



Reflections on Philippians

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Introduction

I'm really not sure what to call this; is it a book, a Bible study, a devotional, a small group study, a commentary? To be honest, it isn't quite any of those things, yet it has aspects of all three. It's hardly long enough to be a book; it isn't complete enough to be a commentary. It's not quite a devotional, but it could be used for devotions. It's not quite a Bible study, but it could easily be used for that, too. If you're creative, it could also be used to teach a class, but it isn't in a proper format to be curriculum.

One thing differs here from the first two collections I have released. For this collection, I have not included discussion questions, but anyone could make up their own for use in a discussion or class setting.

This little "document" is freely given to you. By all means, feel free to share it with others for free. Please do not use any of this for commercial purposes! Make use of whatever helps you grow in your relationship with our Lord and anything here that isn't helpful, by all means set it aside. Helping other believers in their walk with Christ is my only purpose here!

All blessings to you in Christ!

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Chapter 1

The Apostle Paul sat in jail. He had been arrested for his testimony about Jesus and the power of His Gospel; yep, there he was, chained up in jail alone, miserable, unhappy and afraid... or so we might have thought. I wonder, what would I do if that guy chained up in an ancient prison cell had been me?

Yet it wasn't me, it was Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. Let's see what he was doing in this miserable circumstance.

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

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

Philippians 1:3-8

Maybe it isn't all that surprising that he was writing letters, after all he was neither the first nor the last prisoner to write letters home, but from these verses we can see that he's also been praying. Maybe that isn't such a shock either, lots of prisoners pray in prison, some for the very first time I would imagine, but did you notice that he isn't praying for himself?

Paul is remembering his friends in Philippi, and giving thanks to God for them. He doesn't sound miserable, for he says that he is filled with joy because of the partnership of the Philippians with him in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It would seem that our Paul feels thankful and joyful, because of the people in Philippi for they share not only in the gospel, but in God's grace with Paul. Now I don't know about you, but I'm guessing that God's grace might not come to mind for me if I was locked in prison and bound in chains.

Paul misses his friends.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:9-11

Paul prays for his friends. Look carefully at his prayer, for it contains something for us to reflect upon: Paul's prayer is not just for them to prosper in their faith and do well, it is for them to grow in their love, knowledge and depth of insight, so that they may be found pure and blameless on

the day of the Lord so that they might give glory to God! Yes, that's right, Paul's prayer is one of purpose; God's purpose.

While the rest of us might be demanding answers from God, Paul is praying for God's purpose, for God's glory. Yes, let us reflect upon this!

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

Philippians 1:12-14

Paul is in prison awaiting trial before Caesar. He has been taken to Italy and is being guarded by the troops assigned to Caesar's palace guard, a rather tough bunch to say the least. Last time, we saw that Paul was there in jail writing letters, and praying, but not for himself. Unlike what you or I might be doing, Paul is in prayer of thanksgiving for those to whom he writes, for they are remaining in their faith and spreading the gospel. In these verses, Paul reveals that he has been doing more than that.

It has "become clear" that he is in jail for Christ, so we can infer that he has been talking quite a lot as well. It would seem that he has been speaking boldly about Christ while in jail, and that has emboldened other believers to do the same. Caesar's palace guard has heard all about Jesus, and the word has gotten out. Caesar's entire palace has heard about Christ and the gospel because Paul is being held in jail! Let's be careful here not to over indulge in speculation; Paul didn't say that the whole palace has become Christian, but they have heard, and that is surprising enough under the circumstances.

There has been another result, and that is the effect this has had on the Christians in the larger community. They have become fearless in their determination to spread the good news in the city of Rome.

It may be hard for us to fully comprehend how significant this was, for we live in an age of information. It's very easy for us to assume that by this time everyone would have heard about Jesus, but that cannot be true. The Roman Empire did not have satellite news, 24 hour reporting, radio, internet or even newspapers; the printing press was still almost 1,500 years in the future. The only way news could be spread was by word of mouth; one person to the next. For the gospel to travel all the way from Judea to Rome was a huge deal and Paul was spending his time in jail spreading the gospel. For those few Christians who were in Italy at this time to hear that Caesar's palace guard were listening to the gospel meant that anyone in Rome was likely to listen, and they would have understood that this was a huge step forward.

