthians 9:24). In physical terms, the “goal” is analogous to the finish line and the “prize” is analogous to the laurel wreath given to the victor. In spiritual terms, the goal is reaching the end of one’s earthly existence having persevered in the faith<sup>125</sup> (Matthew 24:13//Mark 13:13) and the prize is the culmination of one’s calling<sup>126</sup> (call to salvation; cf. Romans 8:30), glorification. Our call to salvation is “in Christ Jesus” in that it was His work (both His sinless life and sacrificial death) that effected it. Both 2 Timothy 4:7-8 and Hebrews 12:1-2 provide several parallels to this passage.

***Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; (3:15)***

Having used “perfect” in the sense of sinlessness earlier (v. 12), Paul now uses it in the sense of maturity (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:6, 14:20, Ephesians 4:13, and Hebrews 5:14, all of which use the same Greek word translated “perfect” here). Paul exhorts (“let”) himself and any others who might be spiritually mature (“us”) to have the attitude/mindset of which he has been speaking, i.e., striving for practical perfection, all the while realizing one has not attained it, nor will attain it, at least not in this life.<sup>127</sup> If someone does not share Paul’s

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<sup>124</sup>The Greek noun translated “goal” is *skopos*, the verbal form of which is *skopeo*. For a description of *skopeo*, see footnote 48.

<sup>125</sup>In the Christian race, it is not a matter of *where* you finish (1st, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, etc.), but *that* you finish.

<sup>126</sup>The call to salvation is an “upward” (i.e., heavenly) one (cf. Hebrews 3:1), being “of God” and culminating in the believer being “called up” to heaven.

<sup>127</sup>“It is the mark of one who is perfect not to consider himself perfect” (Chrysostom, quoted in F.F. Bruce, *Philippians*, p. 126). “... [A] leading characteristic of this true Christian perfection is a

perspective regarding these matters, Paul is confident that God, through the Holy Spirit's work of illumination (see comments on 1:9), will eventually "reveal" (cf. Ephesians 1:17-18) to them their deficiency in this regard.

***however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. (3:16)***

Paul, as it were, encourages the mature to "keep up the good work." In contrast to ("however") those who are somewhat deficient in their thinking (v. 15b), those who aren't so are to "keep living by that same standard," that standard being the mindset of striving for practical perfection, all the while realizing it cannot be attained in this life. It is the immature believer who either: 1) thinks he has "arrived" spiritually or 2) upon realizing he cannot spiritually arrive in this life, quits trying. It is the mature believer who, in regards to the first, knows better and who, although knowing the second, presses on anyway.

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constant consciousness of imperfection" (Maclaren, p. 373). The more you mature, the more you realize your immaturity.

## Discussion Questions for Philippians 3:12-16

1. (based on 3:13) How can the failure to forget what is behind/in the past hinder our progress in the present, whether past failures or past successes?

*Possible answers: the failure to forget past failures can prevent progress by way of discouragement, while the failure to forget past successes can prevent progress by way of resting on our laurels*

How can the remembrance of what is behind/in the past potentially help our progress in the present?

*Possible answers: the remembrance of past failures can help present progress if we learn from them, while the remembrance of past successes can help present progress by way of encouragement*

2. (based on 3:14) How does fixing our eyes on our future prize help us to be faithful in the present?

*Possible answer: fixing our eyes on the prize can push us to persevere through the pain of the present because the gain is worth the pain*

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

Paul, as he does elsewhere (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1, Philippians 4:9, 2 Thessalonians 3:7, and 9; cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:6), exhorts his readers to imitate him.<sup>128</sup> The Greek word he uses is *summimetes*. From its root, we get our English words, "mime" and "mimic." Paul exhorts the Philippians to "observe," i.e., "be on the lookout for" (Fee, p. 366)<sup>129</sup> others who "walk" (live) like him in order to imitate them also.<sup>130</sup> Paul realized the importance of a good example. More is "caught" than taught; learning is more a matter of "infection" than "injection"; "your talk talks and your walk talks, but your walk talks louder than your talk talks"; what you communicate with your life is more potent than what you communicate with your lips; actions speak louder than words.

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

The importance of imitating men like Paul was magnified all the more in light of ("for") the fact that the Philippians were being exposed to many bad examples. Among them were those whom Paul calls "enemies of the cross of Christ." Such individuals did not lead a "cruciform existence" (see comments on 3:10).<sup>131</sup> Paul had warned the Philippians about such individuals before (most likely while visiting them on his third missionary journey). Paul was brokenhearted over such individuals (cf. Acts 20:31 and 2 Corinthians 2:4), perhaps because he knew their end (v. 19) and because he so cherished the cross of Christ.

