

**Living
for Christ
and the gospel
in
PHILIPPIANS**

by Terran Williams

How to discern God's message to us in Philippians

God, through Paul, inspired the writing of the letter to the Philippians. God directed it first and primarily to the church in Philippi, and then secondly to us, all of us who would read it in the centuries that followed.

That's why it's so important that we understand that until we know what it meant for *them then*, we cannot know what it means for *us now*.

These two phrases *them then* and *us now* reveal the two major steps in hearing God speak to us through this letter:

- 1) The first question is one of ***insight***: '*What did it mean to them then?*' Here we will look for the meaning of words and phrases, translation accuracy, textual accuracy, the flow of thought, data into the specific culture and situation of the day, knowledge about the relationship between the writer (Paul) and the recipients of the letter. And at this point we need the very best data we can get - which is why I have drawn from some of the best commentary available.
- 2) The second question, which hinges entirely on the first question, is one of ***application***: '*What does it mean to us now?*' Our situation and culture is very different to theirs. Yet God put this in the canon of Scripture and we believe that he has something to say to us through every verse of it. Here we seek to find the *timeless truths* that apply to all people, in all places at all times. And of course we are limited by one major law of interpretation: *it can never mean something to us now that it in no way meant to them then*.

It is for this reason that this commentary deals with every verse on both these levels. First it says something about *insight* and what it meant for them then. Second it says something about *application* and what it means for us now.

My prayer is that, with the aid of this commentary, as you explore the word of God to them then, you freshly hear the word of God to you now.

Going through Philippians *alone*

- Make time every day. Allocate as much time as you need to really hear from God for your life. Read until you are full - don't just *snack* on the Bible, rather enjoy a *solid meal*.
- Take your time as you go through Philippians, perhaps only exploring a few verses at a time. After all, it doesn't matter if you do the whole Bible in a year, or in five years, just as long as you're *steadily* moving through it.
- Trust God to speak to you every time you read the Bible. Expect to receive just what you need for each day. Invite the Holy Spirit to be your primary teacher as you read.
- Carry into your day what you sense God saying to you. Perhaps write down the main things you sense God telling you each day. Pray to God about what he has just said to you. Make any needed adjustments in your heart and life as God reveals more and more of his Word, will and ways to you. After all, the goal of Bible reading and study is not information but *transformation*.

Going through Philippians *as a group*

If you are a small group leader, and your church leaders so permit, why not spend four weeks going through Philippians in your small group?

Preparation: Ask everyone to prepare the week before by reading and pondering the specific sections of the letter:

Week 1: read and ponder 1:1-26
Week 2: read and ponder 1:27-2:30
Week 3: read and ponder 3:1-4:3
Week 4: read and ponder 4:4-23.

Commentary: Remind them that this commentary is available to deepen their insight into these verses. Some people may want to work through this commentary *entirely*, and others only *partially and selectively*. That's fine since the main thing is the Bible itself, not the commentary.

Discussion: In the weekly discussion-time of the small group, first read the respective portion of Philippians, and then invite everyone to answer three questions:

- 1) *What did you find most **interesting** in these verses?*
- 2) *What did you find most **challenging** in these verses?*
- 3) *What **change** do you want to make in your thinking or life (as a result of going through these verses)?*

(Notice that the goal of this time is not to explore this section of the Bible with too much detail (since the hope is that people do this at home with the aid of the commentary), but to *apply* this section of the Bible to our lives. The goal of the discussion is more 'growth in *transformation*' than it is 'increase in *information*'.)

Ice-breaker questions: Optionally, at the beginning of a discussion it often helps to start with a question that helps people get to know each other before talking about the Bible. Here are possible questions:

Week 1: Chapter 1 speaks much about prayer. Do you have any stories to tell of answered prayer at any time in your life?
Week 2: Chapter 2 speaks lots about humility. Tell us of a person you know who best embodies this quality.
Week 3: Chapter 3 reveals Paul's personal story. If you're a Christian tell us of a defining moment in your spiritual journey where you decided to pursue Christ. If you're not a Christian, tell us what questions you have that hold you back from trusting Christ.
Week 4: Chapter 4 speaks of dealing with relational conflict. What is the most painful conflict you have experienced - and how did you deal with it?

New people: If your group is a group that seeks to grow through inviting new people, remind everyone it is still fine to invite new people during this time as they will most likely still be able to contribute without preparation.

Main sources used in this commentary

- Gordon Fee's *The IVP New Testament Series: Philippians*
- Tom Wright's *Paul for Everyone: the Prison Letters*
- David Guzik's online commentary of Philippians (www.enduringword.com/commentaries/50.html)
- The 'Today's New International Version' translation of the Bible

Outline of the letter to the Philippians

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Philippians Chapter One

1. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS (1:1-11)

1.1 GREETING (1:1-2)

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

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

Insight

- This is one of six letters in the New Testament where Timothy is included in the greeting. The letter is clearly from Paul, so it seems that Timothy was writing down what Paul was dictating.
- 'Overseers' refers to the shepherds/pastors, or elders of the church. It was Paul's practice to appoint a team of elders to lead churches (see Titus 1:5). 'Deacons' refers to the other body of leaders within the church that seemed to be appointed by the overseers themselves. The deacons carried specific areas of practical leadership responsibility, so that the overseers were freed up to lead and pastor the church.
- Paul was an apostle. Timothy, nowhere described as an apostle, was on Paul's team. To use a helpful (but not biblical) phrase, they were an 'apostolic team'. Together, along with Silas, they had given birth to the church in Philippi through the preaching of the gospel, and through the appointing of overseers to lead the church. Although they kept involved in the church by revisiting, letter writing, and intervention in critical times, they moved on to pioneer new churches.

Application

- **Identity in Christ:** Every believer is a saint (here translated as 'God's holy people') by virtue of being united to Jesus. The word holy means to be set apart for one's special belonging and use. When we are in Christ, we can be sure that God has set us apart for his own special belonging and use. It does not matter who we are as much as it matters whose we are.
- **Church leadership structure:** Local churches need to be led by an oversight team (elsewhere in the Bible called elders) and a deacon team. Elders have general oversight, have the highest human authority in the church, and carry the overall responsibility of the wellbeing of the church and its members. Deacons have more focused leadership functions, and are appointed by the elders to co-lead the church along with them.

- **Apostolic team:** Although, through most of church history, the concept of apostolic teams has been lost, it is my conviction that every local church needs more than just the local leadership of elders and deacons. It also needs outside input from what could be called an apostolic team (after all that is what Paul, an apostle, and Timothy, his team-member, were to this church). This means that on the one hand each local church should benefit from the local leadership of elders and deacons, yet on the other hand, it should also benefit from the input of a trusted, trans-local apostolic team.

1.2 THANKFUL PRAYER (1:3-8)

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

Insight

- The overall tone of the letter is one of friendship. Paul sees the people who make up the Philippian church as his friends - and he starts the letter with these verses, which serve as an expression of appreciation and affection. But he is quick to emphasise that it is a *spiritual* friendship that they have, held together by a common experience of grace, and a common mission to advance the gospel in their generation.

Application

- **Prayer:** Be ready to pray for churches and Christians. But before asking God to do something in them, thank him with joy for all the good things he is already doing in them. Pondering God's grace up until now feeds our faith-levels that God's grace will continue to come our way.
- **Sharing our faith:** The main passion of every apostolic team, every church and every Christian should be the advance of the gospel message about Jesus, and they should partner together in seeing this message take root in the world both near and far.
- **God's transforming grace:** God is doing a good work in you and in every church: he is causing you to be transformed by the gospel and be motivated to spread the gospel, and he will continue doing this until the end of your life, or until Jesus comes back, whichever happens first. So be encouraged.

7 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. 8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Insight

- Paul is writing this letter from prison. He is in chains because of his unwavering proclamation of the gospel. But he is more aware of his love for them, than he is aware of the difficulty of imprisonment. He is writing this letter in response to a financial gift sent by Epaphroditus, which he sees as a sign that they share in God's grace with him.

Application

- **Christ's love:** Allow God to fill your heart with Christ's affection for your fellow-believers around you. Let them get into your heart. This applies especially to leaders, who before anything else need to be lovers - lovers of Christ and lovers of the people they lead.
- **Community:** Two ways to deeply bond with fellow-believers are 1) to partner together on the mission of advancing the gospel, and 2) to see God's grace at work whether the gospel is advancing quickly or whether, like the imprisoned Paul was experiencing, the church is facing some painful set-backs in its mission.

1.3 REQUESTS TO GOD (1:9-11)

9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Insight

- Paul uses the word translated as 'abound' here 26 times in his New Testament writings. It is one of his favourite words. It captures the sense of abundance that is ours to experience because of the lavish grace that God pours out in Jesus and through his Spirit. It echoes Jesus' promise in John 10:10 where he said that he came to give us life, and life in abundance.
- Notice that Paul is not saying that they lacked in love, but that God wanted them to become *more and more* loving. Paul understood the Christian life as a progressive journey into experiencing all God has for us, as well as becoming all God wants us to become. There is no 'arriving' - there is always more.

Application

- **Prayer:** We need to regularly pray for ourselves and for those around us, but we need to pray rich prayers that have to do with the way our lives are transformed to the glory of God, and through Jesus (v11).
- **God's transforming grace:** It is helpful to picture what God wants to do in our lives, and in the lives of people around us - and then to pray that. So, from these verses, what does God want to do in us? 1) He wants to grow our capacity to love more and more people, and to love them more and more deeply (v9). 2) He wants to deepen our understanding of God and God's will (v9). 3) He wants us to make more discerning decisions in life so that we pursue what really matters (v10). 4) He wants us to avoid everything that makes us impure and to be blameless (which means we are not 'a stumbling block to people who see our lives')(v10). 5) He wants the side-effect or the 'fruit' of our relationship with Christ to be practical righteousness, or right living (v11).
- **Prayer as ministry:** Before talking to people about God, talk to God about people. That is what Paul is doing here - he has much to tell them in this letter, but he starts by praying for them. Perhaps people would be more open to our message if we prayed for them before we spoke to them.

2. PAUL'S CURRENT SITUATION AND REFLECTIONS ON IT (1:12-26)

2.1 THE GOSPEL SPREADS (1:12-18)

12 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 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.

Insight

- The church in Philippi was being persecuted by the Roman empire. The reason was simple: everyone in the empire (and Philippi was part of it) were to regularly bow at the mention of Caesar and confess, 'Caesar is Lord'. But as believers in Jesus Christ they believed that 'Jesus is Lord' and only he was worthy of their bowed knee. This meant that they were getting into trouble. What made it worse is that Paul, the person they looked up to, was in prison in Rome - and this discouraged them even more. So Paul wanted them to see how he saw his own imprisonment - as a wonderful opportunity for the gospel, not as something bad. He believed that God had put him in prison (see verse 16 below). Paul told them that his imprisonment was advancing the gospel firstly inside the prison (v13) and outside the prison in the Roman church (v14). The reason it advanced inside the prison is that because Paul was a political prisoner he was guarded permanently by Caesar's elite guard or soldiers, with a different soldier every four. And they would ask him, 'Why are you in prison?' and he would tell that about Jesus. This way talk about Jesus Christ spread throughout the palace guard and even around Rome. The reason it spread outside prison to the Roman church is that the church in Rome were inspired by Paul's fearless example of preaching even to dangerous Roman soldiers, that they were motivated to preach too. Fascinatingly, chapter 4:22 suggests that Paul may even have led one of Caesar's family members to faith in Christ during his imprisonment.

Application

- **God in control:** What may seem like a real disaster (e.g. imprisonment, or going to hospital, or missing one's flight, or whatever) may be God's way of setting us up for an opportunity to impact some people's lives. We must learn to discern the hand of God in even the most tragic situations. In the words of an ancient hymn, 'Behind the frowning circumstances, there is a smiling face' - God, with a smile on his face, loves us and is ready to turn every situation for our good, and for the good of his gospel. But, like Paul, we need to reaffirm that God is in control.

- **Sharing our faith:** Our courage to share our faith in Christ with people around us may wane, so we need to regularly expose ourselves to those who do courageously reach out with success. Conversely, we, through our example and encouragement, can be a catalyst of courage to others who do not have the courage to share their faith. If, when we look around at fellow-Christians, there are few models of courage in faith-sharing, it may be time for us to rise up and become a catalyst of courage through our example.