Historical details aside, what does this say to us today? Put yourself in Paul's situation; would we be so bold? Would we be able to stop feeling sorry for ourselves long enough to stay on

purpose? Do we ever stay on purpose when things aren't going our way? Has it even occurred to us that we should have a purpose?

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

Philippians 1:15-18a

Paul has been telling the Philippians that he is rejoicing because as a result of his imprisonment the gospel is being preached in Rome, and now he continues his thoughts on that subject. It would seem that there are people who are preaching the gospel with impure motives, that they would like to stir up trouble for Paul. He hasn't told us exactly how this would happen for him, so I will leave the speculation to others, but let's be honest; there are those today who preach for the wrong motives as well.

I have seen and heard of some who preach out of envy and rivalry, have you? I have seen some who simply can't stand the thought of anybody else serving Christ in that way, who are always afraid that someone might supplant them or their ministry. Maybe they are afraid for their job or their position, or maybe they just have a sense of inferiority. Whatever the reason, they are only good "team players" if everyone else is on their team. It's sad; really, for it should never be this way in the Body of believers, for all of us are on His Team! Most that I have seen, however, serve out of goodwill. As Paul has noted here, they serve out of love for others. As Paul put it, they know that he was put here for the defense of the gospel. Yes, isn't that why all of us are "put here"?

"Selfish ambition" may be a reason that many preach, thinking that they can "be somebody" by attracting followers, just as a celebrity might attract fans. This sort of thing has no place in the church, and yet perhaps it is more common than we might like to admit.

I know about a particular case where there was a minister leading a growing church. He was doing good work, and yet like all of us, wasn't good at everything. His leadership considered adding an "associate" to staff who was much more experienced and who could handle the areas that the minister had problems in. When the minister heard about this, he became quite upset; all he could see was that the leaders were thinking he wasn't doing the job right. He felt that if they added someone to help him, the people would see him as having been rebuked in some way. When the other guy heard of this, he removed himself from consideration, not wanting to cause any division. Was the growth and health of that church damaged by this? Would it have been even more vibrant had things worked out differently? We will never know; maybe that guy coming on board just wasn't God's plan, but I think you get the idea of what can happen... Right about now, we might want to jump on the bandwagon of condemnation and indignation, but before we do, maybe we should see how Paul reacts...

Paul recognized the situation, and while he did not endorse false motives in any way, he saw that good was coming out of it in spite of everything. What did it matter anyway? For whatever reason, the gospel of Christ was being proclaimed, and that is the most important thing.

Have you noticed how Paul views things? He isn't overly concerned with his unfortunate circumstances, he isn't overly concerned that everything isn't always ideal, his sole concern is that the gospel of Jesus Christ goes forth so that some will be saved, that their sins may be forgiven, and that they may inherit eternal life. I wonder, is there a lesson in this for us today?

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

Philippians 1:18b-26

Have you ever wanted to see what real faith looks like? Read this passage!

As he waits for his trial, knowing fully that the likely verdict will be death, he believes that his situation will result in his deliverance; either way. He believes that even should he die, that he will not be "ashamed" and that he will have the courage to exalt Christ in his body. You can see the connection he makes between "ashamed" on the one hand and "courage" on the other. If he is sentenced to die, he will walk to the execution with his head held high as one who is looking forward to being with Christ.

Then comes that famous verse, verse 21: *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

Just look at what troubles him; he is having a hard time deciding which is better; life or death. If he lives on in the body, he will have much work to do for the cause of Christ, but he is to die in the body, he will be with Christ. What a choice! He would rather be with Christ and away from this life, and yet he seems to think that maybe it would be better for everyone else if he remains alive a while longer so that he may continue to mentor them in the faith.

Let's think about this, pray about this and reflect. This was no hypothetical question for Paul; it was very real. What was his primary concern? It was to continue the glorious work of Christ here on earth so that many would come to salvation. Paul was 100% motivated by God's purpose. How does this strike you?

