NOTES ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

Paul's Epistle to the

Philippians

Gene Cunningham

As Jesus Christ prepared to send the disciples for the first time throughout Israel with His message, He included in their instructions this admonition: *"Freely you have received, freely give"* (Matthew 10:8). This six-word summary of grace explains the financial policy of the publications and audio ministries of Basic Training. All audio materials and publications are provided **without charge** to anyone who requests them. For a list of available material, visit our website.



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"Endure hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."
(2 Timothy 2:3)

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NOTES ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

Preface

While I was teaching in Myanmar/Burma in March 2019, some of my long-term, advanced students suggested that I go through the New Testament and provide basic notes, which they could then be able print as a study Bible. They specifically asked that I focus on issues that are a major area of confusion in the churches where they work. Therefore, the following commentary will focus on these five primary areas:

1. What is the nature of God's grace and how is it received?
2. What is God's plan of salvation and the clear message of the Gospel?
3. What is the Bible's teaching on the security and assurance of the believer?
4. How is the believer to live the Christian life and be effective in witness/service?
5. What does prophecy say about the last days and the order of end-times events?

Practical Suggestions

These notes are purposely brief in nature. This work is not intended to be a complete commentary. All through the work I have kept in mind those who live in remote areas of our world, who labor to both understand and to teach others the Word of God. They do not have access to Bible school or seminary training. Neither are they able to afford the vast array of books available to pastors and teachers who live in more advanced countries.

I encourage all who utilize these notes to study them with an open Bible. Pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:15–23; 3:14–21) as you study. Read the context of the passage carefully. Look up and compare the references that are provided. Above all, let the Word of God, and not these notes, guide your insight into God's Word. As I always tell my students: "Never take my word for anything; search the Scriptures and prove what is true" (Acts 17:10–12; 1 John 4:1).

Before you begin any study of the Word of God, take a few moments to make sure that you are in fellowship with God, filled by means the Holy Spirit. Comprehension, like everything else in the Christian life, is a gift that can be appropriated only by faith. The Bible clearly lays out three requirements that must be met before we can expect to understand God's Word. All three require nothing from us but faith.

1. *We must be believers in Jesus Christ* (John 3:16).
   It is impossible for unbelievers to understand the Word of God (1 Cor. 2:14). Jesus declared to the leading religious leader of His day that apart from spiritual birth, man is blind to the things of God. *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit ... You must be born again"* (John 3:6–7).

2. *We must be filled by means of the Spirit* (1 Corinthians 2:12).
   Only the Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God. As believers, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but when we sin, we break fellowship with God and cease to function in the power of the Spirit. When we confess our sins, God is always faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). The moment we confess, we are restored to fellowship and are again under the control of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, able to learn.

3. *We must approach in faith* (Hebrews 11:6).
   Only when we approach in humility, with child-like faith, will the Word of God make sense to us (Matt. 18:4; Heb. 11:3). Where we find Scripture at odds with our ideas or our desires, we must submit to the authority of the Word. Intimacy, understanding, and power are reserved for those who are willing to do God's will (John 7:17).

DEDICATION

"This will be written for the generation to come,
that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord."
Psalm 102:18

While it is my hope and prayer that these notes will be helpful to all current students of the Word of God, I send them forth with a special dedication to the 144,000 Jewish evangelists who are yet to come on the scene of world history (Rev. 7:1–8). They will be the heroes of the faith in the coming time of Tribulation following the soon coming Rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:13–18).

To these brothers and sisters of the future, I want you to know you have been thought of, prayed for, and loved—before you even knew your mission. We of the Church Age salute you for the sufferings you will endure and the victories you will win. We bid you to be strong in the Lord, for your victory is sure in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the labor put into these notes by many hands and through many prayers, be a help to you as you boldly proclaim the name of Jesus Christ in a dark and dangerous time!

INTRODUCTION

No church of the early Christian era was more in tune with the theology and spirit of the Apostle Paul than were the Philippians. His letter to them is unlike any other. It is a letter to friends and brothers in a *"fellowship in the gospel"* (Phil. 1:5, 7) that was shared by no other church. No other epistle, with the exception of Philemon, reveals the heart of the Apostle as does this one.

Philip, the father of Alexander the great, founded the city of Philippi in 368 B.C. It was a strategic site, which commanded the road from Europe to Asia. The city was a Roman colony (Acts 16:12), settled by veteran Roman soldiers. As a colony of Rome, its inhabitants were given Roman citizenship, spoke Latin, and observed Roman customs (Acts 16:20–21). Paul reminds these Philippian believers that they now hold a new citizenship from Heaven (Phil. 3:20).

The story of Paul's first visit to Philippi is recorded in Acts 16, one of the key chapters of the book. After receiving the call from Macedonia (Acts 16:9–10), Paul and his company travelled to Philippi. It was at this point that Luke joined Paul's team, as is evident from the *"we"* and *"us"* found in Acts 16:10. The story of his first visit is critical to the Gospel message for two reasons. First, the key figures in the chapter are Lydia, a wealthy merchant woman, a demon-possessed slave girl, and a Roman soldier and citizen, who was the jailer. Lydia was from the Asian city of Thyatira (Acts 16:14), the demon-possessed slave girl was a Greek, and the jailer was, of course, a Roman. The whole of the world was represented in these three, and in Paul the Jew, who brought to them the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The second reason this story is so vital is because of the jailer's question, *"What must I do to be saved?"* (Acts16:30), and Paul's answer, a model of the simplicity of the Gospel, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved"* (Acts 16:31). Those who seek to add anything to this simple statement of Paul are guilty of betraying the message of the great Apostle (Gal. 1:6–9).

Although the book is filled with the theme of rejoicing, we ought not to see that it is set against a background of persecution and suffering. Paul is writing from a Roman prison (house arrest, Acts 28:16, 30), in chains for his ministry (Phil. 1:7, 13). He is writing to a church that, from the beginning, shared in his persecution (Phil. 1:27–30). Not only this, but no other church was so dedicated to supporting Paul in his missionary journeys (Phil. 4:14–16; 2 Cor. 11:9). In this letter, the themes of thanksgiving (Phil. 1:3–8), suffering (Phil. 1:7, 12, 16, 29–30), warning (Phil. 3:2–3, 18–19), and rejoicing are combined (Phil. 1:4, 25; 2:17–18; 4:4).

In the book of Philippians, we have a snapshot of the turbulence and challenges of the ancient Roman world, and of a valiant and victorious assembly of early believers who opened the door of Europe to the Gospel message (Acts 16:8–10; 2 Cor. 2:12–14). Most of us in the western world who have believed are indebted to these courageous, first-century believers.

Philippians Outline

1. Chapter One—the Single Mind (**v. 27**)
2. Chapter Two—the Sacrificial Mind (**v. 5**)
3. Chapter Three—the Sanctified Mind (**v. 15**)
4. Chapter Four—the Steadfast Mind (**vv. 1–2**)

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

PHILIPPIANS CHAPTER 1

In this chapter, Paul reveals to us the confidence and boldness of the mind of a true servant of Christ. He shows us that stability and balance in life comes from seeing our life in light of the perfect plan of God, and a willingness to submit to His perfect will.

The Provisions of Grace and the Progress of Faith

Philippians 1:1–11

1:1–2 ***"Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ."*** Paul did not need to cite his apostleship to these believers, as he often did in beginning his letters (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1, etc.). Instead, he writes to them as a servant a bond-slave, or willing servant of Jesus Christ. ***"To all the saints in Christ Jesus."*** All those who are *"In Christ"* by faith have been "set apart to God" forever and are seen by God as "holy" (1 Cor. 3:17; Col. 1:22; Heb. 3:1). ***"Bishops and deacons."*** The word *"bishop"* means "overseer," and is equivalent to "pastor" and "elder," the three titles being used for the same office (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet. 5:1–4). The deacons are to be helpers and servants in the church—not the authorities (Acts 6:1–6). ***"Grace … and peace."*** This greeting is both a summary of the plan of God, and a greeting from the Father and the Son. All those who receive the grace of God in Christ have a standing of peace with God (Rom. 5:1).