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

Insight

- In verse 14 Paul spoke of how the Christians in Rome had become outspoken about their faith in Christ. But now Paul lets us know that not all this gospel-sharing comes from pure motives. Some of it does come from ‘goodwill’ and ‘love’ toward Paul: it is as though some people were motivated by their love for the imprisoned Paul and thought to themselves, ‘If Paul was out of prison he would be active in reaching out to the city of Rome, but he is not, so I will take up the slack.’ But, sadly, it seems that there were some who did not like Paul, probably some of the Jewish Christians who felt he had gone too far in attempts to reach out to non-Jewish Gentiles. These people also continued to reach out to others, probably fellow-Jews, but thought to themselves, ‘Paul may think he’s someone special because he thinks God uses him, but look how God uses me too. I hope he stays in prison and learns his lesson.’

Application

- **Playing our part:** God will sometimes remove strong leaders and strong evangelists from a church or an area as a way of encouraging the rest of the people to lovingly ‘take up the slack.’ It is as though we get a little lazy when highly competent people are leading and reaching out, but we must not wait till they are gone to start playing our part. We are in great danger as a church when we over-rely on leadership to advance the gospel. Every person, regardless of whether they are leaders in the church or not, have the great privilege and responsibility of reaching out with the love and truth of Christ.
- **God’s grace despite wrong motives:** Amazingly, God will sometimes use people to reach others even though their motives are wrong. This does not mean that God tolerates their selfish ambition, envy, rivalry or false

motives - it just means that God is so big and gracious that he can even use people riddled with bad motives.

- **God in control:** Paul's example reminds us that it's best to rejoice in God's ability to work powerfully despite the injustice of political powers (Paul had done no wrong, yet he was a prisoner) and despite the unloving motives sadly found in those who do God's work. In 3:21 he will reveal that he had such a high view of Christ's sovereign power, that he never saw himself in the hands of people - but always in the hands of Christ.

2.2 WHAT TO LIVE AND DIE FOR (1:18-26)

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19 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. 20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

Insight

- Paul was in prison, and soon he would come to trial, at which time they would either set him free (and he would continue to experience *life*) or they would execute him (and he would face *death*). He anticipated that Christ would be exalted through him while he experienced this tribunal - and what made him so sure of this is that he was being prayed for, and he knew that the Spirit of Christ would freshly empower him for the trial (v19).
- Paul quotes Job 13:16 directly in verse 19: 'will turn out for my deliverance'. By this he means that God will not let him down, but will continue to allow him to magnify (or exalt (v20)) Christ through his life. When Paul speaks of not being 'ashamed' (v20) he means that he won't let God down, and God won't let him down.

Application

- **Preparing to be used by God:** Many opportunities will come your way for Christ to shine through your life and through your words into the minds and hearts on unsaved people. But, like Paul, we need to prepare for these opportunities. The best way to prepare for Christ to use you is 1) to ask some Christians to pray for you and 2) to rely on the Spirit of Christ to freshly anoint and empower you at that time so that you can have the courage you need (v19).
- **Passion for Christ:** God wants a passion for Christ and the spread of the gospel about Christ to be the singular passion of your life. When you make this the singular passion of your life then God promises that no

matter what happens, even if you're executed, God will not let you down and you will have your heart's desire: Christ being exalted!

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

Insight

- Paul knew that at his imminent trial he might either be executed or released. Here he lets the church in Philippi know that either way his life-passion and life-purpose is fulfilled: 'For me to live is Christ and to die is gain' (v21). Interestingly, in the original language it rhymes: 'Christos' (Christ) and 'kerdos' (gain). He unpacks this to explain what he means by this personal life-motto. By 'to live is Christ' he means, 'to go on living in the body' and being involved in the 'fruitful labour' of serving Christ by helping other people to find and follow Christ themselves. By 'to die is gain' he means 'to depart (from his earthly existence) and to be with Christ'. Paul had a passionate, intimate relationship with Christ, but still he elsewhere described his relationship with Christ as 'through a glass, thickly dimmed' - he couldn't wait to see Christ 'face to face' which would only be possible when he died (see 1 Corinthians 13:12). Obviously Paul did not have the freedom to choose what would happen at the trial, but if he were to choose he would be torn: if he was to just think about himself he would rather die and be with Christ, but if he was to think about other people, he would rather stay (v23-24).

Application

- **Passion for Christ:** Why not embrace this as your own life-motto, 'To live is Christ and to die is gain'? After all, the purpose of your existence is to serve Christ now, and be with Christ forever! The wonderful thing about this purpose and passion is that, if you give yourself totally to it, you will not be disappointed! Sadly, so many people pursue as their life's passion and purpose something beyond their reach, not to mention something not worthy enough of their one-and-only life. Living to serve Christ and the people he sends us to is what should keep us ticking and motivated in this life. There is no higher motive and there is no grander, more meaningful use of our brief, one-and-only lives! In the words of a famous missionary, 'Only one life will soon be past, and only what's done for Christ will last.'
- **The death of a Christian:** Although how we die is uncertain, what happens when a Christian dies is totally certain: we will be profoundly united with Christ, totally conscious of him, seeing him face to face. We

will never be more satisfied and safe than when we see Christ face to face! So do not fear death if you live for Christ.

25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

Insight

- Paul had been musing over whether he would rather be executed and so depart to be with Christ or be released so he could serve people by pointing them to Christ. But apparently, he was quite certain they would release him (v25). We don't know where this certainty came from: had God spoken to him about imminent release? Or did he just believe that since so many people still needed his ministry that God would not take him yet?
- Paul believed that he would be released, and reunite with the church in Philippi, and minister to them more - and he had a very clear ministry purpose in mind: 1) he wanted to see them making progress in their faith; 2) he wanted to see their joy-levels increasing; and 3) he wanted them to become more and more 'focused upon and thrilled by' Jesus (this is what 'boasting in Christ' means).

Application

- **Promises about future ministry opportunities:** It is possible to know that your time has not yet come if God has spoken to you about future ministry opportunities. I've heard of a man who on an aeroplane that had lost one engine staying totally calm. When the person in the seat next to him asked him how he stayed calm he said, 'God has told me that he is going to use me in some ways that he has not yet used me in. So he won't take me now.'
- **The goal of ministry:** God wants to use you to help other believers 1) make progress in their faith; 2) become more joy-filled in their faith; and 3) become more focused upon and thrilled by Jesus. This is the goal of ministry. But notice that the nature of ministry is 'fruitful labour' (v22) and building relationship with those to whom you minister (see verse 26).

3. STAND FIRM AND STAND TOGETHER (1:27-2:18)

3.1 STAND IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION (1:27-30)

27 Whatever happens, as citizens of heaven live 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 with one accord for the faith of the gospel ...

Insight

- Paul has been speaking about himself, and what God had been doing though him being in prison, but then changes the subject by mentioning that he exists to serve them and to help them (v26). So in the next many verses he starts to do just that.
- Paul cleverly spoke about them as citizens of heaven. This was clever because they knew all about citizenship. Philippi, not too long before, had been made a Roman colony, and its people were given Roman citizenship along with all the privileges that this brought. Their responsibility was to honour Rome and its leader, Caesar, and to promote Roman culture and concerns in their own city. Paul was reminding them that God himself had made the Christians citizens of heaven, along with all the privileges that that brought. Their responsibility was to honour heaven, and its lord, Christ, and to promote heaven's culture and concerns in their own lives, community and city! Paul was not undermining their earthly citizenship, but reminding them that they had one far greater than Caesar as their lord, and a throne far greater than Rome as their centre.
- Paul was already convinced that they were sharing their faith and the gospel with people around them (v5), but it seems that his concern was that they don't just preach the gospel, but that they are sufficiently transformed by the gospel, that they live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ.
- Paul then switched metaphors from citizenship to the picture of battle. Considering that Philippi was a military colony filled with soldiers, and stories of battle, this too would not have been missed. Paul was urging them to stand firm in one Spirit, and to stand together as one man - facing whatever came their way.

Application

- **Citizens of heaven:** In Christ, it is our amazing privilege to be citizens of heaven. Our identity comes from there. So do our authority and our supplies. And it is our responsibility to honour the God of heaven, and Jesus as our Lord as our highest authority, living in obedience to him, living out his values, and living lives that make it clear to observers that we are of a heavenly kingdom.

- **Stand firm, stand together:** We are to stand firm in one Spirit along with the rest of our church. And we are to stand together as one man, one military unity, contending for the faith of the gospel. This calls for an aggression that is not directed toward people, but towards darkness and discouragement. This calls for a radical dependence on the Spirit. This calls for a deep unity and harmony in our relationships as we partner together as one man.

... I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together with one accord for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.

Insight

- The word ‘frightened’ here is the same word used to describe the ‘spooking of a horse’, where someone alarms a horse who becomes totally ‘freaked out’.
- The church in Philippi was experiencing great opposition. Every time an event or a gathering happened, they would call everyone to declare that ‘Caesar is lord’ and to even bow down to him. But Christians refused. And this brought opposition. On top of that, the city was filled with Roman soldiers, the mere sight of them easily intimidating someone. But Paul was insisting that as they recognized that their citizenship (and therefore backup) was in heaven, and as they stood firm in one Spirit, and stood together as one man, that they would have a supernatural courage, and would not be frightened in any way.
- What does Paul mean by the phrase ‘this is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved’? It means, ‘As these people try to intimidate you, only to find out that they cannot, it will be a sign to them that their power (of Rome) will eventually be overcome, but that your power (of heaven) will eventually prevail’. In other words, ‘their inability to bring fear to your heart, will strike terror in their own’.

Application

- **Opposition:** Every Christian and every church can expect to face some kind of opposition from their host culture, since at some point we will neglect their ‘gods’, which can metaphorically refer to the things that the particular culture give inflated value to.
- **Boldness:** As we stand firm in one Spirit, and stand together as one man - God will endow us as the church with a supernatural boldness in the face of opposition. And though people try to intimidate us, we will not fear! But their own inability to strike terror in our hearts, will strike terror in their own, as it slowly dawns on them that their power-base (from which they try to intimidate us) is limited. But as for us, we will know that God will ultimately save and vindicate us!

29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, 30 since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Insight

- Paul said that it had been granted (by God) to the church in Philippi to ‘suffer for Christ’ and ‘on behalf of’ him (v29). What does this mean? We need to understand that Jesus while on earth, in his loving attempts to reach out to people, suffered. He literally ‘loved the world to death’. In the same way the church of Philippi could expect that there would be some opposition, some suffering as they sought to reach out to people. This is what he meant by ‘on behalf of’ Christ: Jesus, as he did while he was on the earth, was still reaching out to people through the church - and the back-lash was still happening.
- Paul mentions the struggle they saw (past tense) he had, as well as the one he still had. The one he still had refers to his imprisonment in Rome, but the one of the past that he refers to is written about in Acts 16:16-24, when he and Silas were arrested and imprisoned in Philippi, all because they lovingly set a slave girl free from a demon. Paul, in his loving attempts to reach out, faced imprisonment. Jesus in his loving attempts to introduce the kingdom, was crucified. And they too could expect to face some back-lash from the kingdom of darkness as they lovingly pointed people to Jesus.

Application

- **The opportunity to extend the gospel:** God has graciously enabled us to not only put our trust in Jesus and receive salvation, but also to be used by him to lovingly extend that salvation to others through the gospel. We are the body of Christ, through which he acts in the world today.
- **The opportunity to suffer:** However, this is not a price-free privilege, there is a price: In the same way that Jesus’ physical body experienced suffering and back-lash from the kingdom of darkness, so we, Christ’s spiritual body, must expect back-lash. Paul was coaching them, and us, to see this back-lash as something ‘granted’ or given by God. Not that we’re suffering at the hands of God himself, but that he allows us to experience the suffering.