How does this strike me? To be honest about it, it's a little embarrassing. How often do I think I need a "break"? How often do I hesitate because I don't want to tick anybody off, or because I don't want to look foolish...? Could I look death square in the eye and not blink?

I'll get back to you on that.

Yes, dear reader, this passage is one for deep reflection and self-examination. Here's the question to ask:

Is God speaking to me in this text?

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

Philippians 1:27-30

Paul winds up the first chapter of this letter with an exhortation to stand firm in unity, come what may. You might notice that this is a common New Testament theme, important as it is for all of us to heed. He urges the people to conduct themselves in a way that is "worthy of the gospel", an interesting way to approach the subject. The rest of the letter will show what this "worthiness" looks like.

The reason that Paul gives for this is also quite interesting, for it might not be what we would have expected. Notice that his concern doesn't revolve around any legal concept, as so many teach, but rather one of testimony. Paul tells them that if they behave in this way, he will know that they are standing firm; he states this as though their manner of living were a sign of some sort. The Philippians should stand firm fearlessly, in the face of any opposition... but who would oppose good behavior?

Then, in the latter part of verse 28, Paul comes right out and tells them that the way they conduct themselves, particularly in the face of opposition, is a sign to the world that they will be destroyed, while the followers of Christ will be saved by God. Have you ever thought of behaving yourself as a sign before? Have you ever thought of it as a sign that those who don't behave well will be destroyed? Maybe not.

When God made His covenant with Abraham, there was a sign of the covenant which was circumcision. Everyone would know that a man who had been circumcised was a covenant partner with God. When God made His covenant with Moses, there was a sign of the covenant; keeping the Sabbath. Everyone would know that the Israelites were God's covenant people because they kept the Sabbath. The New Covenant established by Christ has a sign also, and

that is that we are imitators of Jesus Christ, and this is what Paul is referring to here. Everyone who sees a person living as Christ would live knows they are seeing Christ's covenant partner. This imitation of Christ has little to do with following a written code of rules and regulations, it has everything to do with loving others and putting others first. It also has to do with putting such a high priority on His love that we will be willing to endure hardship at the hands of those who oppose Christ.

The last part of this passage refers to suffering and enduring a struggle. Our struggle isn't really with any person or persons, for those who oppose the gospel really don't have a clue what is at stake. Our struggle is with the spiritual forces that are in opposition to Christ, just as Paul's struggle was. Recall that Paul didn't seem to hate his captors, far from it in fact, for He was there in jail, sharing Christ's love with them, and this is exactly the kind of thing he is calling upon each of us to do.

Chapter 2

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Philippians 2:1-4

You will notice that this passage begins with the word "therefore" and as we know, this word is used when one is drawing a conclusion from what had come just before. In this case, you'll recall from the last post that Paul has been exhorting the Philippians to behave in a manner that is "worthy of the Gospel". If we are going to behave in this way, the way Jesus Himself behaved, then we need to do certain things, to make some adjustments, and in this passage, Paul tells us what they are.

Paul sets out an "if - then" statement here as a manner of encouragement for the readers. Here's the "if":

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, (v. 1)

It is as if he was saying, "Look people, if you've gotten anything from your relationship with Christ..." If we've received any encouragement, comfort, common sharing, tenderness and compassion... Then:

then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. (v. 2)

So, if you've received any of those blessings, then here's what Paul wants you to do. You'll notice that these are all things associated with unity as believers. He could have simply told them to quit fooling around, arguing and disputing amongst themselves and be like Jesus!

Verses 3 and 4 carry on his thought: We are not to do things out of selfish interests, self-centeredness or conceit. We should be humble, and put others ahead of ourselves. We should not be concerned with our own interests, but with the interests of others. Can you think of a shorter way of saying this?

Good, I thought you'd see it: Love one another. Yep, that's the key!

OK, remember in the last post where I said that being imitators of Christ was the sign of the New Covenant?

Guess what?

That means that we should love our neighbor as ourselves. It doesn't mean follow the rules, for rules are way too shallow; it means love your neighbor as yourself. If we do that, we won't need to worry about any rules, we'll be in no danger, for the whole Law is fulfilled if we love God and love our neighbor.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

*Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!*

Philippians 2:5-9

Paul continues to describe what it is like for us to be humble and "worthy of the Gospel" using in this instance the very example of Jesus Himself.