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<sup>128</sup>Only as he imitates Christ, of course (1 Corinthians 11:1).

<sup>129</sup>The Greek verb translated "observe" is *skopeo*. See footnote 48 for a description of this verb.

<sup>130</sup>In Romans 16:17, Paul exhorts the Romans to be on the lookout for ("keep your eye on") those unworthy of imitation in order to avoid them.

<sup>131</sup>"Those who deliberately indulge in sin and repudiate the will of God deny all that the cross of Christ stands for" (F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, p. 105). "It was by their manner of life that they spurned the cross of Christ and did not accept its implications for their daily living" (O'Brien, p. 453). See 2 Corinthians 5:15 and 1 Peter 2:24.

***whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. (3:19)***

Paul continues his description of the “enemies of the cross of Christ” begun in verse 18. Such individuals were destined for destruction (cf. Romans 6:21, as well as 2 Peter 2:1, 3, 9, 12, 17, and 3:16), i.e., eternal damnation (see comments on 1:28). Such individuals worshipped their “appetite” (cf. Romans 16:18), most likely a figurative expression for ungodly desires of any kind (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:13). Rather than living a cruciform existence of self-denial, they lived a life of self-indulgence (Hendriksen, p. 180). Such individuals took pride (“glory”) in what they should have been ashamed of (“shame”).<sup>132</sup> Such individuals lived for the “nasty now-and-now” instead of for the “sweet by-and-by” (cf. Colossians 3:2 and James 3:15). They were earthly-minded, living as if life on this earth was all that there is, as if there wasn’t a Hell to shun and a Heaven to gain. Who were these individuals? Most likely, they were “libertines” (those who believed that one is free to do as he pleases) or “antinomians” (those who believed that one is not bound by any law).<sup>133</sup>

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

In contrast to those described in verses 18 and 19, who were “earthly,” were Paul and the Philippians, who were citizens of heaven. This concept of citizenship in heaven was alluded to earlier in the epistle (1:27; cf. footnote 35). As the Philippians were citizens of another place politically (Rome), so they were citizens of another place spiritually (heaven).<sup>134</sup> “This earth is not my home, I’m just a passin’ through” (cf. John 17:14, 16, 2 Corinthians 5:1, Hebrews 11:9-10, 13-16, 1 Peter 1:17, and 2:11). Paul and the Philippians were “homesick for heaven” (Carson, p. 93), eagerly waiting (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:7, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, and Hebrews 9:28)<sup>135</sup> for their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to

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<sup>132</sup>The church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 5) comes to mind.

<sup>133</sup>“Antinomian” has as its root the Greek word, *nomos*, meaning “law.”

<sup>134</sup>“Just as Philippi was a colony of Rome, whose citizens thereby exemplified the life of Rome in the province of Macedonia, so the citizens of the ‘heavenly commonwealth’ were to function as a colony of heaven in that outpost of Rome” (Fee, p. 379). See also footnote 35.

<sup>135</sup>The Greek verb is *apekdechomai*, an intensified form of *ekdechomai*, “wait for.” According to Maclaren (p. 393), it “literally means to look away out ... like a sentry on the walls of a besieged city

descend from there and to take them there (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

***who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (3:21)***

When Christ does return for His church, believers will receive glorified bodies, as did Christ when He was resurrected. Just as believers are being conformed to Christ's death (3:10), so they will be to His resurrection. As 1 Corinthians 15:42-53 (especially v. 49) indicates, our earthly bodies ("the body of our humble state") will be transformed into heavenly ones ("the body of His glory"), "bodies that are suitable to the life of heaven" (O'Brien, p. 465; see 1 Corinthians 15:50). This transformation is "no biggie," seeing it will be done by One powerful ("power" is the Greek word, *dunamis*, from which we get our English word, "dynamite") enough to subdue everything (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 and Philippians 2:10). One day, Paul and the Philippians would "attain to the resurrection from the dead" (3:11). Then, and only then, could they say that they had "arrived."<sup>136</sup>

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whose eyes are ever fixed on the pass amongst the hills through which the relieving forces are to come."

<sup>136</sup>"The Christian has not truly arrived until he arrives in glory" (Hendriksen, p. 187).

## Discussion Questions for Philippians 3:17-21

1. (based on 3:18) Why do you suppose Paul wept about this?