Philippians Chapter Two

3.2 UNITY THROUGH HUMILITY (2:1-4)

1 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, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

Insight

- In 1:27 Paul made it clear that if the church in Philippi needed anything it was this: to stand firm in one Spirit, and to stand together as one man. This is still his theme in these verses: he is urging them to stand firm, and to stand *together!*
- Verse 1: Paul is speaking about their experience of Christ, God and the Spirit. They experience the encouragement of being in Christ, and they experience the comfort of God's love (note that the above translation probably gets it wrong by referring to 'his' love (i.e. Christ's love), and they experience a deep participation in the Spirit - and this experience of the Christ, God and Spirit creates in them a tender and compassionate heart.
- Verse 2: Paul is already rejoicing in the way the gospel is advancing through them (see 1:4,5) but he urges them to bring him even more joy by being united. He calls them to be like-minded, to have the same love, to be one in spirit and of one mind. This all basically means the same thing: stand together, united at the deepest level.

Application

- **Experiencing God:** The Christian life is one of experiencing Trinitarian life: we experience Christ (who fills us with encouragement), God (who comforts us with his love) and the Spirit. And this experience of the triune God leads to a tenderness and compassion in our lives. Notice that we do not necessarily need to understand the doctrine of the Trinity (indeed it is a mystery how only one God is at the same time Father, Son and Spirit) but we can experience the reality of the Trinity in our own lives, where we at times experience Christ, at other times the Father and still at other times the Spirit.
- **Community:** We need to let our experience of the Trinity overflow into a pursuit of deep heart-level unity within our relationships in our church. The one-ness in the Trinity should overflow to create a one-ness in our community. But this does not happen automatically: we need to intentionally make sure that this happens! And wonderfully, the tenderness and compassion that results from our experience of God is exactly what's needed to deepen our unity and relationships.

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Insight

- Paul has made it clear that it is the experience of the Triune God that leads into pursuing a deep unity in relationships (v1,2). But now he explains very practically how to accomplish this unity: through humble servant-heartedness.
- In verses 5-11 he will show us that the highest motivation for this humble servant-heartedness is to ponder how Christ embodied this same character.

Application

- **Putting others first:** We need to become other-centred (which is another way of saying 'loving') and less self-centred (which is another way of saying 'selfish' and/or 'proud'). We need to humble ourselves, repenting of selfish ambition and vain conceit (i.e. merely seeing other people as competition in our determined journey to get to 'the top'), and instead being ready to put the needs of others above our own, simply because we place such high value on them as people, loved by God. The way to unity is to not be full of yourself, but rather to be full of esteem for, and servant-heartedness toward, others.

3.3 CHRIST'S EXAMPLE (2:5-11)

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had:

6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

Insight:

- Verses 6-11 are the highpoint of the whole Bible! They describe the character and the pathway Christ went through in his attempts to reach and save fallen humanity. In this case Paul is asking us Christians to imitate his character (or 'attitude of mind') especially in how we relate to each other (v5).
- What does 'being in the very nature God' mean (v6)? It both means, 'being God' and 'totally embodying God's character.' In the very next line we're told that Christ is equal with God. How can Christ be God and yet at the same time be equal with God? The answer lies in the doctrine of the Trinity, where God reveals himself in three persons simultaneously: Father, Son and Spirit.

- What does the sentence, ‘did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage’ mean (v6)? It means that Christ, who came to embody Godlikeness to us, showed us that God is not the kind of God who ‘takes advantage of’ people, in the sense of being a selfish, self-absorbed, love-lessly dominating God. No, God is not like this - and that is why Jesus, his equal and his embodiment, did not consider being like that. Interestingly, many people read these verses as if they say, ‘Despite the fact Jesus was God, yet he humbled himself.’ But that is altogether the wrong way to read it. Rather it should be read, ‘Because Jesus was God, he humbled himself.’ Amazing.
- What does ‘he made himself nothing’ mean (v7)? It simply means that he embraced powerlessness and poured himself out for us. It refers, as we see in the rest of verse 7 to his choice to come to this earth as a servant (after all, Jesus was not born in a royal palace but in an animal manger, and grew up as a person without many privileges and powers and rights).
- What does it mean that Jesus came in human likeness (v7)? Why does it not simply say, ‘he came as a human’? It is because although Jesus was fully human, there was something different about him: he was at the same time fully God! He did not stop being God and equal with God when he was born in the manger and lived his 33 years in dusty Palestine.

Application:

- **God’s amazing humility:** God is Christ-like, triune, incarnational, humble, and servant-hearted. We learn so much about God in these verses:
 - *God is the triune God*, one God who is simultaneously Father, Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit. They are all equally God, always have been and always will be!
 - *God is incarnational*. Amazingly, God had the ability to come as a human being in time and space, onto this planet. This is the greatest compliment that God ever paid creation - mysteriously, the Creator became a creature. Christ pre-existed his birth as Jesus on this planet. Stunning!
 - *God is Christ-like*. Christ in his character and in his actions revealed fully to us what God is really like. Until we ponder fully the multi-faceted character of Jesus who walked this planet we will not have a sufficient revelation of God.
 - *God is humble*, humble enough to be born as a human. But not a human with great privileges and powers, as Jesus was born in a manger to a poor family, in a remote corner of the Roman empire. People believed that if God had incarnated in anyone, it was in Caesar. Just think: while Caesar, in the great city of Rome was claiming to be the Son of God and showing off his pomp and fame, his military power and his great wealth, Jesus, brought up in the tiny town of Nazareth, was fixing things with his carpenter father. Mind-blowing humility.
 - *God is servant-hearted*. He is not selfish or self-absorbed or in the business of un-lovingly dominating people, and insisting on getting

his way no matter what. Rather he is a servant-hearted God, who seeks to give not to get. But some may say, 'then why does he insist that we worship him' and the answer is that he loves us so much, he wants us to know the truth about who he is, and how we were made to have him as the centre of our lives - this is life at its best! The greatest gift that God could give us is the ability to know and worship him - he doesn't take our worship, he gives us our worship of him!

- **Humility:** If God is Christ-like, humble and servant-hearted then how much more should we be! Wonderfully, these qualities are all imitable (able to be copied). As we ponder how God emptied himself, poured himself out in Jesus we have the most powerful picture to inspire us and to measure ourselves against. And not only are we inspired by his example, we are in a living relationship with God, Christ and the Spirit - and it is as though their humble, servant-hearted character can by the Spirit flow into and through us. If God was humble enough to leave his throne and draw close to his creatures, how much more should we be willing to stop trying to promote and prove ourselves, and relate to everyone we meet (even those who according to the sinful culture are lower down their own status rating) with genuine respect, care and love! Following the example of Christ in his incarnation, we should be willing to give up our privileges and comforts (think of the privileges and comforts Christ left in heaven) and go to wherever God sends us, and to whomever God sends us!

<p>8 And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!</p>

Insight

- In verses 6 and 7 we see that Jesus, the equal and embodiment of God the Father, become a human! This is called the 'incarnation' and it tells us that God is unbelievably humble, humble enough to leave his throne and be born in a manger! If Jesus had then grown up and become king of an earthly empire none of us would have questioned God's humility simply because he who rules the universe was willing to become a mere human. But amazingly, there is yet another act of humility: God, in Jesus, first becomes human, and then God, in Jesus, dies the most humiliating death: death by crucifixion.
- The crucifixion was reserved for insurrectionists and for slaves alone. In that day to die on the cross was not just painful, but a sign to all that you were the lowest of all life. The Jews even believed that if you were crucified that, not just humanity at large, but God himself had abandoned you. And yet this is to where God's earthly life, in Jesus, headed in a straight line: to the cross!

Application

- **God's self-sacrificial love:** Jesus, who was and is God the Father's equal and embodiment, revealed to us God's willingness to humbly sacrifice himself for fallen humanity. The very people who were crucifying him were amongst the people who he was courageously dying to save. On the cross Jesus literally loved the world to death. He answered our fists of hostility with the kiss of grace. The very wounds that our sins were inflicting upon his body and soul were the wounds through which salvation and love were flowing to us! What courage. What mercy. What sacrifice.
- **Self-sacrificial love:** God's example of radical self-sacrifice calls us to relate to people around ourselves with the profoundest humility, courage, servant-hood, patience, grace and endurance. Self-sacrifice is to be the mark of our lives, and the mark of the church. Only the gospel of God crucified can so ennoble self-sacrifice. How different the values of the world are: instead of loving self-sacrifice we're taught to pursue self-promotion and self-preservation. But the Spirit of the crucified Christ indwells us and seeks to energize in us a life of loving self-sacrifice, joyfully serving even our enemies if need be. The Spirit of the crucified God causes us to see through the shallowness of all the temptation we experience to look out for ourselves first, to step on the people around us in our quest to get to the top, to shy away from any sacrifice and pain in our attempts to serve and love people around us!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Insight

- In verses 6-8 we see how Christ humbled himself and embraced the self-sacrificial love of the cross. And he did this all as the embodiment and the equal of God, the Father (who is described like this in verse 11). But God did not just let Jesus die - he then raised him from the dead, exalted him to his own right hand (where he was before he came to earth) and instructed all humanity to call him 'Lord'. The first thing to notice is that God's exaltation of Jesus is his way of saying, 'Yes, in Jesus you can see that I am humble, and I am self-sacrificial! This is really what I am like.' If Jesus had not risen from the dead we would have doubted if he had really reflected the character of God to us.
- If we have any doubt that Jesus is God (and some people, employing poor translation, argue that verse 6 (which stated that Jesus is in very

nature God, and Jesus has equality with God) doesn't really say that Jesus is divine). Even if this argument is true (which it isn't) verses 10 and 11 clearly reveal that Jesus is God in two ways:

- 1) Well-known words from the Old Testament that describe God himself are directly attributed to Jesus in these verses: 'Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God and there is no other ... before me every knee will bow and by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, 'In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength (Isaiah 45:22-24).' To use these words of anyone but on God would be blasphemous, but they are used to describe Jesus. Jesus is God.
- 2) In the mind of Jews in the first century the name 'Lord' was used of God alone. Although the culture used it of Caesar and other powerful rulers, Jews at the time used it of God alone. And here Paul tells us that God the Father insists of people recognizing that Jesus is divine.

Application

- **Jesus is Lord:** Jesus is heaven and earth's true king. Across the Roman empire people bowed before Caesar and confessed 'Caesar is lord' (see Acts 17:7 for example). In the minds of people there was no one greater than Caesar. His name was above every other name. He was most worthy of respect, worship and devotion. In the same way that Paul, expressing his life's purpose and passion, had said, 'For me to live is Christ' (1:21) many of that time would have said, 'For me to live is Caesar'. Interestingly, one of Caesar's proconsuls, Pontius Pilate, had executed Jesus - so this appeared to be one more reason in the minds of Romans that Caesar was superior to Christ. But, against this background of Caesar-elevation, God exalted and elevated heaven and earth's true emperor, Jesus Christ, by raising him from the dead and causing him to ascend to his own right hand, as co-ruler of the entire cosmos!
- **Sharing our faith:** Although Jesus has already been exalted as heaven and earth's true divine-king, only some people have recognized his kingship and deity. Christians everywhere have already been graced with a revelation of Jesus' authority and we bow down before him in worship and surrender already, and we freely and joyfully confess that he is Lord. But most people in the world have not yet recognized who Jesus is. This was the situation in Philippi, and in Rome, and in the world today. But amazingly, there will come a day when every creature in heaven (referring to angels and demons), every being on earth (all the 6,5 billion people alive, including kings, presidents and celebrities) and every being under the earth (referring to the billions who have died) will see Jesus, and will recognize who he is: the divine servant-king and Lord. Although it will be too late to receive salvation at that time for people who up till then defied or ignored his Lordship, all will acknowledge that he really is Lord. What a joy it will be for us who recognized his kingship before that time, and what a tragedy for people who failed to! Let this simple

thought that Jesus is already exalted as Lord, and yet so few recognize it, motivate you to point people towards him. Before it's too late.

- **Humility:** A common teaching of the Bible is that God ultimately lifts up the humble (1 Peter 5:5-6 for example). If we humble ourselves before God and people like Jesus did, then we have this promise: God himself, in due time (whether in this life or the next, or both) will lift us up. We have the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus as the sign that this is so. Jesus never promoted himself, but because of his willingness to humble himself, God eventually exalted and promoted him. And this he will do for us too, if we humble ourselves.

3.4 SHINE LIKE THE STARS (2:12-18)

12 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, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.