Jesus was by His nature God. Imagine what it could be like for Him to set aside the glory of heaven to be born in a stable; what earthly prince would so lower himself? He took on the very nature of a servant when He became a man. Now many of us might not be used to thinking of ourselves that way, but in God's sight, that's what we are: His servants and all of the riches on earth cannot change that simple fact. So Jesus took on our form, that of a servant, was born in the most humble circumstances into a working man's family. No privileges, no fancy title, no big name, just a working class guy.

As if this were not enough, Jesus, by nature God, became the servant of all, taking this to the point where He was willing to sacrifice Himself for the rest of His servants. Yet not only did He give Himself up for us, He gave Himself up to be crucified, of all things, the most terrible painful method of execution I know of. Think about it: There He was, beaten, ridiculed, tortured, stripped naked and nailed to a cross and then lifted up for all to see as He bore our sins. The people in the crowd, and there were plenty there, hurled insults at Him while He died very slowly in agony: A barbaric scene to say the least. And what had He done to deserve such treatment?

Nothing at all.

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

*and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Philippians 2:9-11

When it was all over, He was placed into a borrowed tomb. When they could finish His burial some 36 hours later, He had already risen from the grave! He returned to His glory and as a result of His remaining faithful to God's purpose, His is the name at which every knee should bow.

The reason that Paul has written this is that this is how we should live as Christ's followers. It is this kind of humility, purpose and selflessness that we should strive for. There is no greater example of love in action than the example of the life of Jesus; He is our role model.

Oh yes, how could I forget to mention that because of what He did in all of this selflessness, you and I have eternal life, and as His co-heirs, we too will arise in glory when the great day comes.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Philippians 2:12-13

"Fear and trembling"?

Thank you for asking!

Over the centuries, there have been some preachers and some commentators that have a field day with these verses. What they often do is to quote them something like this: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, lest..."

Do you see a problem? When you read the verses and compare them with the "quote" is something missing? Was something added? By the way, don't forget you must deal with the "therefore" that is the first word in verse 12. What does it refer to? It refers to 2:1-11; are these verses about going to hell? No way! They are about humility, godliness and the example of Christ which results in salvation... but don't forget that section also begins with "therefore" so we need to go all the way back to chapter 1, where Paul set the context, which is rejoicing in suffering because God's purpose is being advanced. Dear reader, these verses are not a threat that God is waiting for an excuse to smite somebody and ship them off to hell, they are about His purpose. As you will see shortly, this view is confirmed in the verses that follow, so fear not!

Let's start over: verse 12...

Notice how Paul's tone is one of encouragement; "...as you have always obeyed", keep it up! Continue "to work out your salvation" yes, you've been doing fine, keep it up! Also, let's not forget that he isn't talking about earning salvation, for salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, even more remember that salvation isn't the end of the story, it's the beginning. Nobody is talking about going to hell here; Paul is encouraging the people to live lives "worthy of the Gospel", "or it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose."

"Fear and trembling" is another way of saying "reverent awe" and in this context, the reverent awe isn't about God's wrath, and it is referring to God working out His purpose through you and me. Think about that for a moment, let's slow down; The God of all creation has a purpose. He is working at accomplishing this great purpose day and night, and He wants you to be involved so that He can work His purpose through you. What is His purpose? It's redemption, for His love for all people is so great that He wants to redeem them to Himself, and He wants you and I to be agents of His love. No sir, these verses are not scary threats, they are wonderful encouragement! That encouragement will continue in the verses that follow.

How very sad it is that so many have taken a phrase out of context to scare people! May God have mercy...

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Philippians 2:14-18

As we continue in this letter, Paul is still talking about being "worthy of the gospel" in a context of our need to find humility as Jesus did. We shouldn't be too surprised that he has found his way into grumbling and arguing. Those two things probably don't come out of humility very often, at least not in my experience. He urges us to drop those kinds of things that we might become pure and blameless children of God.