*Possible answers: because, according to the next verse, he knew the end of these individuals; because he so cherished the cross of Christ, which these individuals were defaming*

2. (based on 3:20) What are some of the reasons we should eagerly wait for the Lord's return?

*Possible answers: our glorification, as the next verse goes on to speak of; Christ being glorified by His glory being seen, John 17:24 and 2 Thessalonians 1:10; reunion with those who have gone to heaven before us; no more vexation of soul, 2 Peter 2:7-8; being with Jesus, 1 Thessalonians 4:17*

***Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. (4:1)***

In light of the preceding paragraph of 3:17-21 (the reason why the “therefore” here in 4:1 is there for), Paul exhorts the Philippians to “stand firm” (cf. 1:27 and 1 Corinthians 15:58).<sup>137</sup> In addition to once again using the endearing terminology of “beloved” (cf. 2:12), “brethren” (cf. 1:12, 3:1, 13, and 17), and “long to see” (cf. 1:8), Paul calls the Philippians his “joy and crown” (he calls the Thessalonians the same in 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20). In light of the eschatological (i.e., pertaining to the last times) context of this passage (cf. 3:20-21), as well as the eschatological context of the parallel passage of 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, the Philippians were Paul’s joy and crown in that they would be Paul’s cause for rejoicing in the day of Christ (cf. 2:16 and comments on), as well as part of the reason why Paul would receive one of the crowns he would receive on that day.<sup>138</sup>

***I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. (4:2)***

A recurring theme weaved throughout Paul’s epistle to the Philippians up to this point has been the need for unity. Two key contributors to the disunity problem in Philippi were two women in the church, Euodia and Syntyche.<sup>139</sup> The specifics of their “spat” are not specified.<sup>140</sup> Their spat was a serious one, though, as the epistle would be publicly read to the congregation upon Epaphroditus’ arrival with it.<sup>141</sup> Paul urges these two women to

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<sup>137</sup>“In light of the admonition of v. 17, the warning examples of vv. 18-19, the magnificent assurance that the Philippians’ commonwealth is in heaven, and that they await the Lord Jesus’ return to transform them completely (vv. 20-21), they are exhorted to stand firm” (O’Brien, p. 475).

<sup>138</sup>According to Revelation 4:10, Paul, like all other church-age believers, will one day cast such crowns at the feet of Jesus.

<sup>139</sup>“It is probable that the hints of church disharmony to which Paul had frequently alluded earlier in the epistle had some relationship to these two individuals” (Walvoord, p. 102).

<sup>140</sup>“They knew exactly what the issue was, which is why we do not; Paul did not have to reiterate in their hearing what they already knew in this regard” (Fee, p. 397). Wiersbe (2:73) conjectures: “Perhaps they both wanted to be president of the missionary guild or the choir!”

<sup>141</sup>Hughes (p. 164) quips: “If anyone was nodding off in the Philippian assembly while the letter was being read, they were awake now!”

think alike<sup>142</sup> “in the Lord,” i.e., to have the same selfless attitude exhibited by Christ (cf. 2:5-8). Since attitude leads to action (see comments on 2:3-8), Paul knew that the desired change in action (unity) would not come about unless there was first a change in attitude (humility).

***Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. (4:3)***

Since Paul could not personally deal with the situation between Euodia and Syntyche, he enlists the assistance of someone on the scene. Who is this someone, this “true companion”? “Companion” transliterated is *suzugos*. Many interpreters (such as Kent and O’Brien) think that this is a common name (Syzygos). In support of this position is the fact that Paul uses common names both immediately before (Euodia and Syntyche) and after (Clement). Furthermore, Paul may be making a play on this man’s name, much as he does with the name Onesimus in Philemon 11 (the name Onesimus means “useful”). Another strong option (held by Fee and F. F. Bruce) is that Paul is referring to Luke. Though Luke was with Paul early on in Paul’s imprisonment (see Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 24), he apparently was not later on, when Philippians was written (Timothy is the only associate of Paul mentioned in the book). If it is true that Luke oversaw the church at Philippi for an extended period of time earlier (see footnote 6), it is quite conceivable that he was there once again. Yet another possibility is that Paul is referring to Epaphroditus. What made Euodia and Syntyche’s behavior all the more galling for Paul is the fact that they had at one time been partners with Paul in the gospel (cf. 1:5), sharing his struggle in it (cf. 1:27, where “striving together” translates the same Greek verb translated “shared . . . struggle” here in 4:3). Euodia and Syntyche, a man named Clement, and several others were Paul’s co-workers (cf. 2:25, as well as Romans 16:21 and Philemon 24) in the gospel. Such individuals had their names recorded in the book of life (cf. Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 15, and 21:27), the “registry” of all believers.