1:3–5 ***"I thank my God … in every prayer … with joy … for your fellowship."*** These phrases are almost a summary of the whole epistle. Paul was constantly thanking God with great joy for the fellowship of this staunch band of faithful supporters. The word *"fellowship"* speaks of their participation in his ministry, both in sufferings (Phil. 1:27–30), and in their support (2 Cor. 8:1–5; Phil. 4:14–18).

1:6–7 ***"He who has begun a good work … will complete it."*** Paul's confidence is in the working of God to complete their growth, maturity, and service. This confidence includes the fact that ***"you all are partakers with me of grace."*** They willingly and voluntarily joined with Paul in receiving and experiencing God's grace. It was due to their eager response to the Word of God that Paul was able to say, ***"I have you in my heart."*** He held them in his heart due to their dedication to his ministry.

1:8 ***"God is my witness."*** Paul declares a solemn oath assuring them of his love. ***"I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ."*** God loves all men (John 3:16), and commands us to love all men (Matt. 22:37–40). We can only love others when we first love God (1 John 4:19). However, there is a special bond of love shared by those who actively participate (fellowship) in the love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14–21; 1 John 1:7; 3:11, 14, 16–19; 4:16–19).

1:9 ***"That your love may abound."*** The word *"abound"* (*perisseuo*) means to "overflow, to continue to increase." Paul desires that they will not cease to grow in grace and truth. ***"In knowledge and … discernment."*** Our love for God and for others increases as we gain greater insight into His Word. This love is not sentimental but is discerning. This involves insight, perception, and skillful application of God's word to daily life. We do not throw our pearls before swine (Matt. 7:6).

1:10 ***"That you may approve."*** The word *"approve"* is *dokimazo* and means "to prove after testing." Elsewhere, Paul instructs us to *"Test all things; hold fast what is good"* (1 Thess. 5:21). ***"Till the day of Christ."*** This is his second reference to the day of the Rapture of the Church (v. 6; 1 Thess. 4:13–18). We who believe are to live our lives in the Blessed Hope of His return (Titus 2:13; 1 John 2:28–3:3).

1:11 ***"Filled with the fruits of righteousness."*** The service we render to Jesus Christ by faith, in the power of His Spirit, will bring glory and praise to God when we stand in His presence. These fruits of the Spirit (Phil. 4:8–9; Gal. 5:22–23) are the result of the righteousness given to us from Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:22; 4:3, 5, 11, 22–25; Col. 1:6, 9–11).

Summary Principles: The Disciplines of Grace

> *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,* ***teaching us*** *that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."*
>
> Titus 2:11–14

1. The above text makes it clear that those who respond to the Gospel message are to continue in its teaching, resulting in transformed lives.

2. The grace of God is freely received, but it carries with it life-changing power.

3. Spiritual maturity comes only to those who enter into the exercise and the disciplines of God's grace (Heb. 5:12–14).

4. In these opening verses of Philippians, we see the seven disciplines of God's grace:

   a. Thanksgiving (**v. 3)** with "*joy*" (**v. 4**).
   b. Prayer for one another (**v. 4**).
   c. *"Fellowship,"* communion in the things of God (**v. 5**; Acts 2:42).
   d. Joint participation in the ministry (**v. 7**).
   e. Love for fellow believers (**vv. 8–9**).
   f. *"Discernment"* and obedience (**vv. 9–10**).
   g. Fruitfulness in *"righteousness"*/divine good from the Spirit (**v. 11**).

5. To be a disciple means to be disciplined according to the teachings of God's Word.

The Overruling Providence of God

Philippians 1:12–18

1:12 ***"But I want you to know … for the furtherance of the gospel."*** Paul is writing from his Roman imprisonment, probably under house arrest at this time (Acts 28:16, 30–31). He sees, in the events that unfolded from Acts 21–28, the hand of God at work. The word *"furtherance"* is a Roman military word, *prokope/prokopto*. It literally means "to cut ahead," and was used both for an advance scout, out ahead of the main force, and also for the advance of an army. Rather than being a hindrance to the spread of the Gospel, his adverse circumstances had furthered its spread, even into the palace guard (v. 13). Nothing that happens takes God by surprise, and His sovereign providence works all *"together for good, to those who love"* and serve Him (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28).

1:13 ***"The whole palace guard."*** This was called "The Praetorian Guard," originally made up of 10,000 elite, highly trained Roman veterans. These warriors of Rome were chained to Paul in shifts. They heard his explanation of the work of Christ to many visitors (Acts 28:30–31), they observed the scars of his sufferings (Gal. 6:17), and many were won to faith in Jesus Christ. ***"My chains are in Christ."*** Paul was not a justly accused criminal, but a wrongly persecuted servant of Christ (Acts 25:1–12).

1:14 ***"Most of the brethren … speak the word without fear."*** The effect of Paul's gallant defense of the Gospel message produced courage in many believers to be more bold in their witness for Christ.

1:15 ***"Some … from envy and strife, and some … from good will."*** There will always be those who seek to promote themselves as ministers through the misfortune or afflictions of a fellow pastor-teacher. While a spirit of competition is the furthest thing from the spirit of Jesus, it is always present and on display in our churches (2 Cor. 10:12).

1:16–17 ***"The former preach Christ from selfish ambition … the latter out of love."*** Even believing ministers can fall to the temptation for self-advancement. However, at the Bema Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11–15), they will see the foolishness of their efforts, as they are burned as straw. ***Knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel."*** The word *"appointed"* is from *keimai*, which can mean "to recline, to stay where one is placed," but can also convey the idea of "to be set forth publicly." Paul saw his circumstances from divine viewpoint, that is, from God's point of view. God had orchestrated his circumstances so that he might defend the Gospel message and ministry before the throne of Caesar. This would have an effect throughout the entire Roman Empire.

1:18 ***"Whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached."*** Paul knew nothing of jealousy in his ministry. Even when others ridiculed him (2 Cor. 10:7–11) and sought to exalt themselves above him (2 Cor. 10:12–18), his desire was for the message of Christ to be proclaimed. Even those who did so with wrong motives, God could still use the message to reach others for the faith.

Summary Principles: The Providence of God

1. The idea of providence is that because God is able to see ahead, He is able to provide in advance (Gen. 22:14).

2. Paul took confidence in knowing that God worked through his circumstances to further His purpose for Paul in proclaiming the Gospel message in Rome (**v. 12**).

3. It was with that same confidence in the plan of God that Joseph was able to forgive and sustain his brothers in Egypt (Gen. 50:20).

4. The same providence can be seen in the story of Ruth (Ruth 2:1–13), Hannah (1 Sam. 1:11, 20–28), and Esther (Esth. 4:14), and so many other Old Testament examples.

5. God is always faithful to work in our lives for the furtherance of His plan (1 Thess. 5:23–24). However, we must cooperate in faith and submission/obedience, for He will not force His plan on us.

6. When the disciplines of grace (**vv. 1–11**) combine with the providence of God (**vv. 12–18**), the result is confidence and boldness in facing the future (**vv. 22–26**).

Uncertain Future, Certain Outcome

Philippians 1:19–26

1:19 ***"I know"*** is a statement of absolute certainty in Paul's mind, not about what will happen, but of the final outcome. ***"My deliverance"*** does not mean salvation, which Paul already has. It means that God will accomplish what is best for Paul, whether that means death, or future ministry (vv. 21–26). ***"Through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."*** Paul sees his own dedication to God's plan, the prayers

of the Philippians, and the provision of the Holy Spirit, all working together to fulfill the will of God in his life (Rom. 8:28; Phil. 1:6; 4:6–7).

