

PHILIPPIANS
Pursuing Christ to Know Him

Thomas W. Finley

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It was certainly rewarding to work together with other members of the body of Christ in preparing this commentary. It is beautiful to see members of Christ's body freely serve in this way for the purpose of helping others within His body who will read this book.

Foreword

From the day Paul came to faith in Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, he lived life in a single-minded pursuit of knowing Jesus Christ more fully and serving Him more faithfully. Paul desired to live a life that God could reward. That is what he wanted for the believers in Philippi. It is one of the main reasons that he wrote them this letter that we call the book of Philippians. The truth principles, the warnings, and the encouragement of Paul's letter to the Philippians are just as powerful and applicable today as they were to the original readers.

Tom Finley has written a very practical commentary on Philippians that will help believers today understand and apply the powerful truth of this book in their daily lives and ministries. From the knowledge gained from Tom's careful examination of the text, to the understanding of the practical application of that knowledge given in the "Life Application" sections, the readers of this commentary will be challenged and encouraged—through all the circumstances of life—to experience the joy, contentment, and God's reward through living a life of a single-minded pursuit of Jesus Christ.

Tom not only brings out the truths of the book of Philippians in this commentary, he also gives the readers useful instruction about the principles of interpretation. In addition, information is supplied about available resources that will make it possible to have a more effective study of any other book of the Bible. With his trademark thoroughness, faithfulness and compassion, Tom Finley has given us a valuable tool in our study of this wonderful letter to the Philippians.

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Introduction

The original version of this study was prepared in 2014 for a Bible class at a Bible college in Asia. This origin will explain the emphasis on some areas of truth, especially important lessons related to serving the Lord. The current revision has the goal of providing a readable commentary on Philippians for believers in countries where quality Christian literature is limited. This commentary will not be highly technical but will focus on explaining the meaning of the text. Additionally, life application sections should be valuable for the reader in helping his or her daily life.

Some comments on good Bible interpretation principles will be made at times in this commentary. Hopefully, these comments will help the reader for his own study of Scripture. Also, Appendix B contains information on free resources that students anywhere can access to help them in the study of the Scriptures. The interpretation method used in this commentary is known as the “grammatical-historical method.” Note the two elements here of sound interpretation in this method. One element is the actual grammar of the text. The other element is the historical background of the writing. The method may also be understood as the literal interpretation of the Bible text. The goal of this method is to discover the original intended meaning of the author when he wrote the Biblical passage. In other words, in respect to this study, what was Paul actually trying to say to the readers of the letter, those in Philippi?

Therefore, close attention must be paid to the grammar of the text – the words used, the relationships of ideas and statements by means of clauses, verbal tenses, emphasis, flow of arguments, transitional points, etc. The context is often considered as a primary help in deciding the meaning of the words and the ideas written. This approach is basic to understanding any piece of writing. All of the wording should be taken at face value—its literal meaning. The

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exception to this arises when the context gives us some good reason to expect a symbolic meaning. Common communication techniques such as figures of speech, parables, obvious allegories, proverbs and the like are to be recognized as such. These are to be interpreted in a normal fashion as we would understand them in any writing. Much damage has been done in the field of interpretation by those who disregard the literal meaning of the text and search for some deeper, “hidden” meaning as the “true” meaning of a passage.

Also, to help us arrive at a proper understanding, the historical background of the writing is very important. A good Bible dictionary can be very helpful in learning the historical background of a book in the Bible (see Appendix B for resources such as Bible dictionaries). The immediate background would include the identity and situation of the readers. Also, any information on the author of the writing would be important (his background, identifiable spiritual burdens and perspectives, etc.). The relationship between the writer and the recipients would also be significant. Moreover, a broader perspective of the time period and the conditions then present would give important historical clues for interpretation. The time period viewed from the standpoint of God’s plan would also be significant. For instance, was the passage written when the Law was in effect, or after the time of grace had come? Additionally, knowledge of the culture, customs and traditions of the time would certainly be important for good understanding of the text.

Finally, we should note that the “grammatical-historical” interpretive method is the sole acceptable method of interpretation in first rate Bible colleges. This literal approach to interpreting Scripture was recovered in the modern era as one of the hallmarks of the Protestant Reformation.¹

¹ The Protestant Reformation involved a huge shift of ideas and practices in the Christian world. The Reformation began in the early 1500s, and was marked particularly by the actions and ideas of Martin Luther (originally a Roman Catholic monk). The Reformation upset the role of the Roman Catholic Church. For centuries, non-Scriptural traditions, practices and theology had reigned through the Roman system. The Roman church claimed that only the Pope and the Roman Church could interpret the Bible and establish traditions. However, the Reformation had as one of its deep convictions the Latin phrase, *Sola Scriptura*. The phrase means “Scripture Alone,” and its meaning was that Scripture was considered by the reformers to be the sole authority for beliefs and practice.

Introduction

The author gives thanks to God for His grace to prepare this study. Along with over 40 years of Bible reading and personal study, I have also consulted a number of Bible commentaries in order to discover and present the truth as accurately as I can.

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Luther, Calvin and other reformers embraced a literal approach to Bible interpretation. These men rightly rejected the arbitrary allegorical approach that had dominated Roman Catholic teaching for hundreds of years. The “allegorizing method” does not seek to understand a passage by taking its content in a literal way. Rather, it downplays or even disregards the literal meaning altogether while seeking to find some hidden spiritual meaning. To an allegorizing interpreter, the “truth” of the passage, or the “exposition” of the passage, is not the literal at all. Instead, they believe that another meaning altogether must be “discovered.” Therefore, the plain meaning of the text is considered to be only like a code language that must be decoded into the real, secret meaning.

Introductory Notes on the Epistle to the Philippians

Author

The first verse tells us that Paul and Timothy are sending this letter to the saints in Philippi. However, the pronoun “I” is seen throughout the letter, not “we.” This indicates that Paul is likely the author of the letter’s contents. However, Timothy shared Paul’s heart of love and concern for the believers in Philippi (2:19-20). Both of them had ministered to the saints in Philippi on Paul’s second and third missionary journeys. In the sense then that they shared a common spiritual concern for the Philippians, Paul can include Timothy in the greetings and thoughts of the epistle. It may be that Timothy was present with Paul when the letter was written, and Timothy may have actually written it at Paul’s direction. It could be that Timothy is also mentioned because it is expected that he will be sent shortly to Philippi (2:19, 23).