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<sup>142</sup>The Greek words translated “to live in harmony” in 4:2 in the NASB can be literally translated “to think the same thing.” The same Greek words are translated “being of the same mind” by the NASB in 2:2 (cf. NASB’s marginal note for 4:2).

***Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! (4:4)***

As he does in so many of his other epistles (see, for example, 2 Corinthians 13:11-12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22), Paul concludes the epistle to the Philippians with a string of exhortations in 4:4-9, beginning with verse 4's "rejoice in the Lord always" (cf. 3:1 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16).<sup>143</sup> The circumstances under which Paul writes these words, as well as the circumstances under which the Philippians read them (cf. 1:28-30), certainly adds to their significance. Rejoicing is something one determines to do (cf. 1:18's "I will rejoice") regardless of circumstances (cf. Habakkuk 3:17-18, Acts 16:25, Romans 5:3, 2 Corinthians 8:2, and James 1:2). Accordingly, it can be commanded and done always.

***Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. (4:5)***

Paul gives a second concluding exhortation, the significance of which is also magnified in light of the circumstances surrounding its writer and recipients. Like Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 10:1), the Philippians were to exhibit a gentle spirit (cf. Titus 3:2), especially in response to persecution (cf. 1 Peter 2:21-23). This gentle spirit was to be exhibited toward all men, including those opposing them (cf. 1:28-30). As an incentive, Paul mentions the fact that "the Lord is near." "Near" can be viewed either in a spatial (the incentive being God's omnipresence) or temporal (the incentive being the imminency of the Lord's return) sense. If the first, the incentive is that the Philippians are not "going it alone" (cf. Psalm 23:4, 46:1, 139:10, 145:18, Matthew 28:20, and Hebrews 13:5b-6). If the second, the incentive is that the Lord may return at any moment, thus putting a permanent end to their persecution (cf. James 5:8) and punishing their persecutors (cf. Luke 12:45-46) and/or calling them to account for sinfully responding to mistreatment.

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<sup>143</sup>Focus on the book of life (at the end of verse 3), coupled with the words of Luke 10:20 ("rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven"), may have added fuel to Paul's fire in verse 4.

## Discussion Questions for Philippians 4:1-5

1. In verse 1, Paul exhorts the Philippians to stand firm, based on what he has said previously (the reason the "therefore" in verse 1 is there for). What has Paul said in the previous paragraph (3:17-21) that would prompt him to give this exhortation?

*Possible answers: they needed to stand firm because of the danger of falsehood, vs. 18-19; they needed to stand firm in order to receive the future blessing implied in vs. 20-21 (perseverance due to the prize)*

2. In verse 2, Paul speaks of the disharmony between two women in the church. According to this verse (which literally says that they were to think the same thing), what was the root cause of their disharmony?

*Answer: they were not thinking the same*

Therefore, what would be the solution?

*Answer: thinking the same thing, specifically, thinking of the other as more important than oneself [2:3-4], as did the Lord [2:5-8], and thinking of the gospel as most important [1:27]*

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

Paul's third concluding exhortation is a prohibition against worry. If anyone was tempted to worry, it was Paul and the Philippians, considering the circumstances both were facing (including potential martyrdom). While in one sense it is proper to be concerned (cf. Timothy in 2:20, as well as Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:28), in another sense it is sinful to be so (cf. Martha in Luke 10:41).<sup>144</sup> The classic passage in regards to the second is Matthew 6:25-34. Rather than worry, Paul exhorts the Philippians to pray ("why worry when you can pray?").<sup>145</sup> Like Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19:14-19//Isaiah 37:14-20, Paul wanted the Philippians to "spread it out before the LORD" (2 Kings 19:14//Isaiah 37:14), to "take it to the Lord in prayer" (cf. Psalm 55:22 and 1 Peter 5:7). Paul uses three terms for prayer ("prayer"; "supplication"; "requests"); however, they are "not significantly distinguishable" (Fee, p. 409). The Philippians were to pray "with thanksgiving" (cf. Colossians 4:2), in spite of their suffering (cf. 1:29 and comments on).