1:20 ***"Earnest expectation and hope."*** These words express both anticipation and assurance. Paul's desire was ***"that in nothing I shall be ashamed,"*** and his confidence was that ***"with all boldness … Christ will be magnified"*** in his life, ***"whether by life or by death."*** What happened mattered little to Paul, so long as the goal of his life—to magnify Jesus Christ—would be fulfilled. It is a wise believer who realizes that our focus should not be on **what** may happen, but **why** God has permitted it.

1:21 ***"To live is Christ, and to die is gain."*** This is truly one of Paul's greatest sayings. From his perspective, it would be far better to go home to be with the Lord (v. 23). However, from God's point of view, it was better for him to remain for the further instruction and growth of many believers (vv. 24–25). Paul does not pretend to know what the future holds beyond the certainty that God would fulfill His will.

1:22 ***"If I live on … this will mean fruit from my labor."*** Should God grant him further life, he would use it to bear more fruit, both for God's glory, and for his own eternal reward (2 Tim. 4:6–8). Paul could not choose between the two, because only God knew the span of his life (Psalm 90:12) and the work he was called to do.

1:23 ***"I am hard pressed … having the desire to depart and be with Christ."*** The word *"depart"* was used in the military for breaking camp. It reminds us of the last words of Gen. Robert E. Lee, "*strike the tent!*" To be with the Lord was far better than to be in prison for Paul. But what was best was whatever the Lord chose for him.

1:24 ***"To remain … is more needful for you."*** In vv. 23–24, Paul shows three contrasting states or conditions. The first is *"to depart"* from this earth. The second is, *"to be with"* the Lord. And finally, *"to remain,"* for the sake of the Philippians and other believers to whom he ministered. As always, that which benefits others dominates in his mind, for he was a sacrificial offering to God (Rom. 12:1–2; Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6), and a servant to men.

1:25 ***"Being confident of this … I shall remain."*** As Paul evaluated possibilities and priorities, he concluded that God would continue his ministry. This would result in the blessing of ***"progress and joy of faith"*** for these believers, who loved him greatly. The word *"progress"* is again *prokope*, the same translated *"furtherance"* in v. 12, speaking of an advancing army. In a sense, we could say Paul was the advance scout who blazed the trail, which now the army of the Philippian believers will follow.

1:26 ***"Rejoicing … by my coming to you again."*** Knowing the love they had for him, Paul anticipates their great joy upon his return visit, by the will of God.

<u>Summary Principles: Confidence in God, Courage in Life</u>

1. No one but God knows the future. It is enough for the mature believer to entrust their future into the hands of God (Eccl. 8:7–8).

2. It is far better to die boldly, than to live in cowardice and shame.

3. When our priority is to honor Jesus Christ, we can be carefree about whether we live or die. This boldness is based on the certainty that to be with Christ is better for us.

4. To be willing to die for Christ, one must first be willing to live for Him, which is much harder (Romans 12:1).

5. In all our plans and desires, one thing should dominate: What will make me most useful to my Master (2 Tim. 2:20–22)?

6. We should develop the ability to rejoice, both in living our lives for Christ (vv. 25–26), and in dying for Him (Phil. 2:17).

Passing on the Guidon
Philippians 1:27–30

Note: In military history, the guidon was the banner or flag that represented the empire or nation, or company to which it was attached. It was a great honor to be designated as the "guide" to carry the banner and, in battle, all troops were to rally to it, hence the saying, "Follow the colors!" Paul is the "guide," and he is rallying the Philippian believers to the banner of the cross of Christ (Psalm 60:4). If the "guide" were to fall in battle, the nearest man was to raise the guidon and carry it onward.

1:27 ***"Only let your conduct be worthy."*** The word *"worthy"* is *axios* and pictures a set of scales balancing out. Our conduct should balance with our message, ***"the gospel of Christ."*** Paul says the same thing to the Ephesians (Eph. 4:1). ***"That you stand fast."*** This was a word that pictured the motto of the elite Roman soldiers, "Stand firm!" (*stete*, Eph. 6:14). These soldiers would not retreat in the face of the enemy. ***"Striving together for the faith."*** The word *sunathleo* pictures an athletic team striving together for victory, or a band of soldiers who will not break ranks. They are united for the cause of the faith.

1:28 ***"And not … terrified."*** The word *"terrified"* is *pturo*, a very strong word used of a horse that panicked uncontrollably in battle. They were not giving in to fear during their persecutions. This fearlessness has characterized men and women of faith throughout the ages (Psalm 34:7; 91:1; Heb. 11:32–38). ***"Which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God."*** Their bold and courageous stand in the face of persecutions was a warning to their enemies of their coming judgment from God, and an evidence to the world of the assurance of their ultimate salvation. This courage comes from a mature understanding of our standing in Christ (Rom. 8:31–39; Eph. 1:13–23; 2:4–10; Col. 3:1–4).

1:29 ***"To you it has been granted."*** Their persecutions were, in fact, a gift of God's grace (*charizomai*) and would gain eternal reward for those who were faithful (Matt. 5:10–12; 2 Tim. 2:12; 4:6–8). ***"Not only to believe … but also to suffer for His sake."*** God gives the gift of eternal life to all who believe in Him (John 3:16; Acts 16:31). He also gives sufferings and afflictions to those who choose to faithfully follow Christ (Luke 9:23; John 15:18–19; Rom. 5:3–5; 2 Tim. 3:12).

1:30 ***"Having the same conflict."*** These Philippian believers were on the same battlefield as Paul, sharing the fatigue and afflictions of the spiritual war. The word *"conflict"* is *agona*, from which we get "agony." It was often used of those who fought as gladiators in the Roman arena.

Summary Principles: Standing Firm in the Battle

1. This section reads like a commander preparing his troops for battle.

2. First, they are reminded of the just and holy cause for which they fight (**v. 27**). It is their duty to conduct themselves in such a way as to bring honor and glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. They are to "stand fast," that is to keep the battle line firm and unyielding. Every believer, like every good soldier, depends on the man to his right and to his left, to "hold the line" (v**. 27a**).

4. It is not enough simply to hold the line, they must "strive together" in united effort for the faith they profess, to be honored among them and to be made known to the world (**v. 27b**).

5. They are not to be like a horse that panics in the crash of the battle but, by their courage and calm assurance, to send a message of doom to their enemies, and of the absolute assurance of ultimate victory to their fellow soldiers (**v. 28**).

6. By looking at their persecutions as a gift from God, with the promise of great reward, they will ensure that all the above exhortations will be fulfilled (**v. 29**).

7. They will know that they are imitating Paul just as he was imitating Christ (1 Cor. 11:1), and that should Paul fall in battle (Phil. 2:14–18), there would be many to lift up and carry on the banner of Jesus Christ (**v. 30**).

PHILIPPIANS CHAPTER 2

Paul now sets before us the ultimate example of Jesus Christ in His humility and victory. He also provides two living examples of spiritual warriors in Timothy and Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:19–30).

The Humility, Victory, and Exaltation of Christ

Philippians 2:1–11

2:1–2 ***"If there is any consolation in Christ."*** To Paul, all true and lasting comfort or consolation found its source in Jesus Christ—whatever its immediate source or channel might be. To him, God is *"the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort."* (2 Cor. 1:3). He is the Father who, through the love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, *"comforts us in all our tribulation"* (2 Cor. 1:4). Here, Paul is imprisoned, the Philippians are persecuted, and he greatly desires that they all might have this priceless comfort. How is that comfort to come to us, if not through the members of Christ's Body? Thus, he urges them to ***"love … fellowship … affection … mercy."*** All of these sources and elements of comfort are the result of ***"being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord."*** Only by literally being "of one soul," with care and compassion for one another, could this love of Christ bring comfort to each and every one of them. How different the Church would be, if each member saw their chief role as being an avenue of the love and comfort of Christ to all of the other members (2 Cor. 5:14)!