Date and place of composition

Scholars have had varying views about the place and time this letter was written. It is clear that it was written while Paul was imprisoned (1:12-17). Although Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea, the arguments for the letter being written from there seem to fall short. One reason is that the death sentence probably could not have been rendered there, but only at Caesar’s judgment in Rome. It is clear that Paul faces the possibility of a death sentence (1:20). One school of thought says that the letter was written from Ephesus, but that thesis lacks direct Scriptural support. The traditional view is that this epistle was written while Paul was under house arrest in Rome (see Acts 28:16-19, 30-31). This view seems best, especially because of Roman references in the letter (1:13; 4:22). The dates of Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome are considered to be about A. D. 61-63. During this time Paul wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and Philippians, which are often referred to as his “Prison

Introductory Notes on the Epistle to the Philippians

Epistles.” This letter was very possibly the last one written during this imprisonment based on Paul’s statement in Philippians 2:24.

By way of reminder, Paul went to Rome upon his appeal to Caesar arising from the accusations of the Jewish leaders (Acts 25:7-11). The apostle was acquitted of these charges in Rome in A. D. 62 or early 63. It is likely that Paul then went on a fourth missionary journey, of which we have no explicit Scriptural details (1 Tim. 1:3; Titus 1:5).

Persecution against the Christians by the Romans began after a great fire at Rome (July 19, 64). The Roman emperor Nero blamed the local Christians for the fire. Of course, this was a false charge against the Christians.

During Paul’s second prison term he wrote his last book, 2 Timothy, from Rome in A. D. 67 or 68.

Occasion for the letter

Knowing what prompts the writing of a letter is important. Paul wrote the letter in response to the gift from the saints in Philippi brought to him by Epaphroditus (1:5; 4:10, 18). Paul also wanted to explain why he felt it necessary to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi at this time.

Purpose of the letter

Paul wrote to the Philippians expressing much thankfulness for their participation with him in the advancement of the gospel. The apostle was also deeply concerned for the need of unity among the Philippians and this subject is seen in various portions of the epistle. Most importantly, this letter reveals the apostle’s heart as one full of the pursuit of Christ in order to know Him more intimately. So Paul wrote to spur the Philippians into such a single-minded pursuit of knowing Christ (Phil. 3:7-17).

Philippi and Paul

The city of Philippi was a leading city in Macedonia. It was a Roman colony and served as a military outpost. The citizens of Philippi were privileged to be considered as Roman citizens.

Introductory Notes on the Epistle to the Philippians

Philippi was only a few miles from the port of Neapolis and also close to a major route into Europe. This made the city one of importance for commerce and travelers. On Paul's second missionary journey, the Lord worked in a surprising way to direct Paul and his associates to Philippi. In a night vision Paul saw a man summoning him: "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9). The inspiring record of Acts 16 tells us how the church in Philippi started through the gospel received by Lydia and her household, as well as Paul's and Silas' jailer and his household. That took place around A. D. 52. On that journey the Philippian church began to support Paul's gospel efforts financially (Phil. 4:15-16). This support, along with their laboring together with Paul directly (4:3), began their "partnership in the gospel" (1:5). This partnership with Paul in the gospel is an important theme in this epistle. During his third missionary journey Paul seems to have visited Philippi twice (Acts 20:1-6), and this may have been about A. D. 56-57.

Philippians – Outline of the Book

Chapter One – Christ to be Honored

Greetings - 1:1-2

Thanksgiving - 1:3-8

Prayer - 1:9-11

Advancement of the gospel - 1:12-18

Paul's desire to live Christ - 1:19-26

Paul's appeal for unity in the cause of the gospel - 1:27-30

Chapter Two – Live Like Christ

Paul's continued appeal for unity - 2:1-4

Christ, our example - 2:5-11

Shine as lights in the world - 2:12-18

Timothy, an example of a selfless servant - 2:19-24

Epaphroditus, an example of a faithful servant - 2:25-30

Chapter Three – Pursue Christ

Encouragement to rejoice and glory in Christ, with warnings against Judaizers - 3:1-3

Paul's great example - the pursuit of Christ - 3:4-14

Paul's entreaty to follow his example - 3:15-21

Chapter Four – Christ, our Contentment and our Strength

Directions for steadfastness, unity, joy, reasonableness and peace - 4:1-9

Thanksgiving for the gift from the Philippians - 4:10-20

Closing remarks - 4:21-23

Chapter One

Christ to be Honored

Greetings (1:1-2)

¹Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: ²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul and Timothy take the position of “servants” (in New Testament Greek the word is *doulos*, *Strong’s* #1401)², following Christ’s example (2:7). The term *doulos* could mean a slave, but the word in the NT (the abbreviation used in this book for New Testament) was often used generally of a servant. The idea here is a person being in subjection to another. Paul and Timothy served Christ Jesus, just as Christ served the Father in complete obedience, putting aside his own will. Christ’s humility and obedience are a core thought in this letter and may be the reason for Paul’s language here in describing himself and Timothy. Although Paul is an apostle, and is not hesitant to identify himself as such in other letters, here he puts himself on the same plane as Timothy. Paul identifies both of them as servants of Christ Jesus. They share a common service to God and a common service to the Philippians (2:19-24).

Paul sends the letter to “all the saints,” (meaning all the believers) with the recognized leaders (overseers and deacons) noted secondly. The word “with” in verse one actually indicates that the leaders are in union with all the others in Philippi and these leaders

² All references to *Strong’s* numbers for Greek words are derived from the *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, compiled by James Strong and published in 1890.

Christ to be Honored

are included in the group of “all the saints.” Paul does not write to a “leader” group and then add on the other saints in the church. That would elevate the “leaders” who actually are to be servants. Paul writes to the all the saints, and then notes the servant-leaders who are included.