It strikes me as interesting the direction he goes from there. Notice that he puts this right into focus by contrasting this "crooked generation" with the result of being blameless children of God who "shine like stars." Think about the contrast, and the effect it would have if the followers of Christ shone like the stars while in this "crooked generation". Think about how that would look to the rest of the world around us; there would sure be a contrast.

Paul engages in a little personal reflection here as he points out that when he meets the Lord it would be obvious that he hadn't labored in vain, when the Philippians are shining like stars. When he goes on to use the term "poured out like a drink offering" he is telling them that even if he is executed, he will be filled with joy for the work of Christ in them, and urges the Philippians to be filled with joy as well.

Obviously, Paul has brought us back to purpose in saying this. For the followers of Christ to be pure and blameless children of God and to shine like stars in this dark world, is really not about star children, it's about their testimony and God's purpose. Think again of that contrast: What would we look like to those who have not yet followed Christ? Some will be irritated and full of criticism, but others will see the love of Christ and want to have some themselves, and it is for these that our testimony is so important. Yes, there is no way around the fact that God's purpose must always be at the forefront of our thinking as we follow Jesus down the path of life.

Philippians 2:19-30

In this section, Paul moves back into some personal comments. He is talking about two other men who are with him, but who are not prisoners, Timothy and Epaphroditus. In the first several verses, Paul is telling the Philippians that he is planning to send Timothy back to them so that he can bring more news back to Paul about how the Philippians are doing. Then comes what is probably the most significant part of the passage from our point of view:

I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

Philippians 2:20-22

Isn't it interesting that Paul says he has no one else like Timothy, because he will show "genuine concern" for the Philippians? He explains what he means by that when he says that everyone "looks out for their own interests" and "not those of Jesus Christ." Think about that for a moment: Wouldn't you have expected Paul to say 'not those of others' instead? "Everyone looks out for their own interests, but not everyone looks out for the interests of others." That's what I would expect him to say here, since what came just before this was Paul's observation that Timothy would have genuine concern for the Philippians. What's going on here?

Let's see if we can solve this little riddle. Paul has been encouraging the Philippians to live lives "worthy of the gospel" and in the process he has discussed unity in the Body of believers, along with service, humility and putting others first. Now, he cites Timothy as someone who will show the people genuine concern and who will look out for the interests of Christ. We must conclude from this that showing genuine concern for one another *is looking out for the interests of Jesus Christ*. Why would we be concerned about others? Because we want to serve Jesus by looking out for His people.

This is what Paul is doing by writing this loving letter. This is what it means to put others first. This is what loving our brothers and sisters is all about, and it results from our love of God. God loved us, we love Him. God loves our brothers and sisters, so we love them too. Thus, when we love one another and care for one another, we are putting not only the interests of others ahead of our own; we are putting the interests of Jesus Christ first in our lives. This then, is "making disciples": Caring for others because they are loved by, and important to, our Lord.

Verses 25-30 are mostly about Epaphroditus. We gather from these verses, that he was sent to Paul with the most recent news from Philippi. Apparently, while he was with Paul, he became seriously ill, but has now recovered. You might notice the tender way in which Paul speaks of him, and about Paul's relief that he has recovered. Now, he would like to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi with Timothy so that they can see how much better he is doing.

If we look carefully at these verses, what we will see is that Paul is showing genuine concern for both Epaphroditus and for the Philippians; he is looking out for the interests of Jesus Christ, and thus he is giving us another practical example of this teaching. Pretty cool, don't you think?

Chapter 3

Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

Philippians 3:1-4a

Chapter 3 starts out with Paul urging the people to rejoice in the Lord, and that seems simple enough, but then the subject seems to turn. What follows is a denunciation of those who would teach the Philippians that they must first become Jews before they can be saved.

The word that jumps out at me in the second verse is the word "dogs". So catch this spectacle: Paul the Jew is calling those Jews who insist that a Gentile be circumcised a Jew before they can become a Christian, "dogs". That is amazing when you consider that "dogs" are what the Jews call Gentiles! Dogs, evil doers and mutilators of the flesh; hey Paul, tell us how you really feel! As we saw in Paul's letter to the Galatians, he has no patience with this teaching, and there is little wonder why; the old ways are entirely over and done.