2:3–4 Such a happy condition in the Church abolishes ***"selfish ambition or conceit,"*** which are at the root of all division and strife (James 4:1). Rather, in ***"lowliness of mind,"*** each one ought to ***"esteem others better than himself."*** The degree of selfish arrogance that exists in its members, or the depth of genuine humility, determines the condition and spiritual health—or lack of it—in any church. ***"Look out … for the interests of others."*** Humility was scorned in the ancient world, until Christ and His followers elevated it next to love in highest value (Matt. 11:29; 1 Cor. 13:13; James 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:5). It is to Jesus' supreme example that Paul now turns.

2:5 ***"Let this mind be in you."*** The word for mind is *phroneo* and refers to one's mental attitude. It is a key word in this epistle (Phil. 1:27; 2:2–3, 5; 3:15, 16, 19; 4:2, 7). The *"mind of Christ"* (1 Cor. 2:16b), or the attitude that directed His life, is revealed to us in the written Word of God. To adopt His way of thinking is to be *"conformed to His image"* (Rom. 8:29; 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 3:18).

2:6–7 ***"Being in the form of God … taking the form of a bondservant."*** Jesus Christ's humble attitude was demonstrated in His incarnation. This verse speaks of His eternal existence as the second member of the Godhead. Yet, He ***"did not consider it robbery"*** or, rather, something to cling to for Himself—to be equal with God. Remember that it was this claim of equality with God that first lit the fires of hatred in the

Pharisees (John 5:17–18; 10:30–33). ***"Made Himself of no reputation."*** This literally means "He emptied Himself." It means to divest or relinquish all the honor, power, and glory inherent in Godhead, so as to enter into the estate of true humanity ***"In the likeness of men."*** It does not mean He ceased to possess those attributes, but He voluntarily set them aside. As a Man, He relied on the power of the Holy Spirit, as we are to do. In this way, the eternal Son of God became a slave to the Father and to the human race (Isa. 42:1–4; 61:1–3).

2:8 ***"Being found … He humbled Himself."*** By His incarnation, Jesus was identified as true Man (perfect humanity) and humbled Himself even further; He ***"became obedient to … the death of the cross."*** Paul seems to identify three stages of Jesus' self-humiliation: From the glories of Heaven, He became a man. As if this was not enough, He submitted to the death experienced by all men because of the fall of Adam (2 Cor. 5:21). Not only this, but He also willingly accepted the most horrible form of death—that of one crucified as a criminal (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13).

2:9–11 ***"Therefore."*** As a result of His three-fold humiliation, God the Father has given Him, in His resurrected humanity, a three-fold glorification. First, He has ***"exalted Him"*** above all other men and angels (Psalm 110:1; Heb. 1:4–14). Second, He has ***"given Him the name which is above every name."*** This *"name"* includes not only the name given to Moses, *"I Am"* (Exod. 3:14), which was the name of the God of Israel, but it also includes *"Immanuel"* (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23), meaning *"God with us,"* as well as *"the Lord of hosts"* (Isa. 47:4; 48:2; James 5:4). He now holds these exalted titles as the resurrected God-Man. Third, to Him ***"every knee should bow,"*** and ***"every tongue … confess"*** His Lordship, ***"to the glory of God the Father."*** This great confession will not only involve ***"those on the earth,"*** meaning all mankind, but also ***"those under the earth,"*** which will include all fallen angels (Isa. 45:23; Col. 2:15; Jude 6).

Summary Principles: The Sacrificial Life

1. The life of discipleship is a life of self-sacrifice and surrender to the perfect plan of God (Luke 9:23; Rom. 12:1–2).

2. The Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate example we should seek to imitate (Eph. 5:1; Phil. 2:5–9). Just as He humbled Himself to become our Savior, so we ought to be willing to humble ourselves to be of service to those around us (Mark 10:45).

3. Paul is also an example of what it means to live a sacrificial life (Phil. 3:7–14).

4. However, the sacrificial life is not a life of sorrow and loss but, rather, is the only path to joy and fulfillment (Heb. 12:2; Phil. 2:17–18).

5. This is because true blessing, joy, and meaning in life come not from gaining what we want, but by giving what others need (Acts 20:34–35).

6. When we seek to give to others instead of gaining for ourselves, we become imitators of Christ Jesus and enter into His joy (Matt. 25:21, 23; 1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:1–2).

Working Out What God Has Worked In

Philippians 2:12–18

2:12 ***"Work out your own salvation."*** Paul does not say to work for salvation, but to work out in life what God has already worked within us by regeneration (v. 13; 2 Cor. 5:17–21; Titus 3:5). The grace of God offers eternal salvation as a free gift, which is received by simple child-like faith (Matt. 18:1–3). Once we enter eternal life, God's grace works in us, by His indwelling Spirit, to teach us His Word and to guide us

in obedience to what we learn (Titus 2:11–14). ***"With fear and trembling."*** True reverence for God produces in us a genuine fear of offending Him and incurring His discipline in our lives (John 16:8; Heb. 12:3–11), resulting in the loss of eternal reward (Heb. 4:1–3, 11, 14–16; 12:12–17).

2:13 ***"For it is God who works in you."*** This is the purpose of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the believer. He has come as our *"Helper"* (John 14:16–18; Rom. 8:9–17), to work from within ***"both to will and to do for His good pleasure."*** Anyone who claims to be a believer but has no sense of the inner prompting of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8) to grow in grace and to do God's will, might well question if they have been born again. His work is to reproduce the mind of Christ in each and every believer (vv. 5–9).

2:14 ***"Do all things without … disputing."*** There were conflicts within the church in Philippi (Phil. 4:2), which needed spiritual correction (Phil. 2:1–4).

2:15 ***"That you may become blameless."*** This instruction specifically has to do with the witness of the Church to the observing world. Division and strife in the Church is directly contrary to our union with Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:3–6). ***"A crooked and perverse generation."*** Paul describes this fallen world under the dominion of Satan as being both twisted and contrary to Truth. Yet, they will seize on inconsistencies in the lives of believers as an excuse for rejecting Christ. ***"You shine as lights in the world."*** Mature and obedient believers are lights in a dark world (Matt. 5:14–16; John 8:12), showing the way to God, by reflecting the love and character of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2:16 ***"Holding fast the word of life."*** This can also be translated "holding forth," in the sense of offering the Word of God to a dark world as the door to escape from the kingdom of darkness (John 3:19; Col. 1:13). ***"I may rejoice in the day of Christ."*** When Paul stands before the Bema/Judgment Seat of Christ, he wants to rejoice at their shared reward (Col. 1:28–29; 2 John 1:8). Paul uses the words ***"run"*** and ***"labored"*** to emphasize the intensity of his missionary efforts.

2:17 ***"If I am being poured out."*** In the ancient world, wine was often poured out over a sacrificial offering. ***"On the sacrifice and service of your faith."*** In great humility, Paul sees his labors as the smaller part, which contributes to the greater sacrifice of the Philippians. If he should be martyred by Rome, it would be for their sake—a cause for which he would rejoice.

2:18 ***"You also … rejoice with me."*** Paul truly believed what he said in Philippians 1:21, and encouraged these believers—should he be put to death—to rejoice at his good fortune in being at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:1–8).

Summary Principles: The Ingredients of Spiritual Growth

1. Spiritual growth begins with obedience to the Word of God (**v. 12a**).

2. Obedience begins in the heart but works out into the life (**v. 12b**).

3. We obey God because we have love and reverence for Him, and a healthy fear of His displeasure and discipline (**v. 12c**; Heb. 12:3–11).