Servant-leaders are those who lead others in the way of Christ and service. This is the only place in the NT where these two types of serving ones (overseers and deacons) are mentioned in a combined way. And, in no other Pauline epistle does Paul make a special greeting to overseers or deacons. Rather, if not written to specific individuals, the greetings in Paul’s letters are to the assemblies, consisting of all the saints. We should recognize and appreciate those who teach us and lead us in the ways of Christ and God’s truth. However, we should be careful not to elevate these serving ones above the rest of the saints, making them a special class. If we are an overseer or a deacon, we should not think of ourselves as above others or belonging to some special class. An overseer or a deacon has a distinct function in the body of Christ, but not a “position.” To know and practice these truths exhibits spiritual maturity in a church world too often tainted by men’s natural ideas of positions “over others.”

Thanksgiving (1:3-8)

³I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus

Paul is thankful upon every remembrance of these believers, who were obviously tied to him in a deeply spiritual way. Their relationship began on the “first day” when Paul initially brought the gospel to Philippi (Acts 16:9 ff). Paul was so thankful and joyful as he remembered these saints in prayer. His joy was

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especially real when he considered their “partnership in the gospel.” The word for “partnership” here is *koinonia* (*Strong’s* #2842). The word basically means a “sharing in common” or “partnership” in something. Some good translations have translated this word in Philippians 1:5 as: “participation,” “fellowship” or “partnership.” This sharing with Paul in the advancement of the gospel included financial contributions to him (2:25; 4:15-17), co-laboring (4:3), prayers (1:19), and a participation with him in the supply of God’s grace (1:7).

Because of the partnership that Paul had witnessed in them in the gospel work, Paul had a certain confidence (v. 6). His confidence was that God, who had begun a good work in them, would carry that good work on to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. What is the “good work” in verse six? Some Bible teachers believe that this good work is the continuing work of God in the salvation of the Philippians, including sanctification of the life. This view holds that God would complete this salvation of believers at the coming day of Jesus Christ.³ This interpretation would mean that

³ It is unfortunate that many believers have picked up a wrong idea and a false expectation from this supposed meaning of verse six. They think that God will somehow automatically mature their Christian life over their lifetime, thus preparing them for the day of Jesus Christ and the Judgment Seat of Christ. That expectation is false because maturity in the Christian life is not automatically produced in believers by God. God works in us to do His will, but we must “work out our own salvation” by choosing to do His will (Phil. 2:12-14). The testimony of the entire NT is that believers are engaged in a struggle between the flesh and the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-23). They are also in a spiritual warfare with the evil angelic forces (Eph. 6:11-13) as well as a struggle against the pull of this world system (1 Jn. 2:15-17). In these struggles the believer must exercise spiritual discipline or he or she will be overcome by these opposing forces. Believers are called to an active responsibility whereby they must: seek the things above (Col. 3:1-2); by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body (Rom. 8:13; Co. 3:5-8); walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7); walk by the Spirit (Rom. 8:4, 14; Gal. 5:16); carry out those good works which God has prepared for us (Eph. 2:11).

Preparation for approval at the coming Judgment Seat of Christ is not automatic in our lives. Rather, it is achieved by self-control and discipline (1 Cor. 9:24-27). There is the need to consciously prepare for the Judgment Seat (2 Cor. 5:9-10). We should practice living in holiness in anticipation of Christ’s return (2 Pet. 1:5-13; 3:11-12, 14). Any concept derived from Philippians 1:6 that promotes passivity in the Christian life is faulty and dangerous. Any understanding we pick up that diminishes the NT call to *our responsibility* to live a godly life is not according to the truth.

Paul had an expectation that all of these believers would be fully matured in their Christian life by the end of their lifetime, thus being ready for “the day of Jesus Christ.” Indeed, we will examine Paul’s own striving for maturity in his Christian life in 3:9-16 so that he would receive approval for positive reward in that future day. That coming day has particular reference to the time of Christ’s judgment of the saints at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Although it is tempting to wish for that meaning of full maturity, *we must always use the context and other good Biblical analysis for interpretation.*

The context shows us this: verse five notes the Philippians’ *partnership in Paul’s gospel work*. Then, verse seven shows that Paul has this confidence because he has these believers in his heart, and they were “partakers with me of grace” in the gospel work. In other words, Paul had witnessed that these believers had a genuine working of grace (supply and activity of the Holy Spirit) in the same manner as he did. And this is something which Paul describes as being shared together with him. The working of grace here is defined as that which was involved *with the gospel*. Thus, the context would point to an interpretation of the “good work” as the Philippians’ partnership with Paul in the cause of the gospel. In the last chapter Paul specifically recognizes this partnership as one especially involving the Philippians’ financial support of Paul (4:15-18).

Interestingly, if one searches the New Testament for the phrase “good work” or “good works,” he will note that all of the other

Yet, having spoken of our responsibility, we must be reminded that we cannot live up to some standard by our own will power and self-effort. This approach is in the principle of being “under law,” whereby the believer uses his efforts to carry out a set of demands. Such efforts will end in failure (Romans 7).

In contrast is the way of living “under grace,” which involves the living union of the believer with Christ. When a believer learns to “abide in Christ,” he experiences Christ as his life and as his power to live in victory by faith (Jn. 15:4-5; 1 Cor. 15:10; Gal. 20-21; 3:2-5; 5:18). The use of the human will is extremely important. However, it is not used to achieve something for God. Rather the believer should exercise his will to continually seek God and receive His empowering grace to obey God through faith. To learn more about living in spiritual victory, please see the author’s book titled, *The Victorious Christian Life*. This book is available for free viewing, free download, or ordering at the following website: www.seekersofchrist.org.

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verses (besides Phil. 1:6) show a “good work” as some good *deed* done by a believer or by Jesus (all involving *human activity*). Jesus lived as a man under God the Father’s headship, with His good works coming from the Father working in Him (Jn. 5:19-20, 36; 10:32; 14:10). In this way Jesus was a pattern for us and our good works should be those originating from God’s Spirit operating within us. Compare John 10:32 and Philippians 1:6. Also, note that in Chapter Two Paul speaks of God who works in us to will and to do, but we must carry out the doing through obedience (Phil. 2:12-13). The point being made here is that the “good work” in verse six would most likely be a good deed actually carried out *in human activity*. Such human activity would fit well with an interpretation of the “good work” in verse six being financial support of Paul and other gospel activities with him. The alternative interpretation—that this “good work” is simply the work of salvation accomplished by God alone in maturing the believer—would not fit as well with the idea of “good works” as seen in other NT passages.