***And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (4:7)***

Obedience to the command to pray instead of worry (v. 6) brings with it a special blessing, "the peace of God" (v. 7; cf. John 14:27 and 16:33). While "peace *with* God" is *positional* (cf. Romans 5:1), the "peace *of* God" is *experiential*. The peace of God, like the love of God (Ephesians 3:19), is incomprehensible, i.e., beyond the ability of the finite, human intellect to fully (but not truly) comprehend. This peace "guards" our "hearts and minds" (like the three prayer terms above, "heart" and "mind" are not significantly distinguishable here). The Greek verb translated "guard" is a military term (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:32; remember also that Paul is being guarded by a Roman soldier as he writes this). God's peace guards the entrance to our minds, keeping worrisome thoughts from invading. As the Philippians followed Paul's admonition in verse 6, the inner peace promised in verse 7 would be theirs, no doubt leading to outer peace among one another.

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<sup>144</sup>"To care is a virtue, but to foster care is sin" (Muller, quoted in Fee, p. 408).

<sup>145</sup>"The way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything" (R. Rainy, quoted in O'Brien, p. 492). "I have yet to meet a chronic worrier who enjoys an excellent prayer life" (Carson, p. 112).

***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 on these things. (4:8)***

Paul introduces the last two of his concluding exhortations with “finally.” The second-to-last concluding exhortation is to think properly, dwelling on<sup>146</sup> what is true, honorable<sup>147</sup>, right, pure, lovely, reputable, excellent<sup>148</sup>, and praiseworthy.<sup>149</sup> Once again, Paul’s main concern is the mind (attitude precedes action, belief determines behavior). The “if” clauses at the end of the verse are what are called “first class conditions” in Greek. A first class condition is one in which the statement being made is true to fact. Hence, the “if”s can be translated “since.” In other words, excellent and praiseworthy things do in fact exist. Our job is to make sure our minds dwell only on such things.

***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. (4:9)***

Paul’s final concluding exhortation is for the Philippians to practice what they had learned from Paul, both formally (“learned and received”) and informally (“heard and seen”)<sup>150</sup>. With respect to the second pair, Paul (as in 3:17) is calling on the Philippians to imitate him, both in talk and in walk. As the Philippians heeded this final admonition, the “God of peace<sup>151</sup>” (cf. Romans 15:33, 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 2

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<sup>146</sup>Giving focused consideration to (Fee, p. 415). Hughes (p. 177) mentions that the Greek verb is *logizomai*, “from which we get the mathematical word *logarithm*. Paul commands the same deliberate, prolonged contemplation of these virtues that it takes to weigh a mathematical problem.”

<sup>147</sup>Translated “dignified” in 1 Timothy 3:11, Titus 2:2, and 7 (cf. “dignity” in 1 Timothy 3:8).

<sup>148</sup>Translated “moral excellence” in 2 Peter 1:5.

<sup>149</sup>Things that Hendriksen (p. 199) calls the right kind of food for thought and “the right pasture for the Christian mind to graze in.”

<sup>150</sup>On the importance of what we teach with our *lives*, in relation to what we teach with our *lips*, see comments on 3:17. Henry (p. 744) writes: “Observe Paul’s doctrine and life were of a piece. What they saw in him was the same thing with what they heard from him. He could propose himself as well as his doctrine to their imitation.”

Thessalonians 3:16, and Hebrews 13:20) would be with them.

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<sup>151</sup>In the original, a definite article (“the”) precedes “peace.” The peace being spoken of is likely the peace of verse 7. Not only does Paul want the peace that God gives to be with the Philippians, but even more so, the God who gives the peace.

## Discussion Questions for Philippians 4:6-9

1. (based on verse 6) When does proper care and concern become worry?

*One possible answer: when the object of it becomes ourselves rather than others*

2. (based on verse 6) What is it about prayer that makes it a cure for worry?

*Possible answers: prayer helps us to turn control of the future over to God (1 Peter 5:7), rather than trying to control it ourselves, which worry seeks to do; prayer helps us to trust God's concern for our future (Matthew 6:26 and 30), rather than distrusting it, which worry does (Matthew 6:30's "You of little faith")*

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

In the midst of a typical Pauline conclusion (string of concluding exhortations in 4:4-9, greetings in 4:21-22, and benediction in 4:23), Paul atypically injects 4:10-20, an acknowledgment of his reception of the Philippian love offering sent through Epaphroditus, his “thank you note” to them. When Paul received the offering, he “rejoiced in the Lord<sup>152</sup> (cf. 3:1 and 4:4) greatly” (Greek *megalos*). The reason for Paul’s rejoicing was not so much the monetary gift per se<sup>153</sup> (as the following verses will assert), as it was the thought<sup>154</sup> behind it.<sup>155</sup> On several occasions in the past (4:15-16; cf. 2 Corinthians 11:9), the Philippians had financially supported Paul. For an intervening period of time, however, they had been unable (not unwilling) to do so. This is in contrast to those Wiersbe (2:97) speaks of: “Many Christians today have the opportunities, but they lack the concern.” “At last” (cf. Romans 1:10), the opportunity had presented itself again, and the Philippians jumped at it.

***Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. (4:11)***

Paul did not want his exuberance over the receiving of the love offering to be misconstrued (“not that”; cf. 3:12). His joy was not based on the fact that their love offering met his material needs (v. 18). His material needs were ultimately inconsequential, because (“for”) Paul had learned to be content<sup>156</sup> (cf. 1 Timothy 6:6-8 and Hebrews 13:5a), regardless of

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<sup>152</sup>“In the Lord” indicates the only ground or basis upon which true rejoicing can take place (see comments on 3:1).

<sup>153</sup> Although Roman prisoners were dependent upon such support, since the Roman government did not provide for necessities.

<sup>154</sup>“Concern” is a Greek verb meaning “to think.”

<sup>155</sup>“Like a parent who receives a gift from his child, he rejoices more in the fact that the child gives it than in the gift itself” (Walvoord, p. 116).

<sup>156</sup>The Greek adjective translated “content” was used to describe the Stoic doctrine of self-sufficiency, “that man should be sufficient unto himself for all things, and able, by the power of his own will, to resist the force of circumstances” (M. R. Vincent, quoted in O’Brien, p. 521). Contrary to the Stoics, Paul bases his sufficiency in Christ (v. 13), not self.

his financial<sup>157</sup> status. Notice that Paul implies here that contentment does not come naturally, but is something that has to be learned (and re-learned).

***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. (4:12)***

Neither want nor wealth (Fee, p. 435) had any real effect upon Paul. Paul did not allow himself to become a victim of circumstance, but was a victor over it (Wiersbe, 2:97). Paul certainly knew what it was like to be in want (see 1 Corinthians 4:11 and 2 Corinthians 11:27), but in wealth? Perhaps to Paul, being in wealth meant those rare occasions when he had the basic necessities of life/was not suffering deprivation. Regardless, Paul knew how to handle either scenario (a rare skill, indeed). In regards to handling prosperity, Maclaren (p. 62) writes: "To carry a full cup without spilling is proverbially difficult."

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<sup>157</sup>Paul was far from being content with his spiritual growth, however (see 3:12f).

***I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (4:13)***

Paul could handle want or wealth equally well because of the ability Christ gave him (cf. John 15:5, Ephesians 6:10, Colossians 1:11, 1 Timothy 1:12, and 2 Timothy 4:17) to do so. In context, “all things” refers to the ability to handle want, wealth, or anything in between.<sup>158</sup>

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

Getting back (“nevertheless”) to a direct discussion of their gift (begun in v. 10), Paul commends the Philippians for their partnership<sup>159</sup> with him in the gospel (cf. 1:5), their gift being a tangible representation of this reality (cf. Galatians 6:6, where “share” is *koinoneo*, —see footnote 159, and 3 John 8).

***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; (4:15)***

Paul continues his commendation of the Philippians by rehearsing the fact that the

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<sup>158</sup>This is the first of two verses in this passage (the other being v. 19) that is frequently taken out of its context. “This favourite statement of the apostle has often been quoted without regard to its context, and understood at a popular level to mean that, when Paul was empowered by Christ, nothing was beyond his capabilities” (O’Brien, p. 526). “All things” (*panta*) in verse 13 refers back to “any and every circumstance” (*panti kai pasi*) in verse 12, *panta* (v. 13), *panti* (v. 12), and *pasi* (v. 12) being derivatives of the Greek adjective *pas*. Hughes (p. 187) writes: “Do you want to fly? Go to flight school. But please do not take the controls of an airplane reciting Philippians 4:13. Are you a non-golfer who wants to shoot 70? Understand that muttering, ‘I can do all things through him’ before you tee off will turn your fellow golfers into atheists! However, if you are following Christ’s call and serving him faithfully in the task to which he has called you, Paul’s confident words are yours.”