In verse 3, he points out who are the "circumcision", the ones who serve in the Spirit and boast in Christ; and it isn't the Jews. Again, the old ways are done, gone, and irrelevant. We as Christians have "no confidence" in the flesh, not even Paul, who might have a reason to claim some confidence in the flesh. This is an interesting little situation, for Paul has been writing from the end of the first chapter, and all through the second about being "worthy of the gospel" and through all that he described how we should be imitators of Christ, which is the sign of the New Covenant. Circumcision was the sign of a different covenant, and was required of Abraham and his descendants. All of those old ways were merely illustrations of the reality to come in Christ, and now that the reality has come, those old physical things are over. Thus, Paul dismisses confidence in the flesh (circumcision).

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

Philippians 3:4b-6

Here, Paul seems to be issuing a challenge of sorts, as if to say that if anyone could claim salvation from being a Jew, it is Paul, but Paul claims salvation in Christ alone. He gives a brief summary of his resume as a Jew; it is an impressive one. Thus of all people, Paul the Jew among Jews, has no confidence in the old ways, for he knows that only Jesus Christ can take away sin and give the gift of eternal life.

If we were to extend his reasoning a little bit, we might ask a question like, "What of this world can possibly save you from destruction? Your fortune, your possessions, your education and accomplishments?"

No, none of these things can take away sin, and without that, there is only destruction. It is no wonder, then, that Paul began this passage by encouraging the people to rejoice in the Lord always.

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 3:7-11

We need to be mindful of our context as we begin this text. Paul, in the preceding verses has been discussing his Jewish resume, his accomplishments, and his former position. Yes, he was an accomplished man, well-educated, influential and a member of the ruling elite of his day, and he has given all of that up to follow Christ.

Here, almost talking like an accountant, he is writing off losses and seeking gains. What is it that he considers to be losses? His former life, its accomplishments and position. Now we need to recognize that he isn't lamenting his loss of position and all the rest, he is considering these things, his training, his accomplishments and position as losses in and of themselves. Those things he declares in verse 8 to be "garbage". His training is garbage, his accomplishments are garbage, his former position is garbage, not the fact that he has given them up.

Why did he give them up? Simple, he gave up everything he had for Christ. In all of those former things, Paul was trying to attain righteousness by his own power and effort; now he has obtained God's righteousness through his faith in Jesus Christ. It would seem that in Paul's estimation, he has attained a very strong bottom line as a result. Check out verse 10: *I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...* Interesting isn't it, how he has tied together knowing Christ with "the power of his resurrection, and participation in his sufferings" and death. Then, notice in verse 11 how he links this with the attainment of His resurrection and eternal life. It would seem that Paul's whole point is that those attainments of this life, when compared to resurrection and eternal life, are just garbage; utterly worthless.

In light of all this, how should we look at our earthly life, its achievements, its positions, its 'glories'? If we dare to follow Paul's example, then they must all be nothing more than garbage!

OK, so maybe we aren't willing to follow Paul's radical example. Yet maybe we should rethink this, for Paul was following Jesus' example, just like we are supposed to be doing.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12-14

In the verses we covered in the last section, Paul was telling us about giving up his past to follow Christ to salvation and eternal life, and you will recall that he called all of his past accomplishments "garbage" in comparison to what he would gain as a follower of Jesus. Now, in some of the most memorable verses in the whole New Testament, Paul tells us that he still has a way to go before he will reach his goal. Before we get into these verses, I would like to remind you that he is still speaking in the context of being "worthy of the gospel" which is a theme he began back in the first chapter.

Verse 12 is quite telling: *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.* If we aren't careful, we might misunderstand this verse. At first glance, it would seem to mean that Paul hasn't yet arrived at Christ-like perfection, and that would be true. However, is that what Christ took hold of Paul for? Is that what He took hold of you for? Is that why Christ died on the cross? No, it clearly is not why Christ "took hold" of Paul or any of us, for in order for Christ to take hold, He first had to die, so we need to take the cross into account. As I see it, the key to understanding this lies back in verses 10-11: *I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.* Why did Christ die on the cross? It was for forgiveness of sins, that we might receive the gift of eternal life (John 3:16). What was Paul's goal in all of this, and what is he urging us to embrace? The same thing (Phil. 3:11). Paul has not yet attained the goal of eternal life; he is still alive in the body, so there is still work to do on this earth.