Insight

- Notice the flow. In the previous section he was urging them to do two things: 1) stand firm in the face of intimidation (1:27-30) and 2) to stand together in one-mindedness and in servant-hearted humility (2:1-4). Then in 2:5-11 he provided them with two major motivations for doing these two things: 1) God in Christ sets the example of radical, servant-hearted humility and 2) Jesus Christ has the highest rank in the universe - higher even than Caesar - so intimidation is not needed.
- What does Paul mean by 'as you have always obeyed'? The obedience he is calling them to is exactly the obedience he had mentioned in 1:27-2:4, to 1) stand firm in the face of opposition and 2) to stand together in one-minded, servant-hearted humility. He is affirming that they have been doing this, but he is urging them to do so even more.
- What does 'work out your salvation' mean? He is affirming that they have been saved by faith in Christ. There is no question that their sins are forgiven, or that they have received new life, and the indwelling of the Spirit. But now, urges Paul, 'live it out' or 'live like you're saved'. It is one thing to be saved, it is yet another to live it out. Notice that he is not just speaking to individuals here, so it also carries the sense of 'live as a saved community; show the people in your city what it means to be the people of God.'
- What does 'with fear and trembling' mean? He does not mean, 'with cringing and with lack of confidence'. That is not what it means at all. Rather it means, 'with holy awe and wonder'. He is calling them to realize just what a privilege salvation is, and just what a privilege even the task of living as a saved person is.
- What does 'God who works in you to will and to act mean?' Amazingly, moral transformation is not about resolving to keep rules. Rather it is

about learning to discern that God, through his Spirit in you, is at work in you affecting both your will (i.e. desires and choices) as well as your act (i.e. behaviour and responses). Paul is trying to encourage them: the process of change is not just up to you, but is a mysterious partnership with God at work in you.

- What does 'in order to fulfil his good purpose' mean? Probably, it is better translated 'in order to fulfil his good pleasure'. Paul is in effect saying in these verses: 'Actively partner with God in your obedience - it will make him so happy!' Some may say, 'But I thought that God was not in it for himself, but rather he was looking out for our good (based on 2:6)'. But the truth is that God is in it for his joy, but wonderfully what makes him most happy is that we become the kind of people who are most satisfied in him, and the most joyfully obedient to him. In other words, to the degree that God finds joy in us, to that degree we also find joy in him. God is at the same time motivated by his joy and by ours!

Application

- **Obedience:** Now that we're saved (assuming you've been saved), live like you're saved! Since we have become God's people, let us make the effort to actually live and act compatibly with our new identity in Christ. Let us become who we already are. This is an awesome privilege, one that requires a sense of holy awe and wonder. This is our life's great work once we're saved: to pursue deeper and deeper levels of obedience to all that Christ wants from us. And it is not something we do in isolation. No, this process of transformation is only possible if it is done in the context of community. And the goal of our Christian lives is not just to show the world how a saved individual lives, but rather how a saved community lives. And the highest motive for our obedience is that it thrills the heart of God.
- **God's transforming grace:** We are to recognize and rejoice in the deep work of the Spirit in our lives once we are saved. God does not leave it up to us alone to 'work out our salvation', but mysteriously he is at work, through his Spirit in us, shaping our desires and shaping our behaviours. He does not automatically change us in the sense that we are passive. But rather he co-operatively changes us in the sense that together we work at deeper and deeper levels of obedience and transformation. And again his transforming grace does not just flow in the individual heart, but it flows in the life of community. If we deprive ourselves of contact and partnership with other Christians in community, we also deprive ourselves of much of the transforming grace we so desperately need to work out our salvation, and to bring more and more joy to God.

14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 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 16
--

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 labour in vain.

Insight

- Paul has been calling them in the preceding verses (1:27-2:13) to stand firm against the intimidation they were experiencing in the city of Philippi, and to stand together through deep one-mindedness and servant-hearted humility. He continues the same train of thought in these verses.
- In verse 15 he adapts a quote from Deuteronomy 32:5 which had spoken of how Israel, during the desert journey between Egypt and the Promised land, had failed to live like children of God but instead became a warped and crooked generation. Interestingly, the mention of ‘grumbling’ in verse 14 also echoes the same period of time for Israel when they, during difficult times, grumbling against God and against Moses, thereby causing division (see Exodus 16:1-3). In effect, Paul is calling the church to be the exact opposite of ancient Israel as it was in the desert, and instead to get it right.
- The mention of shining among them like stars in the sky is also a quote from the Old Testament. Daniel 12:2-3 says, ‘Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake; some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.’ Paul picks up on the great responsibility and privilege that the church in Philippi has to shine by living blamelessly (in conduct) and purely (in heart), and to ‘hold firmly to the word of life’, which means to, like stars illuminating the darkness, compellingly communicate the message that can make spiritually dead people live. In the star metaphor Paul is calling them to both embody the gospel, and to extend the gospel.
- Since the quote of Daniel 12:2-3 is one that refers to the end of the world when all stand before God, Paul picks up on that theme by speaking of his desire ‘to boast on the day of Christ’. In other words he is saying, ‘If you do shine like stars in this life, then on Judgment Day, I will be able to rejoice with you as together we receive Christ’s commendation.’
- Paul also refers to ministry as running (in a race) and manual labour. At the end of verse 16 he says that on the day of Christ he is hoping that all of his efforts will be seen to be successful.

Application

- **The world’s need of a Saviour:** The world we live in, though no doubt filled with many admirable things, is at its core in deep need of a Saviour. It is warped and crooked world. There is so much distortion of what is really true, and what is really valuable. People, in the words of Isaiah 4:20, call evil good and good evil, put darkness for light and light for darkness, put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. In the same way

the people of Philippi were more taken with Caesar than with Christ, so it seems that every culture idolizes the wrong things and goes in pursuit of lesser gods, whether they be money, comfort, false religion, power, wealth or reputation. This distortion of what is real, and what really matters, and what is really good comes from the fact that they are in the dark. Christ alone is the light, and he calls us to embody that light as stars in the dark universe. Apart from God's light, it is impossible to know what is real, and what really matters, and what is really good. But apart from being in the dark, the world is spiritually dead. It needs the message of life. It may be alive culturally, relationally, aesthetically, religiously and even mystically - but it has lost contact with the true source of spiritual life, God himself. The world needs a Saviour, even in the happiest, richest, loveliest, most successful people there is crookedness, warped-ness, darkness and death.

- **Living the gospel:** We're called to be different. Different to the people we once were. Different to the prevailing culture. We're called to shine like stars. We're called to be blameless in our behaviour, and pure in our hearts. We're called to resist our tendency to grumble and complain to God and others when times are tough. In its place there should be gratitude for all that God is for us in Jesus. And we're called to resist the temptation to argue with each other. In its place there should be harmony and unity. We're called to resist the stirrings in our hearts toward 'selfish ambition' and 'vain conceit' (2:3). In its place there should be one-mindedness and humble servant-heartedness. We're called to refuse intimidation in the face of opposition. In its place there should be a Spirit-empowered standing together as one man (1:27). Christ has made us stars, so let us give ourselves fully to the great privilege of radiating his holiness, his courage, his integrity into this dark and depraved world.
- **Sharing our faith:** We're not to just embody the gospel. We're to extend it. Jesus alone can save the world. Only Jesus, by his powerful saving grace, can re-align a person to reality, and cause light to shine in their hearts, and enable them to breathe spiritual life. Amazingly, every person we lead to faith in Christ can become a star - one more person who seeks to both embody and extend the gospel. The star-analogy used by Paul was meant to encourage the relatively small church in Philippi - it echoes how the children of God, as promised to Abraham, will one day be as numerous as the stars in the universe. The gospel will prevail, one person at a time! So take heart, and hold out the message of life!

<p>17 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. 18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.</p>

Insight

- We have seen that Paul at this time was suffering in Rome because of his obedience to Christ, and they were suffering in Philippi because of their obedience to Christ. He uses a picture based on a practice in the Jewish sacrificial system (see Numbers 28:1-7) where two offerings given to God happened *together*: a burnt offering was offered, and accompanying it was a drink offering. Paul is therefore, in effect, saying, 'The suffering you're experiencing is because of your obedience to Christ, and it serves as a kind of faith-offering to God. And my suffering is also a faith-offering. And in the sight of God it is as though both offerings mingle together. That is why I rejoice in the offering you're giving to God, and I'm asking you to rejoice in my offering to God. We're in this together.'
- One of the most often recurring themes in the letter to the Philippians, other than Christ and the gospel, is the theme of joy and rejoicing. Notice how Paul sets the example of rejoicing despite his circumstances, and how he insists that they rejoice too, again despite their circumstances. The reasons for the rejoicing are 1) that he sees the bigger picture behind this suffering: that God has granted him, and them, the privilege of experiencing the way of Christ in this life (see 1:29); 2) that the gospel continues to advance despite these apparent (and they are only apparent) setbacks (see 1:4 and 1:18-19); and 3) their mutual suffering is an opportunity to mutually rejoice (which is the theme of the above verses).

Application

- **Joy:** In the words of CS Lewis, 'Happiness depends on what's happening, whereas joy does not.' Joy comes from knowing Jesus. Regardless of our circumstances we are privileged to rejoice, and to rejoice for sound reason: Christ has saved us. Christ knows about suffering. Christ is with us. Christ is for us. Christ is powerfully at work in us. Christ will continue to pour his love into us. Christ has plans for us. Christ is in control of our circumstances. Christ will not abandon us. Christ will one day take us to be with him forever, and the pain and suffering will be over. Christ will make up in eternity the price that came from our obedience to him here. Christ will cause the gospel to ultimately prevail. After all, Christ is Lord of the Universe, and he is your and my Lord too. And we're not suffering alone: we're in this together with other believers all over the world! In the words of Habakkuk (see Habakkuk 3:17-18): 'Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crops fail and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.' So, let's not wait till the day of Christ to rejoice (although 2:16 says there will be much boasting there). Rejoice now. And let's not wait till we feel like it. Rather, let's rejoice because we can see the bigger picture of Christ, and because of the assurance he gives our heart that he is real! And our deep enduring joy, far more meaningful than the fleeting spurts of circumstantial happiness, will become evident, like star-light on a dark night, to people around us. Rejoice!

4. PAUL'S PLANS TO SEND TIMOTHY AND EPAPHRODITUS (2:19-30)

4.1 TIMOTHY IS COMING

19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. 20 I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. 21 For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 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. 23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. 24 And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

Insight

- Paul started the letter with some introductory matters (1:1-11). Then he reflected on his own time in prison and how he still found joy in Christ even in this time (1:12-26). Then he communicated the main burden of his letter by urging the church in Philippi to stand firm in the face of opposition, and to stand together in like-mindedness and servant-hearted humility (1:27-2:18). Now he tells them of plans he has regarding them (2:19-30).
- To start he tells them that the moment he finds out how things go with regard to his upcoming trial (v23) he will send Timothy to them. Paul is almost certain that he will be released (rather than be executed) (see 1:25) although the timing of this is 'in the Lord Jesus' (which means 'in the hands of the Lord Jesus'). Anyway, the moment he knows more, the first thing he will do is to send him to them for a short time, and then when Timothy returns back to him with news of how they are doing, he himself will come to them (v24). Paul is confident that he will be released and that it will be soon, but again it is 'in the Lord' (i.e. in the Lord's hands) (v24).
- But why does he want to send Timothy to them? He gives two reasons: 1) he wants Timothy to report back to them how the church in Philippi is doing, and it is his hope that the feed-back will be so good that he will be cheered (v19); and 2) he wants to send Timothy to them to freshly embody to them the kind of 'heart' that he has been urging them to pursue in 1:27-2:18, namely a heart that looks out for the interests of Jesus Christ (which is another way of saying 'looks out for the interests of others (see 2:4)), and a heart that is reflective of Paul's own passion for the spread of the gospel. Timothy, after all, has been working so close with Paul for so many years that he is like a son, a true reflection of Paul himself. Although the church in Philippi know Timothy, Paul reminds them to take a good look at Timothy's heart and way of life as a fresh reminder of what a Christ-pleasing life looks like.
- Interestingly, Timothy was co-writing this letter with Paul (although Paul is dictating the content, Timothy is the one writing it down physically). On the one hand, Timothy must have felt uncomfortable writing this

down, but on the other he must have experienced it as the affirming voice of a spiritual father and mentor in ministry.