Ephesians 2:10 is a verse that matches this concept exactly. God began the good work of gospel partnership with Paul in the lives of the Philippians. This concept is further seen by the prayer that follows this portion and is connected to it. There Paul prayed that the believers would be “filled with the *fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ*, to the glory and praise of God” (1:11). The righteousness in this verse is not speaking of imputed righteousness (our *standing* of perfect righteousness in Christ),⁴ but is speaking of our *actions* of righteousness, fruit borne in our lives. True spiritual fruit can only come from God Himself. Thus we see the strong principle that runs throughout this epistle: Christ’s life is available to the believer and is at work in us, but we must cooperate with the Spirit of God so that Christ’s life might be lived out.

For further support of this position that the “good work” in verse six means gospel partnership engaged in by the believers, please see Appendix A in the back of this book.

What does verse six mean by “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ?” It means that the spiritual impact of the Philippians’ partnership in the gospel

⁴ “Imputed righteousness” is the righteousness of Christ reckoned to our account by God because of our being in Christ, placed into union with Him.

would continue, with God carrying it onward to a final conclusion in the day when Christ judges His believers. The term “the day of Jesus Christ” seems to have a particular emphasis upon the judgment of believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ (also known by its Greek term, Bema). We can see this from verse ten, which highlights our need to have pure and blameless lives in preparation for “the day of Christ.” Also, the third reference to this “day” is in Philippians 2:16. There Paul expresses his hope “that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.” His hope is based upon the godly living of the Philippian believers being made evident in that day (2:14-16). This should refer to the manifestation of the deeds of the believers at the Bema (2 Cor. 5:10). Good works which we have done will be carried onward by God to figure into the believer’s reward at the Bema. The letters that Paul wrote, as an example, are still impacting lives today tremendously. The work of those letters will be carried on by God to final completion for reward at the day of Christ.

1:7 — According to Greek language experts a clause here may be translated in one of two ways: “I hold you in my heart,” or “you hold me in your heart.” There are reasonable arguments for either translation from the context. In any case, the sympathies of Paul and the Philippians are close and real and *based in the reality of the Spirit*, not just emotions. Indeed Paul wrote that the Philippians were “partakers with me of grace.” This means they identified and empathized with the apostle in his imprisonment and experienced a strong burden in prayer for him (see Heb. 13:3; Phil. 1:19; cf. Col. 4:18). And while in prison Paul longed for them (v. 8).

The believers in Philippi were also partakers of grace with Paul as he defended and confirmed the gospel. Paul had known the Philippians for about ten years at the time he wrote this letter. During that time the Philippians had no doubt kept Paul in their hearts and prayers. This is evidenced by their remembrance of him in the giving of multiple gifts and by their sending of Epaphroditus to him (2:25; 4:15-17). Over those ten years Paul had to defend the gospel message against the attacks of Jewish and Gentile unbelievers, Jewish legalists and false apostles. He also worked to confirm the gospel message to all. Paul confirmed the message both by his persuasion from the OT Scriptures and the proofs of his

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apostolic ministry through signs and wonders (Acts 17:2-3; 18:4, 28; 19:26; Heb. 2:3-4; Rom. 15:16-19; 2 Cor. 12:12). The Philippians were truly “with Paul” in his great enterprise of the gospel work by experiencing God’s grace (His inward working). We should note that the Philippians themselves worked in gospel efforts apart from Paul’s presence and efforts, but in the same experience of God’s grace (1:27-28; 2:17).

1:8 — Paul’s longing for the Philippians is rooted in his experience of Christ, not fleshly emotions. He longs for them “with the affection of Christ Jesus.”

Prayer (1:9-11)

⁹And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Bible commentators note that the opening prayers of Paul’s letters often act as a summary of the contents of the letter. At least we can say there are key themes in this prayer which are enhanced throughout the letter. Love is mentioned explicitly again in the letter (1:16; 2:1-2). Love is also seen implicitly, especially in connection with the idea of discernment and choosing the excellent things (3:7-8 is one example). The last part of the prayer deals with the theme of being approved in the day of Christ (the day of His judgment). This reward theme is seen throughout the epistle (2:12-16; 3:10-14; 3:18-19; 4:5; 4:17).

To work on the meaning of this prayer, let us first try to learn the meaning of some words and phrases within the prayer. Then we can put it all together. For learning the meaning of Greek words used in the NT text, see Appendix B.

“love” – The Greek word used here is *agape* (*Strong’s* #26). As respects love toward people, the word is used in the NT of love governed by the will in valuing, loving, and caring for someone. Such love is not based upon feelings or emotions, or even the attractiveness of the person loved.

This love can be directed towards people or things. Love can be misdirected by men, including believers (Lk. 11:43; Jn. 12:43; 2 Tim. 4:10; 2 Pet. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:15).

“knowledge” – Actually, a better translation here would be “full knowledge” (used in Darby, LITV, YLT). The NASB uses “real knowledge.” These other translations take into account that the Greek word used here differs slightly from the one normally translated as “knowledge.” The normal Greek word for knowledge is *gnosis* (#1108), but the word here is *epignosis* (#1922). The word *epignosis* denotes a more special or fuller knowledge of the object known than the simple term *gnosis*. It suggests a basis in experience. When God is the object known, it suggests some participation in Him. In the NT this word often speaks of the true knowledge of moral and divine things.

“discernment” – *aisthesis* (#144). This Greek word means keen spiritual perception or insight. This word also suggests experience being a base for discernment.

“approve” – *dokimazo* (#1381). This word means to test something to verify its value. This word was used in classical Greek literature to depict the testing of metals to see if they were approved upon testing. Gold was so tested to determine its purity. The phrase “approve what is excellent” could also be rendered “distinguish between the things which differ.” The idea is to so test situations and choices with spiritual knowledge and discernment so as to discover that which is excellent, as distinguished from that which is not.

“pure” – *eilikrinēs* (#1506). The word means pure, as though brought out into the sunlight for examination to detect any impurities.