4. It is the indwelling Holy Spirit who works the will of God in us (**v. 13**; James 4:5–10).

5. The greatest light the Church can shine into this dark world is unity and harmony among members of the Body of Christ (**vv. 14–15**; John 13:34–35).

6. The focal point for all spiritual growth is always the Word of God (**v. 16**). It must be studied accurately, faithfully, and consistently.

7. The true minister of God's Word would count his death to be a great prize if he could know that his evangelism and teaching would live on in his students (**vv. 16–18**).

The Example of Timothy

Philippians 2:19–24

2:19 ***"I trust … to send Timothy to you shortly."*** Timothy, as a young disciple, was with Paul when he first came to Philippi (Acts 16:1–12). The Philippian believers knew Timothy and held him in high regard. It would be Timothy's task to evaluate the condition of the church and report back to Paul. Timothy's name means "one who honors God."

2:20 ***"For I have no one like-minded."*** Paul's regard for and praise of Timothy in his epistles surpasses his praise for any of his other co-workers (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Thess. 3:1–2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2).

2:21 ***"For all seek their own."*** This statement of the selfish motives of many in the ministry is exemplified in those referred to in Philippians 1:15–16 and 2 Timothy 4:10.

2:22 ***"You know his proven character."*** Timothy's reputation was great from the beginning (Acts 16:1–2). ***"As a son … he served with me in the gospel."*** The analogy of a father and son speaks not only of great affection, but of likeness of character. Timothy was a reflection of Paul and, therefore, of the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:5–9). The indication of Scripture is that Timothy's father was not a believer (Acts 16:1; 2 Tim. 1:5).

2:23 ***"I hope to send him … as soon as I see how it goes with me."*** Here, he explains the reason for his delay in sending Timothy (v. 19). He wants to wait until his case is heard. If the outcome is favorable, he may accompany Timothy. In the meantime, Timothy was a great comfort to and servant of the apostle.

2:24 ***"I trust in the Lord."*** This phrase begins and ends Paul's words about Timothy (vv. 19, 24). In all that he did, Paul sought to follow the guidance of the Lord Jesus Christ as a faithful servant. ***"I myself shall also come shortly."*** Paul expresses the same confidence to Philemon (Phi. 22). Many scholars believe that Paul was released from imprisonment for a time, then was rearrested and executed.

The Example of Epaphroditus

Philippians 2:25–30

2:25 ***"Epaphroditus."*** Some suggest this may be the same man as *"Epaphras"* (Col. 1:7; 4:12), though Epaphras lived in Colossae, and Epaphroditus in Philippi—cities about 300 miles apart. However, both are mentioned with Paul in Rome. His name means "a very charming man." ***"My brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need."*** Paul heaps praise on this man with five descriptive titles. These titles seem to picture the ancient courier who ran great distances to deliver important messages. A courier had to be loyal, dedicated to his calling, able to defend himself along the way, and willing to risk every danger to deliver his message (Phil. 4:18).

2:26–27 ***"He was … distressed because you heard that he was sick."*** It says a great deal about this man that he was more concerned for those worried about his welfare than for himself. ***He was sick almost unto death."*** His illness had nearly cost him his life. ***"But God had mercy on him … on me also."*** Paul was apparently unable to heal Epaphroditus, but God had shown mercy, showing the power of prayer.

2:28 ***"You may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful."*** God works through adverse circumstances to bring comfort to many, as His good plan unfolds (Rom. 8:28). Paul is imprisoned, facing possible death, yet his greatest concerns are for his friends.

2:29 ***"Receive him … and hold such men in high esteem."*** Men like Epaphroditus were rare, and to be considered of great value in the church. How we need men like him today!

2:30 In this verse, Paul summarizes the motive of Epaphroditus, ***"for the work of Christ,"*** the price he was willing to pay, ***"he came close to death,"*** his self-sacrificial attitude, ***"not regarding his life,"*** and his dedication to the task set for him by the Philippian church, ***"to supply what was lacking in your service toward me."*** As Paul was now under house arrest in his own rented home (Acts 28:16, 30), he needed offerings from the churches to pay his expenses (Phil. 4:14–18). The phrase *"not regarding his life"* uses a word that spoke of an ancient clan of gamblers, who would risk their life on a roll of the dice. Later it was used of a gladiator in the arena and, finally, about two centuries later, it was claimed by Christians who chose to stay in plague-struck cities, so as to care for the sick and bury the dying.

PHILIPPIANS CHAPTER 3

Paul now records his own experience of coming to the *"mind of Christ"* (Phil. 2:5), and how it had transformed his life. This chapter lays out both the attitudes and the actions that can carry any believer from the new birth all the way to winning the crown at the Bema/Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Transformation of a Pharisee into a Beloved Apostle
Philippians 3:1–14

3:1 ***"Finally … rejoice in the Lord."*** The word *"finally"* could be translated "from now on." For the Christian, joy is possible under any and all circumstances, if we adopt the mind of Christ (John 16:22, 33; Rom. 5:1–5). ***"To write the same things."*** Paul recognized the necessity of repetition in his teaching, and we should never tire of hearing a truth over and over again.

3:2 ***"Beware … beware."*** The term ***"dogs"*** was one of the worst terms of contempt in the ancient world. It is used here and in 2 Peter 2:22 and Revelation 22:15 for hardened unbelievers. His mention of ***"the mutilation"*** shows that he is specifically referring to the Jewish legalists who sought to impose circumcision on Christian Gentiles.

3:3 ***"For we are the circumcision."*** That is, the true spiritual circumcision (Rom. 2:28–29; Col. 2:11–13). ***"Worship God in the Spirit."*** The Church-Age believer has entered into full spiritual reality, which the rituals of Judaism all pointed to (Heb. 10:1–4, 12–14). ***"Rejoice in Jesus Christ."*** Our basis for joy is the finished work of Christ (John 19:30; Col. 1:12–14; 2:9–10). We put no faith in good works for salvation (Eph. 2:8–9).

3:4 ***"Though I also might have confidence … If anyone else thinks he may … I more so."*** Paul is anticipating those among the legalists who might want to parade their works before these Philippian believers. He offers himself as one who could surpass any of his challengers in training, status, and sufferings—but his point is **all this is still not enough to gain eternal life!**

3:5–6 Here, Paul sets forth the kind of claims his enemies used to exalt themselves. Paul surpassed them all, being of pure Israelite lineage, from the ***"tribe of Benjamin"*** and thus, a descendant of Rachel, not Leah (Gen. 35:18). ***"A Pharisee … blameless."*** Paul does not mean he was sinless, but that no one could find fault in him. His claims surpassed those of his rivals (2 Cor. 10:10–16; 11:22–30). The ***"righteousness …***

in the law" could not save. Only by receiving the righteousness of Christ by faith can one enter eternal life (Rom. 4:3, 5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:10–14).

3:7 ***"Gain to me … loss for Christ."*** Here is the great decisive moment in Paul's life, which would have occurred shortly after his Damascus revelation (Acts 9:1–9). This is the fundamental decision of discipleship (Matt. 13:44; Luke 9:23; 14:26–33). Christ demands and deserves to be first place in all things (Col. 1:18). What Paul had considered to be assets in his unbelieving life, he now recognizes as liabilities. The religious practices of the unsaved are the greatest hindrance to their coming to Jesus Christ in faith (Matt. 19:24).

3:8 ***"Indeed I also count all things loss."*** This includes not only what he had attained (v. 7), but all the wealth and prestige the world could ever offer. ***"The excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus."*** Here, Paul moves on from his original change of thinking (repentance) and includes his continued growth in spiritual understanding as a disciple and apostle. ***"I … count them as rubbish."*** The word translated *"rubbish"* (*skubalon*) is not found anywhere else in the New Testament and refers to that which is totally disgusting and repulsive (Isa. 64:6), such as human excrement. His point is simple: nothing in this world is worth what he had found through justification by faith in Jesus Christ, and what he continued to learn as he grew in grace (2 Pet. 3:18).