- Why did Paul say 'I have no one like him ... for everyone else looks out for their own interests' (v20-21)? This can be misunderstood as Paul speaking negatively of all the Christians and fellow-leaders that he had ever served with, but this could not be what he means. Probably, he is overstating his case as if to say, 'Not all Christians are like Timothy at all. In fact, it's a rare thing to find someone like him - so when you encounter him be freshly inspired to imitate him.' We must realize that Paul had obviously heard reports of people's selfish ambition, and people looking out for themselves first, or else he wouldn't have stressed this so much in his letter.

Application:

- **Discerning the future:** Paul's future at this point was either execution or release. He had spent much time preparing his heart for both possibilities (1:19-24). But somehow, he became convinced that God was going to release him (1:23) and soon (1:24). It seems like God has said to him that he was going to be involved in more fruitful ministry yet (1:22). But he didn't know exactly when his release would happen, or how it would happen, hence his two-fold use of the phrase 'in the Lord' (2:19,24). Similarly for us, there will be times when God may speak to us about our future. He may tell us of how he is going to use us. He may tell us of the final outcome of a trial, or a complicated situation. This can be greatly encouraging. We may even have such faith that it will be, that we can announce it to select people around us. But we must announce it with humility, after all just because God has given us a glimpse of the future, does not mean he has told us when it will happen, nor how it will come about.
- **Role models:** Paul had given the church a powerful letter with inspiring descriptions of the character of Christ, as well as of instructions about how to imitate this very character of Christ. But Paul knew they needed more than that, since it is possible for people at an intellectual level to agree that this is how the Christian life should be, and then to look around and see something else and say to themselves, 'But this is how things actually are, so let me be realistic and not pursue anything more than the current levels of godliness found in my peer group.' So Paul sent them somebody, Timothy, a living role model - not a perfect person, but someone who was time-tested in his Christ-like courage and humble, loving character. And today, we too need role models. And we need to rise up in God and become those role models to others. For it is impossible to make disciples of Jesus by words alone - we need to display these words fleshed out in our lives, attitudes and actions. There is something to be *taught* by teachers, but there is something to be *caught* from role models.
- **Developing leaders:** Timothy emerged to be one of the most trustworthy and respected of Christian leaders, despite his very humble beginnings

(see Acts 16:1-3). But how did Timothy develop this status and stature in God's kingdom? The answer is not that he was a highly ambitious leader, but that he was a deeply reliable follower. He followed Paul. He worked with Paul. But, note this: it was not Timothy's efforts alone. More importantly it was Paul's efforts toward him. Paul recognized his 'calling' and took him under his wing, and developed a fatherly relationship with him, while involving him in his ministry day to day. And then he started giving him some special responsibilities along with deep affirmations that he believed in him. And still today, this is the best way to raise up leaders: let those who lead already (notice that it takes leaders to make new leaders) take under their wing younger, inexperienced men and women, and in a fatherly way build relationship with them, and involve them in ministry as junior-partners. And then let the the leaders express confidence in them, and give them some serious leadership responsibilities. And let these younger men and women follow. By follow I mean be reliable, available, teachable, committed, and helpful. This is how trustworthy leaders in God's kingdom will be raised up.

4.2 EPAPHRODITUS IS COMING

25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. 26 For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. 29 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour people like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

Insights

- Paul had been in prison. And in those days the state did not take responsibility to feed their prisoners, nor to provide other necessities. The church in Philippi, out of their concern for Paul, had sent Epaphroditus to them with a financial gift (see 4:18). But on the way he had contracted an illness that usually resulted in death. But instead of turning back, he persevered and 'risking his own life' delivered it to Paul. The reason is that he believed that delivering this gift was 'the work of Christ' - it was something Christ wanted him to do. He arrived at Paul, gift in hand, almost dead. Somehow a message was sent back (probably via someone travelling from Rome to Philippi) to his home church Philippi saying, 'Epaphroditus is very, very ill.' But instead of dying, he recovered. Probably Paul and some Christians from the church in Rome prayed for him, and nursed him back to health. He survived and everyone experienced it as 'God having mercy on him'. Paul, particularly

was grateful - on top of the sorrow of being in prison, imagine how bad he would have felt if Epaphroditus had died, and all as a result of delivering a gift to him. But the church back home did not know what had now happened to Epaphroditus; probably they guessed he had died by now. Both Paul and him were very eager for him to get back to Philippi to let the heavy-hearted church there know that he was, by God's mercy, better again!

- Notice how highly Paul honours him in verses 25 ('brother, co-worker and fellow-soldier') and 29 ('welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour people like him'). Paul was deeply grateful to him. And Paul understood that honouring him was really a way of honouring the church that sent him, after all he had been sent as their representative of care and provision (see verse 25: 'whom you sent to take care of my needs' and verse 30: 'he gave me the help you yourselves could not give me').

Application:

- **Short-term missions:** In the same way the church of Philippi sent out Epaphroditus on a short-term, special mission, so today churches need to regularly send select people out to other places, to other churches, and to support and partner with key spiritual leaders around the world needing help. And these people have the honour of representing the whole sending church to those they go to. It is as if the church goes when they go. This means that we as Christians either need to be ready to be sent, or be ready to send others. But to do neither is a form of disobedience, especially when the last word Christ spoke into the DNA of the church was 'go' (see Matthew 28:19).
- **Honouring people:** People who pay a great price in doing the will of God, and in their efforts to promote the gospel and to love people should be honoured. This does not detract from God's glory, but rather communicates to the whole church that God himself honours those who pay a price for him. If there are to be any 'heroes' in our churches, then let them be the ones who embrace great risks, pay great prices, display enduring passion, love deeply, and give everything they have to the cause of Christ.
- **Illness:** Some people today wrongly believe that Christians are not meant to get sick - that somehow, if we stay in the will of God and live by faith, that sickness will evade us. But this story tells otherwise: Epaphroditus was clearly doing God's will, and still got sick. Praise God however that we see in this story God's willingness to heal people, whether through supernatural or natural means, whether instantly or progressively (and in this story we don't know which it was). And when God's people do recover they, and all those close to them, can rightly speak of experiencing God's mercy and goodness.

Philippians Chapter Three

5. TRUST IN AND PURSUE CHRIST ALONE (3:1-4:3)

5.1 BEWARE OF THE JUDAIZERS (3:1-4)

1 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. 2 Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. 3 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

Insight

- The main problems in the Philippian church were 1) that they were being intimidated by the Roman Empire who insisted that they confess Caesar as Lord and 2) that there was disunity in the church and people were not treating each other with servant-hearted humility. So far in the letter, Paul has address these two issues - and he will continue to throughout his letter.
- However, there was another threat that all the churches faced: there were some (apparently) Christian Jews who believed that Paul's ministry was wrong in that he let Gentiles come directly to Christ, whereas they believed that Gentiles first needed to become Jews by being circumcised. So they travelled around the world looking for the churches Paul started and would say to them, 'Wonderful - you've heard of Christ. But have you yet become a Jew by being circumcised? Until you become a Jew, you can't be fully accepted by the Jewish Messiah.' They can be described as 'Judaizers' because they sought to make Gentiles more Jewish.
- Paul had already seen some of his churches almost destroyed by these men (e.g. the Galatian church) so in these verses he warns them about these men in the strongest terms possible (see verse 2 for his three descriptions of them). Verse 1 shows that he had warned them about these men before, but that it is so important that he warns them again.
- These Jewish men, in their attempts to convert Gentile Christians to Judaism, would take the line that they, Paul's converts, were missing something spiritually and that circumcision and observance of the Jewish law would complete them. So Paul, in verse 3, makes it clear that they've got it all - they are not missing anything: 1) they already are 'the circumcision', meaning that their hearts have been circumcised, and marked as those who belong to God; 2) they already have the Spirit; 3) they already delight in Jesus; and 4) they 'put no confidence in the flesh', which is a phrase that means, 'they understand that being physically circumcised and observing a bunch of Jewish rules will make them no more acceptable to God, who has already accepted them totally on the basis of their faith in Christ and his cross.'

Application

- **Warning about deceivers:** We need to be warned about the possibility of people coming along and deceiving us. They will tell us that although we are on the right track (with our faith in Christ) there are some things that we're missing (and this may be a special experience, or a special baptism, or the knowledge of a special doctrine, or whatever) - and apart from these, it is questionable whether we're even really right with God. The best way to deal with these people is to be sure of what God has already done in our lives through Christ.

5.2 PURSUE CHRIST ABOVE ALL (3:4-11)

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— 4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If others think they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 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; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

Insight

- In verse 3, Paul makes it clear that, in contrast to these certain Jewish men who were trying to 'Judaize' the Gentile Christians by telling them to get circumcised, he trusts neither in his works, nor in his circumcision to be accepted by God. In verse 4, he effectively says, 'But as for these men, I could beat them on their own field anyway - if there is anyone who excels in what they're trying to get you to become, it's me.' And then in verses 5-6 he lists his Jewish pedigree (circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews) and his religious performance (as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless). His point is this: 'trust me, what they tell you that you need to be more accepted by God, you do not need. These things - spiritual pedigree and performance - do not make you right with God! I gave myself to them, and they left me empty.'
- The phrase 'as for zeal, persecuting the church' (v6) refers to how Paul, before he was a Christian, zealously tried to destroy the church through intimidation because he did not believe at that time that Jesus was the Messiah.
- The mention of 'righteousness based on the law' (v6) does not refer to being right in the sight of God, but rather having the ability to keep all the external rules of Judaism, which included things like observing special days and staying away from certain foods.

Application

- **Uselessness of spiritual pedigree and performance:** When it comes to being right with God, we must not put our confidence either in our spiritual pedigree (which would include having Christian parents, or being part of a certain church) nor in our spiritual performance (which would include things like church attendance, keeping so-called 'holy' days, avoiding certain foods, obeying extra-biblical church rules). These may make us feel good and may make us look good, but they have absolutely no power to make us more acceptable to God. Only being circumcised in our heart by the indwelling of the Spirit through joyful faith in Christ can make us acceptable!

7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss because of Christ. 8 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 rubbish, that I may gain Christ ...

Insight

- In verses 4-6, Paul lists the things that he used to value most - things that had to do with his religious pedigree and performance. He used to live for these things. But then he met Christ and his whole perspective changed. Instead of supremely valuing those things, he began to supremely value Christ, and his relationship with Christ. It is as though all those other things became 'a loss' (as opposed to the 'gain' he once perceived them to be). And then to make his point he even calls those things 'rubbish'. He is not saying that they are rubbish in themselves, just that compared to Jesus and the amazing privilege of having a personal relationship with him, they are.

Application

- **Pursuing Christ above all:** Paul says that 'everything' that this world has to offer (although he has only specifically mentioned things pertaining to his religious pedigree and performance in verse 5-6) does not come close to the sheer worthiness and wonder of knowing Jesus Christ. We were made for one supreme passion. As wonderful as the next most wonderful thing next to Christ is - whether it be sex, or travel, or romance, or family, or career, or education, or health, or whatever! - it is nothing compared to Christ! And this pursuit of Christ does not mean that we must reject these things, rather it enables us to put all these things in their rightful place. A helpful picture is this: imagine your life to be a solar system. Christ is the sun, and all these good things that come into our lives are planets. They are meant to find their place in your life with reference to Christ. But beware, from time to time these planets will try usurp the place of the sun, and then your life will disintegrate. Life is best lived with Christ as the glorious, all-attracting centre, and with

everything else orbiting him! Life is best lived when we regularly dethrone those things other than Christ that seek to become the dominant passion and focus of our lives!

- **Self-righteousness:** Most religions teach that in order to gain God's full acceptance and / or forgiveness one must earn it through good works. Paul had once believed this too. But then when he met Christ, he understood that he could not earn God's acceptance and forgiveness - he could only receive it as a sheer gift of undeserved grace. This led him to abandon all his self-righteous attempts to get to God.

... 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.