“blameless” – *aproskopos* (#677). It could also be rendered “without offense.” It refers to character which is exemplary and does not cause others to stumble (be led into sin). This does not mean sinless perfection, but exemplary character, including the forsaking and confession of known sin.

“the day of Christ” – This future time seems to hold emphasis upon Christ’s evaluation and judgment of His believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ in that day (1:6, 10; 2:16; cf. Matt. 16:27; 2 Cor. 5:10).

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Paul prays that the love of the Philippians will abound yet more and more. This means that he has already witnessed their love and is praying to see it displayed even more in their lives. How had Paul seen the love of the Philippians? Obviously, in the context, he has seen their love displayed towards him and towards the gospel work of God. Also included would be their love toward all men, since the gospel represents God's love toward man and those who take out the gospel do so in love toward men.

Some Bible commentators feel that the love in verse eight is talking only about the believers' love for one another. The love among believers is an important theme picked up later in the letter, sometimes expressed under the idea of unity (1:27; 2:2-4; 4:2). But, the "love" in verse nine is not modified (as in "love for one another", as it is, for example, in 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9-10).

Surely these saints loved God's apostle, God's good news, and the work of genuine ministry. They had also demonstrated to Paul that they loved the saints most sacrificially in their giving to the poor. The passage is 2 Corinthians 8:1-4 speaks of such giving from the churches in Macedonia, which included Philippi. Certainly the saints here had a love for the cause of the gospel, to see it spread. Hebrews 6:10 speaks of doing things in ministry as showing love towards His name. The "labor of love" in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 seems to speak of ministry performed out of love for Christ. Paul opens his prayer, then, that the love of these saints will increase still more, in all kinds of ways. Some Bible commentators do agree that the "love" Paul prays for here is not narrowly defined, as in "love one another." Rather, it covers love in the many avenues that it may be expressed.

The meaning of the prayer: On Paul's heart is the earnest spiritual desire that the Philippians will enter more and more into the experience of Jesus Christ in their lives. The "love" he prays for is nothing less than the expression in attitude and actions of the indwelling Jesus in their lives. After all, Paul states: "for to me to live is Christ" (1:21). Also, his great goal is to know Christ intimately in His resurrection power and in the self-denying obedience that marked His path of suffering (3:10-14).

This love is to be exercised "with [full] knowledge and all discernment." In other words, it is love that is governed and directed by a real knowledge of God and sound spiritual principles.

Such knowledge and careful spiritual discernment are applied in order to perceive what is excellent. Naturally, our knowledge of God is something that should grow as we mature as believers (Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:10; 2 Pet. 1:8; 3:18). Linked to the knowledge of God is knowledge of His word, which reflects Him, His ways and His will.

The letter to Colossae was written during this same period when Paul was in prison. A roughly parallel passage in the opening prayer of that letter reads: “And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord” (Col 1:9-10a).

We use this knowledge and discernment as a spiritual tool to test things—people, situations, choices before us, etc.—in order to approve and select the thing that is excellent. *The thing that is excellent is that thing or way that is of Christ. It is what or whom He is loving and how He is doing it. Paul wants our love to abound, but within the will and way of Christ. Do our attitudes and actions follow the living Christ within us?*

If we choose to follow the living Christ in the giving of ourselves in love, then we will indeed be pure and blameless in our lives. In this way we will be prepared for His approval in the day of Christ (v. 10). Notice how 2:12-16 picks up this exact theme. In that passage we see that when the Spirit of God is followed, we become blameless and innocent in our living, ready for the day of Christ.

In verses 9-10 we see how to be prepared for His approval at the Judgment Seat. Notice that this preparation is really equivalent to the description in verse 11, which is a summary statement regarding the preparation under discussion: “having been filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” If we practice verses 9-10, then we will have the practical fruit of righteousness in our lives. This is not “imputed righteousness.”⁵ It is the righteous living and deeds of our lives, and

⁵ “Imputed righteousness” is the righteousness of Christ reckoned to our account by God. This righteousness has nothing to do with our actual living, but is reckoned to our account upon our initial faith in Christ (Rom. 3:22; 4:3-5; 2 Cor. 5:21). “Practical righteousness” is different than “imputed righteousness.”

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this righteous fruit “comes through Jesus Christ.” Think of the fruit borne by the branch abiding in the Vine (John 15). An example of this fruit is the partnership that the Philippian saints had in Paul’s gospel ministry by financially supporting him (4:15-18). In 4:17 Paul says that he is not seeking a material gift as such for himself. Rather, he is seeking the spiritual fruit which increases to the credit of the believers in Philippi. Paul’s idea of “fruit” which increases to the “credit” or the “account” of the Philippians points to reward at the coming Judgment Seat of Christ. This reward is based upon their participation in the gospel work of Paul.

The letter to the Philippians certainly contains references to the ways that Christ’s love should be manifested toward fellow believers (2:2-4; 4:2, 5). Yet, I also believe that love expressed toward those who are servants of God is also included in Paul’s mention of love in his prayer. We should take note again that such love toward ministers and ministries should be exercised with full knowledge and discernment. In 1:16 Paul said that some preached out of love (*agape*) toward him, knowing that he was appointed for the defense of the gospel. Love, then, can surely be expressed toward ministers and ministries. In 1:15-17 Paul uses spiritual discernment to examine the preaching of others. In 3:1-3 he expresses concern that the Philippians be on the alert for evil workers and false religious teaching.

It is my observation that today many believers have little or no discernment concerning preachers, teaching and ministries. Those without spiritual knowledge and discernment often give themselves to follow and support ministers and ministries which are not truly led by the Holy Spirit. Undiscerning believers “love” these ministers just as Paul was loved by the Philippians. But, the result of loving such ministers is not true spiritual life or fruit for these undiscerning ones. Too many times the result of following unspiritual ministries is either a life of legalism or religious activities not led by the Holy Spirit. Non Spirit-led ministries can also cause people to seek after mere “mental knowledge” of the Bible that does not touch the living. Such ministries sometimes

Practical righteousness comes from our actual living in union with Christ and is expressed by our right attitudes and righteous deeds. It comes from living in dependent faith in Christ in our daily lives.

direct their followers to sensationalism and charismatic excesses not of God. Today we also see many unspiritual ministries focus on the pursuit of earthly things, such as preached by the promoters of a “prosperity gospel” (note this pursuit in 3:18-19).