3:9 ***"And be found in Him."*** At the moment one exercises faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit places us into eternal union with Him, imputing His righteousness to us (Rom. 6:3–5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:2–9; Eph. 1:13–14). ***"Through faith in Christ."*** The true gospel message is always "faith alone in Christ alone!"

3:10 ***"That I may know Him."*** When we believe in Jesus Christ, we are trusting in the message about Him—what He has done for us on the cross. Spiritual growth comes by moving on to knowing Him personally. ***"And the power of His resurrection."*** The desire expressed here is to experience His resurrection life in our daily walk. ***"The fellowship of His sufferings."*** In taking up our cross (Luke 9:23), we commit to the willingness to suffer for His sake (2 Tim. 3:12) and, in our own small way, we become ***"conformed to His death."*** By His death, Jesus Christ conquered sin and death (Col. 2:13–14). By living in the power of the Holy Spirit, we also share in that victory (Rom. 6:6–14).

3:11 ***"If … I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."*** Here, Paul uses a word for *"resurrection"* not found anywhere else in Scripture. It literally means "out-resurrection," Paul does not doubt either his salvation or his future resurrection. What he desires, and hopes to attain, is both the living experience of the resurrection life of Christ here and now, in his imprisonment and possible martyrdom (Phil. 1:21–23; 2:16–17), and his final approval and reward before the throne of Jesus Christ at the Bema/Judgment Seat (Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 9:24–27; 2 Cor. 5:9–10). This final victory had not yet been attained (v.12), because Paul realized that failure on his part was still possible. Every believer must realize that as long as we are in this life, God's grace and power are available to us. But we must never cease to strive to our utmost to claim them by faith (Heb. 6:11–12), lest we should *"become weary and discouraged"* (Heb. 12:3) and fail to "run our race" to the finish (Heb. 12:1). The possibilities of either victory or failure exist for each of us until this life is over.

3:12 ***"Already attained … already perfected."*** These phrases show that Paul is thinking about the future completion of his life in faith and victory. He is still in the race, and he is still running to win (1 Cor. 9:24–27). As long as we live, there is more to learn and more to apply of the power of the life of Christ in us. ***"That I may lay hold … for which Christ Jesus … laid hold of me."*** Jesus had a plan for Saul of Tarsus when He met him on the Damascus Road. That plan is not complete since Paul is still alive. Paul's desire, in simple terms, is to fulfill the plan of God for his life. This same desire should be the driving force in every believer's life. Each and every believer has been *"called according to His purpose"* (Rom. 8:28b). The motivating force of our lives ought to be to lay hold of and to finish the plan of God for us. This demands

continual spiritual growth in God's Word and faithful service according to His will. Every believer needs to be reminded that God has a plan for his or her life (Gal. 6:9; Eph. 2:10). That plan involves growing in conformity to Christ (Rom. 8:29; 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Pet. 3:18) and faithful service in the area of your gifting (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:7), resulting the building up of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:11–16).

3:13 ***"Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead."*** Here is the key to success in the Christian life. Past failures or successes must be forgotten, in order to strive for victory in whatever time remains to us. The words ***"reaching forward"*** are from the athletic arena, where the runner, nearing the end of the race, leans forward in the final sprint.

3:14 ***"I press toward the goal."*** Paul has his eyes focused on the finish line of his life. ***"For the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*** This shows that the whole section here (v. 7–14) is speaking about striving for faithful service that will result in eternal reward. God is keeping a record of believers who are faithful (Mal. 3:16–17). Paul desires his life and name to be in that book (*"remembrance"*). So should we!

Summary Principles: The Path to Spiritual Greatness

1. We should rejoice in the repetition of Bible teaching (**v. 1**). Without truths being repeated over and over we do not grasp their deeper meanings.

2. The great danger to our spiritual growth always comes in the form of false teaching (**v. 2**). False teachers always claim that salvation *"by grace through faith"* (Eph. 2:8) is not enough. They then add some form of work as being necessary for eternal life (Acts 15:1–5; Gal. 2:16–21; 3:1–3, 10–14).

3. Paul offers himself as an example to those who think that works can gain eternal life (**vv. 4–6**). He surpassed them all in good works, yet these accomplishments did nothing in bringing him forgiveness or righteousness.

4. The great moment of repentance and faith came when Paul realized that all his achievements counted as nothing compared to the righteousness and life offered to him by faith in Jesus Christ (**v. 7**).

5. As a new believer, Paul began the life of a disciple, setting aside the things of this world, so as to know Jesus Christ in a real and personal way (**v. 8**).

6. Paul's great desire was to not only enter into eternal life, but to live in such a way as to share the power, the fellowship, and the sufferings of his Savior (**vv. 9–10**).

7. The goal of Paul's life was to experience the resurrection life of Christ here and now, and to gain the greatest possible reward in eternity (**v. 11**; Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 9:24–27; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:6–8).

8. As long as we are in this life, there is more to learn, more grace to experience, and more service we can render (**vv. 12–14**). We need to forget the past and to look forward to what lies ahead, and to live in order to win the prize of eternal reward (Heb. 11:26; Matt. 5:10–12; James 1:12; 1 John 2:28–3:3).

The Mind-Set (Attitude) of Spiritual Maturity
Philippians 3:15–21

3:15 ***"As many as are mature, have this mind."*** The immediate goal of every believer, according to the plan and will of God, is to grow up into spiritual maturity (Matt. 5:48; Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:13; Heb. 5:12–6:1; 2 Pet. 3:18). The word translated here as ***"mature"*** (*teleios*) is unfortunately often translated "perfect," which gives the wrong idea of being sinless. Those who are mature, Paul says, should have the same attitude as he has expressed (vv. 7–14), to continue to grow in grace, wisdom, and power, until life on this Earth ends. If you are still breathing, there is more for you to learn and do, and greater sanctification/purification is required (1 Thess. 5:23).

3:16 ***"Let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind."*** No matter what level of spiritual growth one has attained, whether child, young man, or father (1 John 2:12–14), all should continue to strive for greater Christlikeness (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). Those who are mature ought not to expect young believers to live up to the standards of the mature. We all need freedom to grow and need to show grace and patience with others as they grow up into Christlikeness.

3:17 ***"Brethren, join in following my example … as … a pattern."*** Paul was able to point to himself as an example of the genuine Christian life, as well as other mature co-workers. Every believer should associate with those who are more advanced in their Christian life and learn to emulate their example. The phrase, ***"note those who so walk,"*** uses the word *skopeo*, which means "to examine closely," or "scope-out." We should all diligently seek and find examples to follow, both of those living now and from historical examples (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Titus 2:7–8).

3:18–19 ***"For many walk … the enemies of the cross of Christ."*** Paul has mentioned before those with impure motives and false teachers (Phil. 1:15–16; 3:2). There will always be imposters, deceivers, and hirelings—even among the body of Christ. Some he mentions by name (2 Tim. 2:17–18). By their erroneous teachings and conduct, they are the enemies of the truth and righteousness for which Christ died. ***"Whose god is their belly."*** They live only for what gratifies their own carnal appetites and is pleasing to them in the moment (1 Tim. 5:3–6; 2 Tim. 3:1–9). Their self-centered lifestyle will ultimately destroy them, for "we reap what we sow" (Gal. 6:7–8).