<sup>159</sup>“Share with me” is *sugkoinoneo*, an intensified form of the Greek verb *koinoneo*, “to share” (cf. “partakers” in 1:7, the noun form of this verb).

Philippians did not just stand out, but stood alone, in financially supporting Paul. After founding the church in Philippi in Acts 16, Paul moved on to Thessalonica, Berea, Athens (Acts 17), and Corinth (Acts 18), leaving Macedonia en route from Berea to Athens. While at Corinth, he apparently received a monetary gift from the church at Philippi (Acts 18:5 and 2 Corinthians 11:9). Paul likely has this gift in mind here in verse 15.

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

Backing up chronologically, Paul also commends the Philippians for their financial support while he was in Thessalonica (in Acts 17:1-9). Their generosity to Paul was exhibited even prior to this (Acts 16:15 and 34).

## Discussion Questions for Philippians 4:10-16

1. In this section, Paul directly expresses his praise to God (verse 10), indirectly expresses his thanksgiving to the Philippians (verse 10), and gives testimony to his contentment when in want (verses 11-12). What underlying heart attitude that Paul has been extolling in the book of Philippians do all three of these reflect?

*Answer: humility (a humble person will be giving thanks to God and to others because he realizes he does not deserve any gift, monetary or otherwise; and a humble person will be content when he is in want because he realizes that he does not deserve the little that he has)*

2. (based on verses 11-12) What lessons need to be learned when in poverty?

*Possible answers: being content with what God has given you; not being covetous of what God has given others; learning to give to God and to others; not stealing, Proverbs 30:8b-9*

What lessons need to be learned when in prosperity?

*Possible answers: being content with what God has given you; not being covetous of what God has given others; learning to give to God and to others; not becoming self sufficient/forgetting God, Deuteronomy 8:17-18a, Proverbs 30:8b-9, and 1 Timothy 6:17*

3. Is the promise of verse 13 an unlimited one? In other words, is Paul's point that the Christian, because he or she has Christ, can do absolutely anything?

*Answer: no*

If limited, what are the limitations?

*Answer: it is limited by the overall context of Scripture—the Christian can do only those things that are God's will for him or her to do; and it is limited by the immediate context of the passage, with the "all things" of verse 13 referring back to what is spoken of in verses 11-12, the ability to be content in poverty or in prosperity*

***Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. (4:17)***

As before (v. 11), Paul does not want his words to be misconstrued (“not that”). The gift itself is inconsequential. As he has done so often before throughout the epistle, Paul puts the Philippians’ interests ahead of his own. Paul’s concern is not any financial benefit he may derive from their gift, but the spiritual benefit they will derive from it. Their gift is like a deposit made in the bank of heaven (F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, p. 154) which is accruing compound interest (Matthew 6:20). God will reward their generosity, in this life and/or the next. Hughes (p. 192) writes: “The truth is, the only money that we will see again is that which we give away.” Jim Elliot famously said: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

***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. (4:18)***

Paul, as it were, gives the Philippians a receipt for their gift, at the bottom of which he writes “paid in full.”<sup>160</sup> Switching metaphors (from financial to sacrificial), Paul characterizes the Philippians’ gift as ultimately given to God (Matthew 25:40). The imagery is that of the burnt offering (Genesis 8:20-21, Exodus 29:18, 25, 41, Leviticus 1:9, 13, and 17), the smoke of which ascended to heaven, filling God’s “nostrils” (an anthropomorphism<sup>161</sup>) with “a fragrant aroma” (cf. Ephesians 5:2). Such a sacrifice is “acceptable” (cf. Romans 12:1, 15:16, and 1 Peter 2:5) and “well-pleasing” (cf. Hebrews 13:16) to God.

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<sup>160</sup>The Greek verb translated “received in full” was regularly written at the bottom of a Greek receipt (O’Brien, p. 540).

<sup>161</sup>An anthropomorphism is a description of God in human terms for the sake of human understanding.

***And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (4:19)***

As with verse 13, this verse is frequently taken out of context. In context, it is a promise to the Philippians (and, by extension, to any who do what the Philippians did<sup>162</sup>) that those who sacrificially give<sup>163</sup> towards the cause of Christ will not be left destitute (cf. Proverbs 11:25, 19:17, and 2 Corinthians 9:6). God will supply our needs, not our “greeds.” The Philippians had abundantly<sup>164</sup> filled (“amply supplied” in v. 18) Paul; God, in turn, would abundantly<sup>165</sup> fill (“supply”) the Philippians.