Concerning spiritual discernment, in 3:3-8 Paul draws a contrast between the religious “flesh” and its efforts and the pursuit of Christ for life and ministry. Here we see a very significant principle. The flesh (the natural power of man) is ever present to operate in “doing things for God.” It works from the base of religious ideas and self-effort, without the reality of the Spirit’s enlightenment, leading and empowerment. In this realm, doing “good works” becomes the way of religious life.

Today there are multiplied Christian ministries and efforts of churches doing all kinds of works, but how many are producing “the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ” (1:11)? To the mind of many anything that seems “good” from a human perspective equals a work of God. However, Paul’s prayer is that love would abound, but only from full knowledge and keen discernment, *to test and approve what things are truly of Christ Himself*. Without such keen spiritual discernment, believers can choose what seems “good” but not what is excellent. What appears good to man can easily miss the very target of what is truly excellent and approved by God, the things and doings of Christ Himself.

In summary, the prayer in 1:9-11 is for the saints to grow in their knowledge of Christ. This knowledge of Him, going hand-in-hand with true spiritual perception, equips them to test, discover, and choose what is excellent. What is excellent is that which is truly of Him, and by following what is excellent they will live Christ out practically (love abounding). As a result, the saints will be prepared for approval by Him in the day of Christ at His Judgment Seat. They will have the experience of being filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes from Jesus Christ. This prayer sets the major themes of the entire epistle.

Life Application

The first section of Chapter One provides us much to consider. Our participation in the true work of the good news of Jesus Christ

is vital. At the time of the writing of this letter, only the Philippian church, out of all the Macedonian assemblies, had supported the apostle in his God-ordained gospel work. We should understand the gospel work in a broad way, to include the teaching of all the truth of God. This support was out of a love for the spread of the gospel, a love of God, a love for Paul, and a love for mankind. Paul's prayer certainly provokes us to deeply consider and pray over what we embrace, love and practice in living out our Christian lives and service. *Good application often begins with dependent prayer to God for His work and enablement in our lives.*

Here is a suggested prayer: "Father, I come to You in dependence and humility, confessing my need to grow in Christ in order to properly discern the will and way of God. I do desire to participate in the work of genuine Spirit-led ministry. I ask You to open my eyes to see more clearly what is really of Christ in the work of service. I want to see and follow the things that are truly excellent. Let me learn of Christ, His will and His ways in Your word. I want to be prepared for the day of Christ and be approved at the coming Judgment Seat of Christ. I pray that You would grant me discernment. I pray for the Spirit's enablement in my life to be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ alone. I ask for these things from You in the name of Jesus."

Advancement of the gospel (1:12-18)

¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel ¹³so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. ¹⁵Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

1:12-14 — This imprisonment was Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, probably 60-62 A. D. Scripture tells us that he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, being able to talk to others who came to visit him (Acts 28:30). Paul was allowed to stay by himself instead of being placed with other prisoners (Acts 28:16). Nevertheless, he was chained to a Roman guard at all times, per Roman regulations (Acts 28:16, 20).

This guard was part of the imperial guard encampment near the Emperor's palace on the Palatine hill, the very center of the Roman Empire in those days. Paul was most likely in a building somewhere on this hill and near the guard barracks. He had daily discussions with other believers in the presence of different guards, who took turns guarding him. Such activity probably became the primary means by which the gospel advanced throughout the guard and Caesar's household nearby (Phil. 4:22).

The word translated "imprisonment" here is literally "bonds," meaning a chain in Paul's case. The guards and others of the area learned that Paul was in "house arrest" and chained to a guard simply because of his stand for Christ and the message of Christ. Paul writes that his "imprisonment is for Christ," meaning that, to him, these chains were simply his present lot due to his pursuit of Christ. Paul's chains were part of his sharing of Christ's sufferings (3:10). Paul's second imprisonment was not in the exact same place as his first imprisonment, as the great fire in A. D. 64 did much damage to the buildings there. His second imprisonment was probably more severe as he wrote that for the gospel "I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal" (2 Tim. 2:9).

Paul's gospel also spread to the believers in Rome through his contact with his visitors. The text tells us that most of the brethren were confident in the Lord because of Paul's imprisonment, and thus were bold to speak the word of God without fear. Naturally speaking, if we see someone preach and then be put into prison for this activity, this would tend to make us less bold to preach. What emboldened them was Paul's example in preaching and the life of Paul in his imprisonment. That Paul would be willing to preach at the cost of imprisonment no doubt provided inspiration for them to follow in this path of costly discipleship.

Yet perhaps additionally the saints outside of prison saw how Paul was living Christ and proclaiming the gospel while in prison.

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In other words, the imprisonment was not a real hindrance for Paul and his life of testimony. It only increased his witness, so that he could say “it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ” (see also 4:22). In other words the imprisonment did not extinguish the light of Paul’s testimony; it only increased that light (1:20-21).

It is most impressive that Paul’s writing tells us that what had happened to him through his imprisonment “really served to advance the gospel.” The Greek adverb for “really” is *mallon* (*Strong’s* #3123). Here it reflects an ironic comparison. Circumstances that might be expected to suppress the gospel actually worked to advance the gospel! This shows the amazing work that God can accomplish even when things look bleak and unpromising.

1:15 — Some now preached Christ out of envy and rivalry. This means that they wanted to use their preaching as a way of self-promotion. They were envious of Paul’s stature, power and success. Such competition in “God’s work” is a problem we see in the NT (2 Cor. 11:12; Gal. 4:17). It causes rivalry, leading to factions. Others, however, preached “from good will.” They preached Christ for His glory and His kingdom plans, and for the benefit of people’s salvation. They preached Christ sincerely (v. 17).

1:16 — Those who preached out of love for Paul and the truth were those who recognized Paul’s appointment – being placed, or “put here,” for the defense of the gospel. They were not trying to outdo Paul and be recognized by others. This reminds us of some of the characteristics of God’s love: “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant” (1 Cor. 13:4). Those who preached out of love wanted to support Paul by continuing his gospel work with proper motives. They probably knew that that this would encourage the apostle while he was in prison.