3:20 ***"Our citizenship is in heaven … we … wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."*** One of our greatest aids to continued spiritual growth and service is to live in the expectation of our Lord's return (Titus 2:13; 1 John 2:28–3:3). Remember that Philippi was a Roman colony and possessed the privileges that accompanied that status. We are a colony of Heaven, planted in this fallen world, to be a light in the darkness (Matt. 5:14–16; Phil. 2:15; Col. 3:1–4). We are ambassadors of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:14–21).

3:21 ***"Who will transform … conformed to His glorious body."*** When Jesus Christ returns for His bride, every believer will be glorified in a moment of time (1 Cor. 15:50–58). We will receive a body like His resurrection body. This will accompany His dominion and rule over all things (Psalm 110:1; Heb. 2:5–8). We are to live our lives now in anticipation of our glorious future.

<u>Summary Principles: The Mind of Maturity</u>

1. Those who are mature in Christ will have the same attitude as that expressed by Paul (**v. 15**). Whatever lack we may have in our understanding, if we are striving to excel, God will reveal those things to us.

2. Whatever our level of spiritual growth, we ought to follow in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul (**v. 16**; 1 Cor. 11:1; 2 Tim. 2:10–17).

3. We must always be on the alert for those who, by their false teachings, make themselves into enemies of Christ (**vv. 17–19**; Matt. 7:15–20; Acts 15:1–5; Gal. 1:6–9; Col. 2:4, 8, 16, 18; 1 Tim. 4:1–3; 2 Tim. 3:1–9; 2 Pet. 2:1–3). Sometimes these false teachers are believers who have wandered away from the truth, for personal gain (Phil. 1:15–16; 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17–18).

4. Believers should always remember that we are citizens of Heaven, and that we are to live by the precepts of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, as we await His return to take us home (**v. 20**; John 14:6).

5. When He comes, all who believe in Him will be transformed into the likeness of His resurrection body (**v. 21**; Job 19:25–27; Psalm 17:15; 1 Cor. 15:50–58; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 1 John 3:1–3). If we live our lives in light of these truths, we will not fail!

PHILIPPIANS CHAPTER 4

Paul concludes this epistle with a plea for unity, a call to prayer and obedience, and an expression of gratitude for their continued support. This chapter is filled with great lessons for those who are faithful and mature to avoid complacency and to strive for even greater excellence in thought, word, and deed.

A Call for Stability, Unity, and Tranquility

Philippians 4:1–9

4:1 ***"My joy and crown."*** The crown of joy is an eternal reward given for effective evangelism and training of others (1 Thess. 2:19). Because of their faithfulness and loyalty, Paul had a bond with these believers above all others, and they would share in eternal reward together. ***"Stand fast in the Lord."*** This command is repeated from Philippians 1:27. The word used here is a military term that pictures holding the line in the face of enemy attack (Eph. 6:13–14).

4:2–3 ***"I implore Euodia and … Syntyche."*** These ladies' names are interesting. The first means "prosperous way," the second means "good fortune." They were good workers in the church, who had an apparent falling out with each other. This is the third time Paul has called for unity of mind (Phil. 2:2; 3:16). ***"True companion"*** is likely the pastor of the church. ***"Whose names are in the Book of Life."*** The names of all who believe in Jesus are recorded in this book (Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:15).

4:4 ***"Rejoice … rejoice!"*** This is probably the most famous verse of this epistle. Remember, Paul is a prisoner in Rome facing possible execution (Phil. 1:21–26). His confidence in the perfect plan of God is not shaken by his circumstances (v. 11).

4:5 ***"The Lord is at hand."*** This can refer either to His presence with us at all times (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5–6), or to His soon return (1 Thess. 4:13–18; Titus 2:13). The word ***"gentleness"*** speaks of patience, forbearance, and being *"temperate"* with others by exercising self-control (1 Cor. 9:25; Gal. 5:23; Titus 1:8).

4:6–7 ***"Be anxious for nothing."*** Victory over worry and anxiety comes through praying for everything. If we entrust everything that concerns us into the hands of a loving and protecting Father, ***"the peace of God … will guard"*** our souls (Gen. 50:20; Psalm 27:1; John 14:27; Rom. 8:28). The word translated *"guard"* means "to see and provide in advance," exactly the idea seen in the experience of Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 22:8, 13–14). Our God is *"The God of peace"* (v. 9).

4:8 ***"Finally."*** As in Philippians 3:1, this can mean "from now on," or "for the duration." ***"Meditate on these things."*** Our life is the product of our mind-set (Rom. 8:5–8).

4:9 ***"You learned and received and heard and saw in me."*** Paul had been both teacher and the example of what he taught. ***"The God of peace will be with you."*** It is one thing to be a child of God and secure for all eternity; it is another to live in the daily fellowship of the heavenly Father. This should be the goal of every believer (John 14:21–23; 15:4–8; 1 John 1:7).

Self-Sufficiency through Christ-Dependency
Philippians 4:10–23

4:10 ***"But I rejoiced … your care for me has flourished."*** Paul expresses both gratitude for their support and his awareness that they had not forgotten him, even though they could not send financial aid until Epaphroditus was able to travel to Rome (Phil. 2:25).

4:11 ***"I have learned … to be content."*** The word *"content"* (*autarkes*) has the meaning of being "self-sufficient, self-reliant, and independent of outward circumstances." Paul's total trust and reliance upon the Lord Jesus set him free from living life "under the circumstances." He lived life from the heavenly perspective (Col. 3:1–4).

4:12 ***"I know how … to be full and to be hungry."*** Paul had the "know-how" because he took seriously what he learned of Christ and practiced it daily. While hunger, cold, and exposure could make him uncomfortable (2 Cor. 4:7–13; 6:9–10; 11:24–28), it could not dampen his joy in Christ. He had graduated from the school of affliction with high honors!

4:13 ***"I can do all things through Christ."*** How many Christians quote this as if it were a promise to claim instead of a stature to grow up to? For Paul, it is a statement of fact, based on years of proving it to be true. What he taught them about the power of God, he practiced (Phil. 2:12–13). It is certain that God has a plan for every believer for sanctification and service (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Pet. 1:5–7). If we are growing and obedient to His plan, no other power can hinder its fulfillment in us. ***"Christ who strengthens me."*** Again, total dependence upon the Lord brings independence from conditions and circumstances.

4:14 ***"You have done well."*** He commends them for their care for him, so as not to seem indifferent to their gift. ***"You shared in my distress."*** His affliction was real, and their gift would help in his time of need (Phil. 1:7).

4:15–16 ***"When I departed from Macedonia … in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities."*** Paul recites three previous times they had supported him as evidence of his gratitude. While he was in Corinth there was another time, they sent support (2 Cor. 11:8–10).

4:17 ***"I seek the fruit that abounds to your account."*** Regarding financial support, Paul shows that his greater concern was for the eternal reward being laid up to their account (Matt. 10:41; Mark 9:41).

4:18 ***"I have all and abound. I am full."*** Their gift had provided for all his needs. ***"Well pleasing to God."*** Paul always saw his own life, as well as that of his converts, in its relationship to God. Their gift blessed him but, above that, it had been a sacrifice and offering to God (Eph. 5:2).

4:19 ***"My God shall supply all your need."*** Just as God supplied Paul's needs through the gift of the Philippian church, so He would also meet their needs in return (2 Cor. 9:8–11). Sometimes, believers "have not because they ask not" (James 1:5; 4:2). But many times, believers have not because they give not (Luke 6:38). God's ability to provide is never limited (Eph. 3:20; 1 Cor. 2:9), but our disobedience and/or lack of

faith hinders our ability to receive and use His gifts wisely. ***"According to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."*** Through our faith and union with Jesus Christ, we have been given access to all the riches of Heaven (Eph. 1:3, 7, 18; 2 Cor. 1:3; Col. 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:3). God does not waste His gifts but gives them in proportion to our willingness to learn and apply His Word to our lives. If we reject His Word—the greatest treasure we possess—we have no capacity to rightly use many of His other gifts!