Insight

- Paul is saying that he used to believe that his spiritual pedigree and performance had impressed God - and somehow made him right with God, but now he realizes that they, in fact, did not at all. However, he has discovered that 'being found in Christ' (which implies that God found him through the efforts of his Son, Jesus) is the only way to be right with God.
- He speaks in these verses about two kinds of 'righteousness'. The first is the one he has already mentioned in verse 6: 'a righteousness of my own that comes from the law'. This refers to the belief that through diligently obeying the external laws of the Torah (such as circumcision, food and holy day laws) that somehow God accepted him. But now Paul has rejected obedience to the Torah as the way to being accepted by God. The second kind of righteousness is 'the one that comes from God on the basis of faith' in Christ Jesus. This righteousness is a gift from God, as opposed to being earned. This righteousness does not come from moral striving or from obedience to the Torah, but rather from trusting in Jesus Christ. It is not earned, but rather it is received by undeserved grace.

Application

- **Found in Jesus now:** A Christian is someone who has put their trust in Jesus Christ. A Christian is someone found by God - even though it may seem like we found God, in fact the moment we trusted in his Son, he found us. We are found in Jesus!
- **Righteous in Christ now:** And amazingly, as we trust in Jesus we receive the gift of righteousness. Elsewhere this is called the grace of justification. God justifies us. He accepts us totally in Christ. He no longer counts our sins against us, and amazingly even counts all of Christ's good deeds to be ours. God simply changes our very category in

his sight - from being in the category of unrighteous sinners outside of Christ, to being in the category of righteous (and therefore fully accepted) saints in Christ. This is our covering righteousness - though we fall, and every Christian will fall in some ways, yet there is no condemnation for us. We have been totally accepted, not on the basis of our deservedness, but on the basis of God's undeserved grace in the gift of Jesus to us! Our relationship with God is totally secured through faith in Jesus.

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, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Insight

- In verses 7-9, Paul speaks of what is presently his - i.e. a relationship with God based on the gift of righteousness that came when he put his faith in Christ. Now, in verses 10-11, he speaks of what he already has in part, but wants so much more of - namely, a deeper and deeper relationship with Christ. That's why he says, 'I want to know Christ'.
- But what does it mean to 'know Christ'? He answers the question with the phrase, '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' (v10,11). Very importantly, notice how the two-fold content of the first part of the sentence (i.e. resurrection and suffering) is repeated in the second part of the sentence, but in reverse order. So 'the power of his resurrection' correlates to 'attaining the resurrection from the dead', and 'participation in his sufferings' correlates to 'becoming like him in his death'.

Application

- **Knowing Christ's resurrection power:** What does it mean 'to know the power of his resurrection'? Firstly, it is to experience the Spirit's power and presence that is a result of Christ's resurrection. Secondly, it is the assurance that no matter how bad things get, God has the power to turn things around for our good, and more importantly, for the good of the gospel. Thirdly, it is the assurance that when we die, we will resurrect into Christ's glorious presence along with the wonderful resurrection body. To the degree that we know the Spirit's power, and these assurances of God's ability to intervene, and of a wonderful afterlife with Christ - to that degree do we know Christ!
- **Knowing the participation in Christ's suffering:** What does it mean 'to participate in his sufferings'? We must read this in the light of 1:29, where Paul said, 'It has been granted to you, on behalf of Christ, to suffer for him'. Although Christ's sufferings on the cross were unique in

their ability to accomplish the world's salvation, yet somehow the suffering we experience connects to his own suffering. This does not mean that we go out looking for suffering, but that when it comes, we see that it is an opportunity to draw close to the Crucified One, who seems to be willing to draw unusually close to us. Not only that, when we're suffering we often discover an increased experience of his Spirit's power and presence, and the experience of his ability to turn a situation around for our good, and more importantly, the good of the gospel, is greatest when we're suffering! Like Paul, we can expect some of our most intimate encounters with Christ when we're suffering (e.g. 2 Timothy 4:16,17).

- **Conformed to Christ's character:** What does it mean to 'become like him in his death'? It means to more and more develop the character that Christ displayed on the cross, namely humility, and a willingness to lay one's life down in obedience to God and in love for others (see 2:3-8). Paul understood that without a deepening character transformation that reflected this humility, courage and servant-heartedness of Christ, he would not also experience a deepening relationship with Christ. But there is more to this phrase: the fact that he has just mentioned participating in his sufferings (in the phrase before) suggests that Paul understood that God used sufferings to help us become like Jesus.
- **The meaning of the resurrection:** What does it mean to 'somehow, attain the resurrection from the dead'? To be honest, commentators struggle to agree on the meaning of this phrase. The strongest possible interpretations include...
 - 1) *Some believe it refers to Christ's resurrection:* When Paul says, 'attaining to the resurrection of the dead' he is saying in short, 'attaining to the power that comes from Christ's resurrection of the dead'. This is plausible when one considers the way that the phrase 'attaining the resurrection from the dead' correlates to 'to know the power of his resurrection'.
 - 2) *Some believe it refers to Paul's own certain future resurrection from the dead:* When Paul says, 'attaining to the resurrection of the dead' he refers to how he will one day be resurrected from the dead because of his faith in Christ. He speaks of 'attaining it' not because it is uncertain (rather 3:20,21 makes it clear he is certain about his future glorified body) but rather because it is something that he yearns for, something that highly motivates him, even though it is guaranteed. Those who take this view say that the use of the word 'somehow' shows that for Paul his future resurrection is in some way mysterious - for example, if Christ comes while he is alive then his body will be immediately transformed, whereas if not, his dead body will be resurrected and then transformed.
 - 3) *Some believe it refers to Paul's yearning for reward:* When Paul speaks about attaining to the resurrection of the dead, he understands that there are degrees of resurrection glory (which is another way of speaking of 'heavenly reward'). He yearns for a

high degree of resurrection glory, and it motivates him highly. This is plausible when one considers that Paul when speaking of the resurrection body elsewhere, compares it to the way different stars have different levels of splendour (see 1 Corinthians 15:41). And Hebrews 11:35 also speaks clearly about degrees of resurrection glory. It is also plausible when we consider that Paul is about to speak on the subject of reward in the following verses. This is my own view.

5.3 RUN THE RACE WITH REWARD IN MIND (3:12-14)

12 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. 13 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, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Insight

- What is the goal that he speaks of? What is the prize? What is it that Paul strains to take hold of? What is it that he believes God is calling him to? The answer is 'knowing Christ more deeply'. And he has just unpacked what he understands by the phrase 'knowing Christ' in verse 10-11: It means 1) to experience Christ's resurrection power, 2) to experience participation in Christ's sufferings, 3) being conformed to the character Christ revealed on the cross, and 4) to ultimately achieve a high level of resurrection glory. And all of this he understands he will experience partly and progressively in this life, but ultimately on the day of Christ, and in heaven!
- Paul uses the language of a race. He does not look behind him any longer - he pays no attention to his past (which he spoke of in verses 5-6). He is totally focussed on the finish-line which is in heaven (hence his use of the phrase 'God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus'). He is motivated to run the race of faithful obedience to Christ as the singular priority and passion of his life (hence his phrase 'this one thing I do'). And he anticipates it all being worth it, as God promises to give him the prize (which speaks of reward) for his persevering faithfulness. But, for Paul, the prize is not something separate to Christ - it has to do with Christ himself. Using the previously mentioned analogy of different stars shining with different degrees of splendour, I believe he hoped to shine as brightly as he can in eternity for the glory of Christ!

Application

- **The purpose of salvation:** Christ took hold of us at salvation. But he took hold of us for a purpose, namely that we would take hold of that for which he took hold of us. What is it that we're meant to take hold of

now that we are saved? Primarily, we're meant to pursue a deepening relationship with Jesus himself! And this, as Paul unpacked in verses 10-11 means that we pursue a deeper experience of Christ's resurrection power and a participation in his sufferings, as well as a deeper conformity to the character he displayed on the cross - which all leads to the promise of greater resurrection-glory in heaven. Paul, elsewhere in his letter, speaks of how our passion, however, is primarily, but not exclusively, the pursuit of Christ. That's because our passion for Jesus should lead us to a second passion: that others might know him too (see 4:1, where Paul speaks of the people he'd led to Christ being his crown in heaven).

- **The race of discipleship:** Once we're saved the race starts. And not until we meet Christ in heaven does the race end. Although we can thrill in the distance we've covered, we need to be humble about the distance yet to cover. And we need to give everything we've got to focusing on that finish line. If we run faithfully and with perseverance, we will receive the prize of great reward. Any sacrifice and suffering along the way is nothing compared to the greatness of the reward. We must not look over our shoulder at the ground we've covered, but rather humbly and eagerly focus on running the race set before us. The finish line is in heaven. God calls us, cheers us on. He draws us and pulls us in that direction. So let us run, and let us run with all our hearts. What a privilege it is to serve and seek Christ!

5.4 FOLLOW A WORTHY EXAMPLE (3:15-17)

15 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. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Insight

- The phrase 'view of things' and the word 'think' here are all translated from the same family of words used in 2:5 to speak of Christ's 'attitude of mind'. Paul had told Jesus' story of crucifixion-resurrection (2:6-11) and now he had just told his own story of suffering-resurrection (3:7-11). Having told these two stories, it is as though he is saying - the attitude we see in Christ, and the attitude you see in me - that is the attitude to take! Paul, in 15a, is therefore asking them to see things like this.
- But notice how gracious he is in 15b. He suggests that some people may not quickly be willing to see things like he does, and he permits some variation in opinion - but he also lets them know that God himself will eventually reveal the necessity of this attitude of mind.
- In verse 16, he reminds them however that, for most of them at least, this attitude of mind that is found in Jesus, and in himself, has been accepted as the right one by them already - and that they should just get on with embracing it, and living it out.

Application

- **The right perspective, humbly embraced:** There is a right way of seeing things, a right 'attitude of mind'. And it is this: that Jesus is the Crucified-Resurrected Lord who is worthy of our one and only lives, who we should pursue with singular passion, and who we should imitate in humility and self-sacrifice. And there is reward at the end of a life faithfully and perseveringly lived like this. This is the view that Christians everywhere should take. However, some Christians may not see it like this, and we need not force them to see it like this. However, since we are convinced that this really is the right view, we should trust God himself to patiently and progressively help Christians and churches everywhere to see it like this. But while we wait for others to see it like this, we must not postpone our call to live this perspective out for ourselves.

17 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.

Insight

- Paul had a particular strategy for making disciples. He would teach them the gospel, and teach them how the gospel of the Crucified-Resurrected Christ practically could and should impact their attitudes and behaviours. But he knew that people needed more than just teaching - they needed living examples. Paul had set an example of the right attitude (and he had told two personal stories to give them a window into his approach to life and faith in 1:12-26 and 3:4-14). He asked them to imitate him - both his attitude and his behaviour. And he asked them to look out for others who also lived similarly to him (note that he is probably referring to Epahroditus and Timothy here - see 2:19-30).

Application

- **The need for role models:** We need to seek out role models who exemplify Christ-like character and ministry. And then we need to keep our eyes on them, and model our lives on them. Obviously, we should not expect anyone to be perfect, so it is wise to have many role models - and probably each will exemplify different aspects of Christ-likeness to us. But we should not stop there - we should then rise up in God and become role models to others. We will find that as we follow other Christ-like leaders, that soon other people get caught in the 'slipstream' of our own example.

5.5 LIFE WITHOUT VS LIFE WITH CHRIST (3:18-21)

18 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. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.

Insight

- Who is Paul speaking of here? We do not know. It certainly doesn't refer to the legalists (mentioned in 3:2) - since these people display greatly immoral behaviour. It does not refer to all non-Christians, but it does seem to refer to 'many' - perhaps people who have heard the gospel and yet have rejected it. It could refer to well-known and influential people in their own city of Philippi. Paul is urging them not in any way to be influenced by these people - but to understand just how different they are to disciples of Jesus.

Application

- **Life without God:** We're warned by Paul to not be influenced by people who really are anti-Jesus. It should bring us to tears to our eyes how spiritually suicidal some people are - when all the time the offer of grace and salvation through faith in Christ is held out to them. They are enemies of the cross of Christ, which means that they have rejected the salvation that Christ offers, as well as the humble, serving nature of Christ that he reveals on the cross. Their destiny is destruction, which means they are doomed to face the judgment of God without mercy on Judgment Day. Their god is their stomach, which means that their lives are not governed by conscience but rather by appetite - they live for pleasure, and they live to satisfy their wants. Their glory is their shame - instead of Jesus being the one in whom they glory, they glory in things that really they should be ashamed of. Simply said, their approach to life is to think only of the here and now, with no consideration of eternity, or the eternal consequences of their chosen path. Come to think of it, this describes the majority of people in the Western world!