Let's be careful that we don't stray too far from the path here; it isn't that Paul is seeking to earn his salvation, for that is assured through grace by faith. Paul is still in this life concerned with his response to salvation, and that's where being Christlike comes in. Paul's goal is eternity, his journey to eternity is by imitating Christ and spreading the gospel, and by the way, that's our journey as well. See how all of this comes together? Simple!

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:13-14

Thus, Paul ties this together for us with a rallying cry that has spanned two millennia, thrilling the followers of Jesus, encouraging all of us to strive to take the gospel to the nations, and moving us to minister to one another in His love. This is where Paul takes his stand, and this is where we stand with him for the cause of Christ.

All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Philippians 3:15-16

Following his great rallying cry of verses 12-14, Paul will make a plea to the Philippians and by extension to us, to continue forward in Christ. He begins with these two verses. This is a transition into his exhortation for us to follow his example. You can see that by the way he links the two sections with the first sentence, yes; we who are mature should take the view that he has expressed, and if we find ourselves disagreeing on some point, don't worry for God will sort things out. I sure wish more Christians in our time would take this view!

Notice he goes on to urge us to live up to what we have already attained, which moves us to his larger exhortation. Before we get to that exhortation, maybe we should ask ourselves what it is that we have attained. By our faith we have entered relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ and received forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. In chapter one he urged us to be "worthy of the gospel" and now he urges us to "live up to what we already attained".

Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Philippians 3:17-21

Here is the exhortation; Paul is urging the people to follow his example, and the example of others who live as he does. Because of this, it is quite clear that he is talking about the way we all live; follow the example of the way he and certain others *live*. This is an important distinction, for many say all of the right things and live quite differently.

Pay careful attention to verses 18 and 19: Many live a different kind of life than Paul does— a life that leads to destruction. My first question about this would be, "Just exactly who are we talking about?" My first impulse is to assume that he must be talking about unbelievers, to make a distinction between Christians and non-Christians; some might even want to toss in the concept of phony Christians or fake Christians, or Christians who aren't "really" saved. I'd prefer to leave that kind of speculation to others; they are probably much smarter than I am if they can make

such judgments. I'll 'play it safe' and stick with the context. Since Paul is sending this message to Christian believers, I must infer that he thinks it is possible for Christians to follow the wrong path, thus the warning; otherwise the warning is pointless and sent to the wrong people. Are there Christians that we might know of (or be) who live for the things of this world and neglect the heavenly priorities of Christ? If so, we should not follow their example.

Our citizenship is in heaven! Our priorities must be on heavenly things. As citizens of heaven, we must concern ourselves with the mission that Jesus has given us, to love others, to put their interests ahead of our own in true humility, and to share the awesome gospel of Jesus Christ, for this is the way that will lead us to our reward. It is also the reason that Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians.

Chapter 4

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:4-7

The final chapter of Philippians is largely personal in nature, and I like to think of it as taking place at a certain stop on a longer journey; Paul is giving some last instructions before heading off, and we are getting set to head off on a different road. In a way, that's what was really happening at the time. Paul was going into the final stretch before heading home to glory, but the Philippians still had a long trail ahead before they would cross the river.

These verses comprise another very memorable bit of advice from Paul, one of his last to Philippi, and they are as full of significance today as they were almost 2,000 years ago. As we head off in our journey, Paul reminds us to rejoice in the Lord always.

For emphasis, he repeats his admonition; I can only imagine how that struck the Philippians, aware as they were of Paul's situation. If Paul can rejoice in his situation, how can we not rejoice in ours? Then this man who was awaiting the judgment of Caesar that would send him to the executioner's block tells the Philippians to be sure that their gentleness is evident to all; amazing.