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

Paul concludes the section of 4:10-20 with an appropriate doxology.<sup>166</sup> In light of the “glorious” ending of verse 19, Paul cannot help but burst forth into praise. “When one thinks on the ‘riches of God’ lavished on us in Christ Jesus, what else is there to do but to praise and worship” (Fee, p. 455)? God is the believer’s “Father” both in creation and salvation.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup>It takes faith to believe and, thus, act upon such a promise as this. “In a sense, every gift is an act of faith because, in many cases, justification could be found for retaining the gift for the selfish benefit of the donor” (Walvoord, p. 117).

<sup>163</sup>The sacrificial nature of the Philippians’ giving is alluded to in the first several verses of 2 Corinthians 8.

<sup>164</sup>“Have an abundance” in verse 18 is a Greek verb that means excess and fullness that overflows set bounds (O’Brien, p. 524).

<sup>165</sup>God would supply the Philippians “according to,” not just “from” or “out of,” His riches (cf. Ephesians 3:16).

<sup>166</sup>For similar doxologies in Paul, see Romans 16:27, Galatians 1:5, Ephesians 3:21, 1 Timothy 1:17, and 2 Timothy 4:18. See also such a doxology by Peter in 1 Peter 4:11 and by Jude in Jude 25.

<sup>167</sup>Salvation is a spiritual creation (2 Corinthians 5:17 and Ephesians 2:10).

***Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. (4:21)***

As customary in epistolary literature, Paul closes the book of Philippians with some greetings (vs. 21-22) and a benediction (v. 23).<sup>168</sup> Most likely, Paul wrote the final three verses with his own hand (see footnote 11). Unlike the close of some of his other epistles (for example, Romans), Paul does not greet anyone specifically by name here in Philippians. This seems especially unusual in Philippians, in light of the intimate relationship Paul had with this church. The likely reason why Paul chose instead to give a generic greeting to each of the Philippians (“greet every saint in Christ Jesus<sup>169</sup>”) was to foster the unity stressed throughout the epistle. Among those with Paul in Rome when he wrote Philippians was Timothy (see 1:1).

***All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household. (4:22)***

The “saints” are most likely members of the church at Rome (many of whom are mentioned at the close of the Roman epistle). “Those of Caesar’s household” likely were employees of the Emperor. What a spiritual coup! Men and women had been saved right under the nose of one who arrogantly claimed for himself the titles, “lord” and “savior.” The gospel certainly had not been bound (2 Timothy 2:9), though Paul was (see comments on 1:13)!

***The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. (4:23)***

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<sup>168</sup>Among Paul’s epistles, greetings are absent in Galatians, Ephesians, and 1 Timothy. Every Pauline epistle concludes with a benediction.

<sup>169</sup>For the significance of the designation, “saints” and the phrase, “in Christ Jesus,” see comments on 1:1.

The conventional Greek “sign off” was “farewell” (see, for example, Acts 15:29). Paul, however, “Christianizes” it with a benediction of grace (cf. Galatians 6:18 and Philemon 25)<sup>170</sup>, perhaps a subtle reminder that one can fare well only by the grace of God. There is no great significance to “spirit” here. Since the spirit is the “real you,” Paul simply means “you” (compare, for example, 1 Corinthians 16:23).

### **Discussion Questions for Philippians 4:17-23**

1. (in relation to 4:19) John Walvoord contends that “in a sense, every [monetary] gift

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<sup>170</sup>“In Paul’s hand conventions are never merely conventional” (Fee, p. 462).

[to God] is an act of faith.” How so?

*Answer: when we give money to God we are trusting Him to meet our future needs with money other than the money we have given*

2. Besides 4:19 (and by implication 4:17), what are some of the other promises in Scripture that promise God’s blessing upon those who give to Him?

*Possible answers: Proverbs 11:25, 19:17, Luke 6:38, and 2 Corinthians 9:6*

3. Paul’s doxology in 4:20 calls upon God to be glorified forever (as do other such doxologies—see Romans 16:27, Galatians 1:5, Ephesians 3:21, 1 Timothy 1:17, 2 Timothy 4:18, 1 Peter 4:11, and Jude 25). Why?

*Answer: because God is infinitely worthy of worship, and only an eternity of time can give God His due*

4. In 4:21, Paul greets “every” saint in Philippi, rather than singling out some of them (as he does in many of his other epistles). Why might Paul have done so in this particular epistle?

*Answer: because he wanted to one final time reinforce the unity he has been emphasizing throughout this letter*