20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 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.

Insight

- In contrast to the spiritually suicidal people mentioned in verses 18-19, the life of a disciple of Jesus is radically different. They have 'heaven' rather than 'earthly things'. They have a 'glorious' future rather than the prospect of destruction. They experience glory in Jesus, rather than

glory in shame. They have their bodies under Christ's control - and will even receive a glorious new resurrection body - rather than being under the control of their body and its appetites.

- Paul uses the analogy of being a Roman citizen under Caesar: in the same way that the Philippians were citizens of Rome, so they were also citizens of heaven. In the same way that their city was a colony and outpost of Rome, promoting Rome's culture and values, so their church in fact was a colony and an outpost of heaven, ready to promote heaven's values and cultures. Caesar was commonly described as Lord and Saviour - in the same way, Jesus is the Saviour (the only time this word is used in this letter) and Lord. Caesar had the Roman Empire under his control. Similarly, Jesus had the power to bring everything under his control.

Application

- **Jesus is our Lord:** He is the king of kings, the emperor of emperors. We are his citizens and his subjects. And our church is a colony and outpost of heaven. It is our privilege and responsibility to embody and promote the values and culture of Christ's kingdom in a fallen world. And the best is yet to come. Though we already experience Christ's Lordship now, yet we are riddled with temptation, trials and a decaying body. We are surrounded by people who think we're crazy. And yet there is coming a day when our experience of Christ's Lordship will go to another level. He will come back for us as our worthy Saviour and Lord. Although the world is already under his control, yet there is resistance to his will and leadership on every side. But there is coming a day when Christ will deal with evil and resistance decisively. This is the day of Christ, the day when all will see who Jesus really is. Even the greatest leaders and emperors of human history will see it. And wonderfully, we the redeemed ones will be set free totally of sin's presence. Our 'lowly' bodies will be transformed into new glorious resurrection bodies - ones that are like Christ's resurrection body! Despite appearances to the contrary, God is in control! And our salvation is not just for today, but forever. Christ is coming again - and at his coming we will share in the glory that belongs to him alone. All powers will be under him - including those powers that presently bring much suffering to the church.
- **Becoming like Jesus:** One of the passions of our lives should be 'to become like Christ in his death' (see 3:10) - this refers to the transformation of our character, partially aided by suffering, so that we reflect the character of Christ as seen in his willingness to humbly give himself for others. Fascinatingly, Paul uses a similar word to the word translated 'become like' in 3:10 when he says that Christ will 'transform' us, so that our bodies will become like his resurrection body. Said another way, in this life it is God's will that our characters are transformed to reflect the crucifixion character of Christ - and this is made possible by Christ's resurrection power at work in us (see 3:10). But on the 'that day' it is God's will that our bodies are transformed to

reflect the resurrection body of Christ - and this is made possible because of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf! Wow!

Philippians Chapter Four

5.6 STAND FIRM AND STAND TOGETHER (4:1-3)

1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

Insight

- 'Therefore' at the beginning of the sentence implies, 'In the light of everything I've just told you' (that is, what he has just said in 3:1-21). Paul tells them to 'stand firm in the Lord'. This repeats one of the main instructions of the whole letter mentioned in 1:27,28. They are, in the face of opposition, to stand firm in their faith in Jesus! (Interestingly, the two main burdens of Paul for the church (that they stand firm in the face of opposition and that they stand together in unity - both mentioned in 1:27,28 - are repeated in 4:1-3.)
- Many translations translate the Greek word 'adelphoi' just as 'brothers' whenever it is used throughout the New Testament. But there is a problem with translating it just as brothers. The plural Greek word adelphoi refers to 'siblings' in a family - and the word 'siblings' is a word not often, nor affectionately, used in the English language. That is why, depending on the context, adelphoi may refer either to men or to both men and women who are siblings (brothers and sisters) in God's family. The reason I mention this point here is that in the immediately following verse he address two women - who clearly are sisters not brothers. It is therefore certainly preferable to translate 'adelphoi' as 'brothers and sisters' unless the context shows that it is just men being referred to.
- Notice Paul's extreme affection for the church: he describes them in this one sentence as brothers and sisters, 'you whom I love and long for', 'my joy, my crown', and 'dear friends'.

Application

- **The church is a spiritual family:** The whole tone of the letter has been one of profound spiritual community. Imagine a three-sided triangle: side 1 is Paul's relationship with Christ; side 2 is the Philippians' relationship with Christ; and side 3 is Paul's relationship with the Philippians. Every verse in this letter can be seen as describing at least one side of this triangle of relationship. Notice that Paul's relationship with Christ and the church's relationship with Christ is the basis of Paul's deep relationship with the church. That is what we mean by spiritual community. And since Christ is known in such intimate and affectionate ways (read 2:1 again), that affection and intimacy flows between the human relationships too. The church is a family 'in the Lord', where,

because of our mutual relationship with Christ, we can call each other brother, sister, dear friend, ones who we love and long for.

2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Insight

- Throughout the letter Paul has greatly emphasized the need for unity, one-mindedness and humility in the church. He had obviously heard from Epaphroditus that a break-down in relationship was an emerging problem in the church. And specifically, there were two women (mentioned in verse 2) that were at the epicentre of this church-dividing conflict. In this verse he addresses them directly and asks them to be of the same mind in the Lord.
- Who were these women? Probably they were amongst the first ‘God-fearing’ women who converted to Christ by a riverside along with Lydia (see Acts 16:13-15). They had previously partnered with Christ in some ministry as his co-workers (v3), and therefore probably played a leadership role of some kind in the church. Though they were women, he even used the military metaphor with the word ‘contend’ - hence describing them as fellow-soldiers. Interestingly, in the Philippian culture - and for that matter, the Philippian church (see Acts 16:40 for example) - it was common for women to play key leadership roles.
- Fascinatingly, Paul addresses a single person: ‘my true companion’ (other Bible translations: ‘my genuine yoke-fellow’). Nowhere else in all his community-directed letters does he do this. Who is this person? Probably the doctor-historian, Luke (who would go on to write the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts). How do we know this? In Acts 16:10-16 we see Luke, the author of Acts, joining Paul on his trip to Philippi, but notice in Acts 16:40 that Luke does not go with them when they leave. Probably he stayed at the church, taking care of it in the absence of Paul.
- Paul expected that these conflicting women needed more than just his teaching in this letter on the subject of humility and one-mindedness. They needed someone to play a mediatory role - and this he requested his ‘true companion’ to do.
- The last phrase ‘whose names are in the book of life’ picks up on the Jewish thought that God had a list of those who were his. It also picks up on the idea of citizenship. They were citizens of heaven, and therefore they needed to live out the values of heaven.

Application

- Resolving conflict:** Poorly dealt with conflict is so damaging to the church and the forward movement of the gospel - especially when it is leaders who conflict. How can we stand firm in the face of opposition, if we do not stand together as one? This reminds us of Jesus' words: 'A house divided against itself cannot stand' (Mark 3:25). The way to deal with conflict is for everyone to have the same mind of Christ - which calls for humility, a willingness to subordinate one's own agendas to God's agenda of the forward-movement of the gospel, and a willingness to put other's interests above our own. Rather than insisting that God is on their side, both conflicting parties should get on the side of God. This is what it means to have the mindset of Christ (2:5). And reconciling is not always easy. At times it will need a mediator. This mediator should be commissioned by a trusted leader (such as Paul in this case) - someone not prone to take sides, someone more concerned with 'what's right?' than 'whose right?' The mediator's role is to help the conflicting parties deal with each other in a Christ-like way.
- Women in leadership:** Both men and women get to be leaders in the body of Christ. Apart from Lydia the church would never have even started. She was greatly instrumental in God's work - as were Euodia and Syntyche. The church was led by elders and deacons (1:1). Whether these women were made elders however, we cannot be sure of. It is more likely, looking at the rest of Paul's writings (e.g. Romans 16:1 and 1 Timothy 3:2) that they were deacons. There certainly are contexts where having females as leaders is more culturally acceptable (as was the situation in Philippi, and most of the world today, especially the developed world) and where the situation necessitates it (as was the situation in the Philippian church which started with a group of women). Notice however that Paul leaves Luke there, quite possibly because he believed they needed some credible male leadership in the mix. (Also, by the time Paul writes this letter we know of other key male leaders that emerged in the Philippian church: Epaphroditus and Clement(v3).) This should encourage us as churches to keep on releasing (and allowing God to release) leaders who are both male and female.

6. FINAL COMMENTS (4:4-23)

6.1 THE PATHWAY TO JOY AND PEACE (4:4-9)

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Insight

- Verse 7 tells us that one goal of the Christian life is to experience the peace of God guarding our hearts and minds. But in order to experience this peace we need to give ourselves to the instructions in verses 4-6, which include rejoicing, trusting that Christ is near, responding to situations that normally create anxiety with prayer, thanking God, and presenting requests to God.
- Regarding the call to rejoice: A dominant theme of this letter is joy. See 1:4, 1:18, 1:25, 2:2, 2:16, 2:17, 2:18, 2:28, 3:1, 3:3, 4:1, 4:4 and 4:10 for more examples. When Paul tells them to rejoice he calls them to praise and sing to God with joyful abandon. He calls them to constantly delight in God, both individually and collectively.
- Regarding the call to 'let your gentleness be evident to all': The Christians in Philippi must have wanted to retaliate against the persecution they were receiving, but instead they were to treat everyone - including their enemies - with gentleness. This is seen in Jesus' way of dealing with his own arrest, trials and persecutions: 1 Peter 1:23 tells us that 'when they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.'
- Regarding the announcement that 'the Lord is near': Fascinatingly, in the middle of a list of imperatives (i.e. things we are instructed to do) there is this little indicative (i.e. something that is already a reality and does not call for any action on our behalf). It refers to how close the Lord Jesus is to them - he has made himself available and accessible to them, they can draw close to him and he will be there for them. This must have encouraged them. Every patriotic citizen of the Roman Empire would have been encouraged by the thought that the Lord Caesar was nearby. It is as though Paul is saying, 'the true Lord - Jesus - is near'. A major difference is that Caesar was inaccessible to the people, whereas Jesus was accessible.
- Regarding the call to prayer instead of anxiety: the three words translated as 'prayer', 'petition' and 'requests' all have very similar meanings. The fact that we can pray 'in every situation' reminds us that Christ, the true Lord, cares about all of our lives. It is a call to trust a God who promises to look after them.
- Regarding the call to give thanks: gratitude for all that God is, all that he has given, all that he has said and done, past, present and future is

the basic posture of the Christian life. It is the opposite of the tendency to complain and argue spoken of in 2:14.

- Regarding the promise of peace: Listen to Spurgeon's definition of God's peace: "What is God's peace? The unruffled serenity of the infinitely-happy God, the eternal composure of the absolutely well-contented God." This peace is more than a steady state of mind and heart however - it is also the experience of God's gift of wholeness. This peace does not make sense to the world - it transcends their understanding. God's peace will 'guard' or garrison (a military metaphor) our hearts (i.e. the very core of our beings) and our thoughts.
- This peace will not just be experienced personally, but also in the relationships within the Christian community.

Application

- **Joy and thanksgiving:** Joy is not an option. We are commanded to rejoice. Regardless of how desperate or dangerous our situation is, there is reason to rejoice. Jesus Christ himself, the universe's true Lord, is near. And he cares for us. And wonderfully, we are 'in him'. His presence, his care and his power are all available to us. Our lives should be marked by regular outbreaks of singing to and about God and his goodness, giving thanks to God and celebrating with God's people. What a good God - that he would make delight a duty!
- **Prayer:** We can enjoy Jesus' nearness. He is present and accessible to us. Kings, presidents and emperors can be esteemed, but seldom approached. Jesus is different however. He longs for us to approach him, and to talk to him about every aspect and circumstance in our lives. Every day lived, every situation faced, every aspect of our humanity is an opportunity to talk to God, our loving Father, and to talk to Jesus, our caring Lord. And not only do we talk to him, but we need to ask him for what it is we need. Since we are under his leadership, we are also under his care. Asking is an expression of our dependency on him. And God has designed life in this world to constantly drive us to our knees in dependency on him. The sooner we realise that God himself orchestrates the situations that drive us to our knees, the sooner we will replace anxiety (which results when we do not really believe that God is looking after us) with prayer.
- **Experiencing God's peace:** God wants us to experience his supernatural presence and peace. It has a way of shielding and guarding the deep emotions of our hearts, and the thoughts in our heads. Instead of fear, anxiety and worry we find ourselves experiencing a deep calm. Not the calm of Eastern spirituality (which is meant to result from detaching ourselves from our own humanity) - but rather the calm that comes from attaching ourselves to a loving Father and Saviour. This experience of God's own peace, God's own wholeness is no doubt made possible by the Holy Spirit.