4:20 ***"To our God and Father be glory forever."*** This verse is a summary of all the rejoicing found in this epistle. All praise and glory and honor belong to our gracious heavenly Father (Rom. 16:25–27; Jude 24–25).

4:21 ***"Greet every saint in Christ Jesus."*** Two things stand out in this sentence. First, we are saints because of our union with Christ. We have been "set apart" to God for all eternity. One is not a *"saint"* because they do good deeds. Second, each and every member of Christ's Body is beloved of God, and there should be a unity and harmony in the Body as a result of divine love for one another (Eph. 4:1–6).

4:22 ***"Especially those who are of Caesar's household."*** Paul's witness and ministry in Rome had won many to Christ in the household of Caesar (Phil. 1:12–13). These probably included some Roman soldiers who guarded him, as well as slaves and even members of the family of Caesar.

4:23 ***"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."*** If we possess and live in the sphere of His grace, all will be well in the end. His grace is sufficient for us all (2 Cor. 12:9–10).

Paul, an Example of Spiritual Growth

1. The Apostle Paul had to go through the stages of spiritual growth just like we do. In the early record of his Christian life, he is recorded first as a **believer** (*"brother,"* Acts 9:17), then as an evangelist/**witness** (Acts 9:20–22), he then is identified as a **disciple** (Acts 9:26–27), then as the least of the teachers in Antioch (Acts 13:1). When he went out as a **missionary**, it was Barnabas who was in charge (Acts 13:2), and not until he grew fully into his gift do we see the mighty **apostle** emerge (Acts 13:9–12).

2. In this section of Philippians, Paul gives us three stages in his own spiritual development:

    a. Learning (**v. 11**). The word translated *"learned"* is from *manthano,* which is the root word for "disciple." A disciple is a student, a learner—one who is devoted to master the knowledge and service of Christ.

    b. *"Know how"* (**v. 12**). When we say that someone has "know-how" regarding something, we mean that they are skilled in that area. The result of consistent learning is the development of skill in applying what we have learned to life. Paul gained this skill, being able to abound or be abased, by long and continuous practice. He could stay in a nice inn and eat a fine meal or sleep in a crevice of rock to escape the wind and rain. In either case, he was thankful to God.

    c. Confidence/courage (**v. 13**). *"I can do all things through Christ."* How many Christians quote this verse, then fall apart when things don't go well for them? This is a verse only for the mature (Heb. 5:14), who have proved themselves over and over in the spiritual fight. This is not self-confidence. Paul's confidence is in *"Christ who strengthens me."*

3. He also commends the Philippian believers for their growth and service (**v. 14**). The book begins (Phil. 1:3–7) and ends (Phil. 4:14–20) with his acknowledgement of their generous

participation in his missionary labors. True spiritual growth will always result in fruitful service to others (Rom. 7:4; Gal. 5:22–23; Eph. 5:8–10; Col. 1:3–6).

4. Paul assures them that their service is not in vain, for it will result in eternal reward (**vv. 17–18**; Matt. 6:4, 6, 18, 20; Heb. 10:35; 11:26; Rev. 22:12). The highest form of eternal reward is the crown, of which there are five:

    a. The Imperishable Crown (1 Cor. 9:24–27). This crown is given to those who exercise self-discipline so as to serve Christ better (1 Cor. 9:19–23).

    b. The Crown of Joy (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19). This crown is given to those who are faithful to win others to faith in Jesus Christ.

    c. The Crown of Life (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10). This crown goes to those who faithfully endure sufferings as a way of life.

    d. The Crown of Righteousness (2 Tim. 4:6–8). This crown is given to those who live their lives in light of the return of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13–14).

    e. The Crown of Glory (1 Pet. 5:1–4). This is often called the pastor's crown, given to faithful shepherds of God's flock. It appears that Peter was looking forward to receiving this one, for keeping Jesus' charge (John 21:15–19).

5. The assurance given in **v. 19** should be viewed in the context. God is faithful to His children, whether we are faithful or not. However, we do reap what we sow (Gal. 6:7–9). Disobedient believers will receive divine discipline (Heb. 12:3–11), and that discipline intensifies as long as their rebellion continues. There are four stages of discipline seen in Scripture:

    a. Rebuke or reproof (Heb. 12:5b; 2 Tim. 3:16). This is verbal correction from the teaching of God's Word, or from fellow believers.

    b. Chastening (Heb. 12:5a, 6a). This word means "child-training," and speaks of the application of the rod (Prov. 13:24; 22:15).

    c. Scourging (Heb. 12:6b). This is a severe beating (Heb. 10:31). Scourging was done with a whip, producing deep cuts.

    d. Death (1 John 5:16; Acts 5:1–11). In cases of persistent and destructive behavior by a believer, God may call them home to Heaven early, so as to spare others their destructive ways (Judg. 16:28–31).

6. The book of Philippians is a joy-filled book but, in the background, are Paul's sufferings under Roman imprisonment, and the afflictions of these Philippian believers. Triumphant living is joyful living (Neh. 8:10; Heb. 12:2), because it is Christ-centered in thought, word, and deed, and is a blessing to those around. Let us all strive to be such a believer!

Application: Promises Based on Premises

There are a number of promises given to the Philippians that Christians love to quote. Probably, the two most often claimed are Philippians 4:13, *"I can do all things through Christ,"* and Philippians 4:19, *"And*

my God shall supply all your need." The problem is that, when put to the fiery test, most Christians fail to *"**do** all things through Christ,"* and many find themselves short of the supply of critical needs.

How do we square this lack of spiritual reality that God's Word seems to promise with the reality we see on a daily basis? The answer is really quite simple. The failure lies, as usual, in a failure to understand Scripture in its context.

A brief survey of promises shows us that promises in the Bible usually come with conditions. Many love to quote, *"And we know that all things work together for good ..."* (Rom. 8:28), without finishing the verse, *"to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."* The promise is based on a premise of spiritual dedication on the part of the believer. Jesus said, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments"* (John 14:15). Can we casually assume that the promise of Romans 8:28 then can be applied to a disobedient believer?

Certainly, there are some promises in Scripture that are unconditional, based solely on the faithfulness of God. *"I will never leave you nor forsake you"* is an example (Heb. 13:5b). But this is a promise about what God will do, not about what we can do.

Certainly, the promises cited above can be said to be **potentially** true of every believer. We all share in the same provisions and potential through God's Word and by His indwelling Spirit. But, when we read promises in the Bible, we would do well to consider the context. Consider these promises made to the Philippians, with the contextual background:

1. Philippians 1:6, *"Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."* Why is Paul confident here? Because of their consistent joint participation with him (**vv. 5, 7**).

2. Philippians 1:21, *"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."* Many believers claim this, without real merit. Paul had proved this to be true (**vv. 12–14**), and anticipated that he would, by the grace of God, continue to be "unashamed" (v. 20) due to continued *"boldness."*

3. Philippians 4:13, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* While this is certainly potential for every believer, most who claim it have no clue of its reality in life. Paul came to this by a process (**vv. 10–12**) of experience, learning, and proven capabilities over the course of many years.

4. Philippians 4:19, *"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."* Certainly, God is able to do this for every believer. However, it is not true of many (2 Thess. 3:11–12; Eph. 4:28; Luke15:11–17).

CONCLUSION

In this epistle, Paul sets forth the Lord Jesus Christ as the ultimate example of both attitude and conduct for every believer. Not until we fully absorb the mind of Christ, through the diligent study and digestion of His Word, can we hope to actually experience the victorious life of Christ ("humility and obedience," Phil. 2:5–8). The potential is there for every believer. Few attain the practical reality.

May each of us be challenged to pursue the prize of knowing Jesus Christ
as Paul sought to know Him!