1:17 — Those who preached from a wrong motive probably thought that their activities would cause Paul pain. This would be because Paul was replaced by other preachers in the public square. They probably felt that Paul was like them, seeking recognition by being in the public spotlight. They figured that he would feel pain

because he was locked up in prison without freedom to preach in public.

1:18 — “What then?” Paul is asking, “What is my reaction now that others are trying to cause me pain and that others are being the public preachers?” Instead of feeling crushed by these things Paul breaks out into praise. He does not focus at all on revenge or condemnation of others. Nor does he focus on his own hurts, but he focuses on the fact that Christ is proclaimed. This causes him to rejoice. This is a picture of how Paul has lost his self-life. This is a picture of how Paul is living Christ. This does not mean that to preach with wrong motives is acceptable with God. Of course it is not, and all of our motives will come out at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 4:4-5; 2 Cor. 4:2).

Paul’s desire to live Christ (1:19-26)

¹⁹for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.²¹For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.²³I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.²⁴But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,²⁶so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

Verses 18-20 comprise one long complex sentence. The greatest controversy among commentators is over the meaning of the word “deliverance” (also translated as “salvation” by some Bible versions) in verse 19. The Greek word here is *soteria* (*Strong’s* #4991). The word can be used in a variety of ways and simply denotes some type of deliverance. It must always be interpreted according to the context of its usage. Some commentators say that Paul means a “deliverance” from prison. This is implausible

because this deliverance is accomplished not only by prayer, but also through the help of the Spirit (v. 19). We will see later that this Greek word for help would mean a personal provision to Paul from the Spirit. This would not be needed for a release from prison.

Additionally, the whole thought of the “deliverance” here is *explained in the sentence* by the expectation that Christ would be honored, or “magnified” (a more literal translation), in Paul. This honoring or magnification of Christ is anticipated, whether by life *or* by *death* (v. 20). Death would mean non-release and the execution of Paul. Obviously, then, this deliverance cannot refer to a physical release from prison.

Other commentators claim that the deliverance here is pointing firstly to a future “vindication” of Paul at his final appearance before Christ the Judge at His coming. Or, they say this vindication perhaps refers to his exaltation of Christ in his appearance before the tribunal in Rome as a prisoner. An account of Job’s accusers and hope of vindication in Job 13 is supposedly on the mind of Paul, according to these interpreters. Note Job 13:16 which speaks of Job’s expectation of salvation, and Job 13:18 which speaks of vindication.

It is not reasonable to think Paul has this account of Job in mind at all, which includes Job’s thoughts that God was “against him” in his circumstances (Job 13:20-28). That is certainly not a thought of Paul who wrote Romans 8:31-39 at an earlier time. Also, Paul’s expectation that he would not be put to shame is not oriented to some future vindication at the Judgment Seat. Rather, it is oriented to “now,” and indeed to “as always,” his past experience. It has to do emphatically with *Christ being seen in him now*, as verse 21 explains: “**for** (*gar*) to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

The idea of Christ being manifested in our lives as an explanation of “deliverance” here should be understandable in NT theology. In our practical sanctification (our daily living) we can be delivered from the dominion of self and sin and brought into the reality of living His life. And such deliverance is not only before God, but also before men. This same word for deliverance here is used twice more in this letter, in 1:28 and in 2:12. When we arrive at these verses in this commentary, we will show that they also refer to a current experience of our deliverance, or salvation. This is a

deliverance from sin, self and the influence of the present age by experiencing our union with Christ in His death and resurrection.

Therefore, the explanation of 1:19-20 (and 21) is put in summary fashion as follows: Paul knows how “this” (his present suffering circumstances of imprisonment and even preaching intended to cause him pain) will turn out. It is his expectation and hope that now, as always, Christ will be honored in his body (meaning in his life). And he expects that this will happen, whether through life or death (regardless of the outcome of his trial in Rome). By the help of the Spirit, and the prayers of the saints, the apostle will not live for himself in his own natural and fallen life, and thus be put to shame before God and others. Rather, Paul’s confident expectation is that Christ will be honored (enlarged, magnified) in his life. Thus, for Paul to live is Christ, meaning that his living expresses Christ. But if he dies, that is gain. So, the present negative circumstances provide a personal opportunity for Paul—“my deliverance” (v. 19). They also served to advance the gospel (v. 12).

Paul sees the “big picture” in what God has allowed in his present circumstances and he rejoices at how Christ can be preached and exalted through them!

As commonly stated by good Bible teachers, salvation comes in three phases for the believer: 1) *We have been saved from the penalty of sin*, delivered from God’s condemnation upon sin. We may call this a “justification” salvation. (Acts 16:30-31; Rom. 4:5; 5:1; Titus 3:5-7); 2) *We are being saved from the power of sin*, the ongoing process of a “sanctification” salvation in our living. In this sanctification we are being delivered from the dominion of sin in our experience. (Rom. 6:19, 22; 1 Thess. 4:3-4); 3) *We shall be saved from the presence of sin*. This future deliverance is the “glorification” stage of our salvation. Our bodies shall be glorified when Jesus returns (Phil. 3:20-21).

Critical to Paul’s deliverance in his circumstances are two things: 1) the prayers of the saints; 2) the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Here we see great instruction for us in the Christian life. Firstly, it is critical that we learn to pray for one another. We are in an intense spiritual battle against the evil spiritual forces and against indwelling sin. Ephesians 6:18 tells us that we should be alert in prayer, praying in the Spirit with all perseverance and supplication

for all the saints. This intercession works in the spiritual realm to aid struggling saints (and we all have struggles, even Paul).

Secondly, we see the importance of the Spirit of Jesus Christ in this ongoing salvation struggle. This Spirit is Jesus realized by us in the Holy Spirit. It is called the Spirit of Jesus Christ because He entered into the realm of the Spirit after His resurrection and functionally became available to us through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17; 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:15-17; 1 Pet. 3:18). Romans 8:9-10 shows a close identification between the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, and Christ. God wants to supply us with this Spirit, strengthening and enabling us to live victoriously. By this Spirit we can honor or magnify Christ in our living and service. Thus we are not put to shame by being defeated and giving in to the self-life and sin.