8 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.

9 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.

Insight

- Regarding verse 8: The phrase translated ‘think about such things’ also implies ‘value such things’ and ‘embrace such things’. Paul gives them eight words that describe that which they should think on, pursue, value and embrace. Interestingly, the fifth and sixth words ‘lovely’ and ‘admirable’ are words used no where else in the New Testament. They do not describe that which is ‘right’ or ‘moral’, but rather that which is inherently beautiful. In this verse Paul is telling them how to respond to the culture around them. In a sense he is saying, ‘Find whatever you can in the culture that is compatible with the Gospel and the character of God and which is beautiful - and embrace it.’ We must remember that the Philippians had grown up with a rich Greek philosophy that called them to pursue life’s best - and many of the words used in this verse were words commonly used by the Greek philosophers of that day.
- Regarding verse 9: This verse summarizes what Paul has been saying the whole letter through: it refers to Paul’s gospel message, and Paul’s attempts to live a life that is compatible with the gospel. Verse 7 spoke of experiencing the peace of God, now this verse speaks of experiencing the God of peace.

Application

- **Christians and culture:** There is such a thing as common grace. Common grace consists of the signs that, although humanity and culture have become corrupted by the fall of humanity, not all of God’s image is lost, and God himself has not stopped exerting some influence on people and culture. This means that as Christians we are not meant to only think of and pursue Christian things. Rather we need to be ready to think of all things Christianly, and pursue things that are compatible with our faith. Where we find truth, nobleness, righteousness, purity, loveliness, admirable-ness, that which is excellent or praiseworthy - even in people of other religions or no religion - we are ready to embrace. However, we are called to be discerning - instead of embracing our culture’s values thoughtlessly, we are alert to that which is incompatible with God’s character, with the gospel realities, and with the examples and teachings of the apostles who wrote the New Testament.
- **Thought and action:** Verse 8 calls us to diligently think on and value that which is good and beautiful, whereas verse 9 calls us to put these thoughts and values into practise. In 2:12 we’re told to work out our salvation - and these two verses show us that we play a very active role

in this. On the one hand, we engage and develop our minds, our ability to think and discern, our willingness to give a sustained mental focus on what pleases God. (This reminds us of Romans 12:2, which says that transformation comes from mind and thought renewal.) On the other hand, it is not enough to think diligently and discerningly - we need to make sure that we actually implement and put into action our best thoughts, and highest values. Right thinking must lead to right living. And wholeness (which is another meaning of the word 'peace' mentioned in verse 7 and 9) will be the result. Brokenness comes from wrong thinking, and wrong living - whereas our humanity is restored into God's image through right thinking and right living.

6.2 TRUST AND GENEROSITY (4:10-19)

10 I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Insight

- Verse 10 reveals one of the major reasons Paul wrote this letter: to thank them for the generous financial gift they had sent him in the hands of Epaphroditus (see 2:25). (Being a prisoner in a prison that did not meet any of his needs (including food), he was fully reliant on the generosity of friends and family to survive). Paul was grateful, and rejoiced in God, not primarily because his needs were met, but because it was evidence of their friendship and concern toward him. The word translated 'renewed' implies a 'blossoming'. He was saying that their friendship had freshly blossomed in this expression of concern.
- In verses 11-13, Paul makes it clear that the reason for his rejoicing at their gift was not primarily because his needs were met. He wants to make it clear that his trust is in Christ, not in them. This takes the pressure off them to provide for him and it makes it clear to them that the relationship is not utilitarian. His main delight is in their gesture of care and friendship.
- The phrase 'I have learnt the secret' (v12) is a phrase that was most commonly used of those initiated into the mystery cults of that day. He implies that there was a moment when he was initiated into the revelation and ability he speaks of. But what is this revelation, or this new ability? It is simply to trust and rely on Christ regardless of the circumstances, in such a way that he experiences Christ's gift of contentment (v11-12) and strength (v13). He uses the word 'contentment' which is a word that was used by the Greek philosophers of a person who was completely self-sufficient. He uses the same word

but packs it with new meaning: instead of using it to refer to his self-sufficiency, he refers to his Christ-sufficiency.

Application

- **Relationships:** All healthy relationships imply a giving and a receiving. But the giving and the receiving is not the *substance* of the relationship as much as it is the *evidence* of the relationship. That's why Paul, in response to their gift and concern, did not major on what they had given him as much as he celebrated their relationship. Our relationships with people are in danger when we value them precisely for what we get from them. Relationships must never be utilitarian. In the best relationships, our delight is not in the gifts people give us, but in the people themselves. We should not seek what belongs to others, but the people themselves (see 2 Corinthians 12:14 which says 'we did not seek what is yours, but you').
- **Trusting Christ:** We need to follow the path of Paul, and learn by experience how to trust Christ completely, regardless of our circumstances. When things are going well, we must not begin to trust in our prosperity, but still trust in Christ ultimately. And when things are going badly, we again have opportunity to trust Christ. This ability to trust Christ seems to take time to learn but it is one of the most important signs of spiritual progress. And the advantages of trusting in Christ regardless of the situation at hand will mean that we will experience a supernatural contentment and strength! After all, Christ 'has the power to bring everything under his control' (3:21) - starting with our inward state of being. Most people's inward states are a direct reflection of their circumstances: when things go well, they're happy and when things go badly, they're anxious. If our life's reference point is our circumstances then we end up experiencing life merely in up-down terms. We become victims of life. But if we instead make Christ, who never changes, our reference point, our lives are remarkably stabilized! Not that our circumstances no longer impact us - just not as deeply.

14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.

Insight

- Regarding verse 14: Paul is grateful for the way they shared in his troubles. The fact that they gave him this gift while he was in prison shows that they see themselves as partners with him - and therefore if Paul is in prison, it is as though they are in prison.

- Right at the beginning of the letter Paul had revelled in their ‘partnership in the gospel from the first day till now’ (see 1:5). This theme is picked up again in these verses. The fact that they financially supported Paul was not just evidence of their care for him, but their passion for the advance of the gospel.
- The phrase ‘giving and receiving’ (v15) was common language in the relationships of that day. It implied that real friendship evidenced itself in giving and benefiting the other. These words also introduce a commercial metaphor which is picked up in verse 17 and 18.
- The phrase ‘not one church ... except you only’ (v15) was not Paul taking a swipe at other churches. Rather he was affirming the unique relationship he had with this church. A study of 1 Corinthians 9:1-18 and 2 Corinthians 11:7-11 reveals that he did not expect or even encourage other churches to support him personally. Perhaps because they were the first church planted on European soil, he did receive support from the Philippian church however. They seemed to serve as a base church for apostolic ministry into neighbouring lands. Verse 16 tells how they had supported him financially while in Thessalonica (which was the place he went immediately after planting the church in Philippi (see Acts 16:40-17:4)). See also 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, where Paul speaks of the amazing generosity of the Philippian church, who, despite great poverty, were motivated to give by their longing that the church and gospel thrive all over the world.

Application

- **Giving to the cause of Christ:** The church in Philippi was passionate about the advance of the gospel everywhere. We too should share their passion. And like them, we should trust God to give us as churches key relationships with people who break open new areas for the gospel. Although we might not be able to go ourselves, we can support those who do. Regardless of how poor the people in a church are, we should not see it as a burden but as a privilege to give to God’s work (and by this I mean specifically ‘give to God’s workers’) in the nations! However, we must never give out of manipulation. And we should generally not give to those with whom we have no relationship.

17 Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Insight

- Verse 17 emphasizes that he was not trying to manipulate them to give. He sincerely was looking out for their best and not his own. And it turned

out that giving to the cause of the gospel, and to Paul, was for their good: God would credit it to their account. By this he means that God takes note of their giving, and will reward them for their giving. Interestingly, Paul saw them as his heavenly reward (2:16 and 4:1), but he was interested in them increasing their reward.

- In verse 18, Paul tells them how their gift has helped him - he has gone from being hungry to being full, from lack to plenty. He is quick to remind them that the pleasure is not just his, but God's. Using the metaphor of the Old Testament sacrificial system he speaks about their gift as an offering that delights God.
- Paul would love to reciprocate their generosity, but being in prison he cannot. So he does something even better: he tells them that God will reciprocate. That is how verse 19 needs to be understood. Since they have given to the cause of Christ, God himself will take care of all their needs. After all God is extremely wealthy (hence the reference to his 'riches'). They are poor (see 2 Corinthians 8:2), yet God will provide financially. They are experiencing painful persecution and opposition, yet God will give them the ability to endure, as well as great doses of joy and encouragement. They are experiencing anxiety, yet God will give them his own peace. Paul's use of the word 'my' in 'my God' is his way of saying that he knows *by experience* God's ability to look after us. And Paul reminds us that this experience of God's ability to look after us is the privilege of those 'in Christ Jesus'.
- Verse 20 lands all of this mention of God's grace - which has run through the entirety of the letter - with the call to worship! Worship is the appropriate response to such a gracious God and Father! The word 'amen' means 'yes'!

Application

- **God's response to sacrificial giving:** These verses describe three ways God responds to giving - when the motives are similar to that of the Philippians. They gave because of their sincere concern for the well-being of Paul. And they gave because of their longing to see the gospel and the church thrive all over the world. Whenever we give out of sincere love for people, and out of the longing to see Jesus' name lifted high in all the world, we can expect God to respond similarly. So how does he respond? Firstly, he takes note of it and increases the reward, which he stores up for us in heaven (v17). Secondly, he takes great delight in our gift (v18). Thirdly, he promises to take care of us. This third response echoes the promise of Jesus in Matthew 6:33 which says that as we seek first God's kingdom, 'all these things will be added to us'.
- **Worship and grace:** To the degree we have a revelation of God, Jesus and their grace toward us, to that degree will we be able to worship. Worship is the appropriate response to such a God. A God who takes sinners and saves them, including them in the forward movement of the gospel and the church. A God who is gloriously wealthy and treats us as his own children. A God who poured himself out in Jesus. A God who

pours himself out in love to his children. A God who pours himself out in love to his not-yet children through orchestrating the preaching of the gospel. A God who takes rebels and, through the gospel, turns them into worshippers! This God is worthy of a loud, heart-felt 'Yes'! This God is worthy of our deepest adoration and highest celebration!

6.3 FINAL GREETINGS 4:21-23)

21 Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. 22 All the Lord's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Insight

- In verse 21a, Paul sends his greetings to every single person in the church of Philippi. In verse 21b, we see that people could freely visit Paul in prison in Rome, and may have been in his presence while this letter had been written. In verse 22, Paul refers to those Christians in the church in Rome, some of whom have visited him in prison.
- Although in this letter he chooses not to mention any specific names of people that he is greeting, or sending greetings from, in verse 22 he singles out some people in the church of Rome who are related to emperor Nero himself. Why does he single them out? It is as if he is saying, 'Though you suffer at the hands of Roman citizens who call Caesar 'Lord', yet the true Lord Jesus is at work even in Caesar's family. Many of them have converted to faith in Christ and recognize Jesus as the true Lord. So be encouraged! The gospel is advancing despite apparent large-scale rejection of it. And there is no one beyond its reach!'
- Verse 23 is the final benediction. It brings together the main themes of the whole letter, namely Christ and his grace toward the church in Philippi.

Application

- **Confidence in the gospel:** The mention of those in Caesar's family who had become Christians sends us a clear message: there is no one beyond the reach of Christ. God is sovereignly at work in advancing the gospel. We should not be intimidated by whole 'groups' of people who appear to be resistant to the gospel, because amongst these people will be some to whom Christ has revealed himself. The gospel is steadily turning the world upside-down. And even when it seems like not much is happening in terms of gospel-advance, be sure that God is wonderfully at work.