He reminds us that the Lord is near, so we shouldn't be anxious about anything, and sends us right into His presence as he encourages us to be in prayer. We are to present our prayers and petitions to God with thanksgiving, and the peace of God that "transcends all understanding" will guard our hearts and minds. I just can't help but think that this would have made a big impression to the Philippians, as it has to so many ever since.

I would like to suggest that we all spend a little time reflecting on these words while remembering the circumstances that Paul found himself in when he penned them, and to ask our Lord to show us where He wants us to go next on our journey through this life.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:8-9

There is a principle in these two verses that I think people tend to miss, one that is critical to healthy and happy living. These two verses are quoted often, I've even heard them quoted to

"prove" that we shouldn't use bad language, but to me, that sort of thing really misses the point. Let's see if we can find a little more than meets the eye here.

Notice that verse 8 begins with the word "finally." This should clue us in to the fact that Paul is summing up everything he's been teaching in the letter, and this should tell us there is a larger context here. Paul tells us that we should take note of whatever we find along our life's path that is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy and think about them.

Notice that excellent and praiseworthy are set apart so as to sum up the others. Notice also the way he says we should think about them: "Think about such things." This tells us more that we should be focusing on these kinds of things, which rather expands the focus from the specific instance, to the category at large. To put it another way, we are to focus our minds and attention to things that are excellent and worthy of praise, rather than on things that are not.

Don't rush through this, for it is very significant advice. Ask yourself what is not included in this, and I think you'll end up with a list of things that we usually think about; our problems, our feelings about things, our little resentments, our little hurts and things that aren't uplifting. Surely the kinds of things Paul wants us to be thinking about wouldn't include our circumstances, illnesses and pains, but would instead include the kinds of things that would inspire us to greatness, and to service of humanity. Now you can see how Paul has been able to have such a positive attitude in his imprisonment.

He wraps up with this statement:

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

This is one of those "if – then" statements. Put into practice the things Paul has taught and God will be with you. By implication, if you don't put them into practice, you'll likely find yourself far from God. Now if I was to make such a remark, your eyebrows would surely rise for who am I? But by the time he was writing this, Paul had proven himself as the Apostle of Christ, the things that he has taught the people have been from God and for the sake of His purpose; they are the things that will put each of us firmly within God's purpose and will. Paul has taught us how to be in fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ, and when we dwell in this place, His presence and peace are surely with us.

Philippians 4:10-23

Paul closes out his letter in this final part of chapter four. This is largely a personal message to the Philippians, and there are some things about it that we can learn, especially if we keep the theme of the letter in mind; being worthy of the gospel. As Paul has shared what it means for a believer to live the Christian life and to walk with Jesus as opposed to just believing, in these last verses we see this teaching in practice.

In verses 10-13, Paul expresses his happiness that the Philippians have shown their regard for him in sending one of their men to Paul with aid, as you might recall. He is happy not so much

because he needed anything, but because they expressed their concern. Then, he goes on to mention that he has learned to be content with whatever he has, be it plenty or little, whether he is hungry or well-fed, for he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him. (v. 13) Once again, we see that Paul's orientation to focus on Christ is all that is really needed to get through any situation.

In vv. 14-19, we see another aspect of the sharing on the part of the Philippians; it seems to be a habit with them. On more than one occasion they have sacrificed to share their material resources with Paul, and in so doing they have made their faith manifest. They didn't simply say, "Gee, that's a shame I'll pray for you." They sacrificed to meet a need; they behaved as Christ would behave.

Isn't that what this whole letter has been about?

You might recall that in the very beginning of the letter, Paul mentioned that because he has been locked in prison, guarded by Caesar's palace guard, Caesar's very household had come to hear the gospel. In those early verses, Paul didn't actually say whether or not any of them had come to faith, only that they had heard. All things considered, that was a really amazing thing, but in verse 22, Paul reveals the most amazing thing of all:

All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

There were believing brothers in Christ within the very household of Caesar, because Paul had been imprisoned in Rome to await his trial before Caesar, a trial that was to cost him his life. Even in that dire circumstance, the gospel moved forward to the glory of God!

How much can we accomplish for the gospel if we will only take to heart the lessons that we have found in this letter?