The noun used for “help” in verse 19 is a rarely used word in Greek. This noun is derived from the verb *epichoregeo* (*Strong’s* #2023) which originally meant to furnish supplies that were needed for a chorus of singers. The same verb is used in Galatians 3:5 in a passage which says that God supplies us with the Spirit through faith in order to live the Christian life. Paul was human and suffered in a prison in Rome, awaiting trial for his life. Yet, these circumstances did not bring him into self-pity, disillusionment and ongoing depression. In fact, he was supplied by the Spirit of Jesus Christ so that he was strengthened and inspired to minister to the saints by writing four books of the New Testament while in that prison: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon.

In verses 22-26 Paul is unveiling to us his experience of sorting through two possibilities for him, either of remaining on in the flesh or of going to be with the Lord. As respects Paul’s imprisonment in Rome, humanly speaking the outcome of his trial is unknown. It could result in life for him by being released. But, if he is charged with treason, perhaps by being accused of proclaiming allegiance to another lord besides Caesar, then he may be put to death.

In actuality, Paul does not have a “choice” to make on his own for the outcome of his imprisonment: execution or future ministry. The sovereign Lord is the only One with this choice. But, Paul presents the dilemma of the two possible outcomes in line with his aspirations. Here he sorts through the outcomes in terms of “Christ.” The outcome described as “to die is gain” means that if Paul dies he goes into the immediate presence of the Lord to experience His

fullness. This surely is in line with the longing of Paul's life (3:10-14). Although it is gain for Paul personally it also fits Christ's plan for him and every believer at some point. So, it could be the will of the Lord for Paul at this time. On the other hand, for Paul to continue on in the flesh would mean fruitful labor for him. This outcome too would be in line with God's desires.

Thus, Paul in these verses is sorting through the possibilities of God's path for him. When Paul says "which I shall choose I cannot tell," he is really seeking the right path for him. Both paths seem of value to him. In reality, Paul plans to accept God's will and is *seeking after that*. Finally, in his sorting through this he states: "But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I *know* that *I will remain* and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith." This means, at verse 25, Paul has been convinced of what the choice of God is in the matter — to remain on and help others.

In this whole matter of sorting through and evaluating these two choices we see a playing out of the pattern of Paul's prayer in verses 9-10. Through Paul's knowledge of God and his spiritual perception he has been enlightened as to what path his life and actions of love will take. He has tested the two things that differ—life and death—and he perceives that the most excellent thing *in God's mind* at this point in time is staying alive and helping the Philippians. Paul is thus seeking God's will, and God shows it to him. He is assured that this path *is Christ* for him. He is accepting inwardly what he intuitively knows is God's choice for him.

Life Application

Certainly one of the most challenging things we humans face is difficult and pressing circumstances. Paul, the great apostle, found himself locked up in a prison and chained to a Roman guard. Outwardly, his circumstances were miserable in that awful place. Not only that, but Paul's calling to preach Christ would seem to be frustrated by these conditions. However, we learn in 1:19-26 that Paul does not allow these things to depress him or block him in his service. Rather, he sees in every circumstance an opportunity to honor and magnify Christ in his life.

Paul has a view of things that we need—a heavenly view. He knows his ultimate aim is to honor Christ, and he seeks to find the Spirit's way of doing that right where he is. May we take this lesson to heart. So many times our goal is to change our circumstances because they are difficult. Instead our thought and prayer should always be: "Lord, this situation is really hard. Yet, I am here and You have a plan for me. Your plan is for me to learn of Christ right here and to exalt Him, to magnify Him in my life."

We see that Paul is ever seeking to follow God's will and plan in the path of his life. He is seeking to know what God's will is for him so that he can agree with that will. Only when we agree with God's will shall peace be known unto us. And, when we agree, peace and deep joy comes even when the circumstances do not change.

Finally, we should note that Paul is delivered from a life of self, to a life that lives Christ. This happened with the aid of others' prayers and the provision of the strengthening Spirit of God. We need one another's prayers and we should ask for them in a good way, with proper discretion. We should also abandon all trust in our own ability to make it through tough circumstances in a way that honors God. We must place all of our trust in the provision of the Holy Spirit, God Himself as a supply to us.

Paul's appeal for unity in the cause of the gospel (1:27-30)

²⁷Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.²⁹For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Verse 27 introduces a dominant theme in the letter—needed unity of the believers. We see this theme again in 2:1-4 and 4:2. It

seems obvious that there were some tendencies toward disunity in the assembly, of which Paul was aware.

The clause translated as “let your manner of life” comes from a Greek verb meaning “behave as a citizen” (*Strong’s* #4176). Thus, Paul is exhorting the Philippians to “live as citizens” of the heavenly kingdom (cf. 3:20). According to one respected commentary, verses 27-30 comprise one long sentence. And, all that follows the opening imperative of this sentence (meaning “live as citizens”) consists of modifying clauses and ideas to that imperative to “live as citizens.”⁶

Paul’s concern is not a minor one. To strive together in oneness was considered as conduct worthy (fitting) of the gospel of Christ (v. 27). To be in disunity is an anti-testimony to the gospel preached! The great work of Christ on the cross not only produced forgiveness of sins, but also produced a oneness among redeemed men (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:12-15; 4:4-6). This unity is to be displayed as a testimony to the Savior, causing belief in Him (Jn. 13:34-35; 17:21).

The importance of oneness among the believers, including in the gospel work, should also been seen in light of the opening prayer. Unity in the cause of the gospel should be viewed as something excellent to be approved and chosen. The human tendency may be to disregard unity in our gospel labor in order to do the work “our way,” or the way we think best. That may have been a problem between Euodia and Syntyche (4:2-3). Their own preferences, perhaps bolstered by pride, could have been causing disunity in the gospel labor. Their actions may also have affected others. Paul is pointing all of these believers to the true excellence and importance of unity in our labor for the gospel.

The striving together in unity is described as:

“standing firm in one spirit” – This means to stand, to not be moved from your position in one spirit. Here the “spirit” most likely refers to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives us oneness and firmness in the face of opposition (Acts 4:29-31).

“with one mind” – The Greek word translated here as “mind” is more commonly understood as “soul” (*psuche*, *Strong’s* #5590).

⁶ Gordon Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge, UK: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), pp. 159-162.

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The soul of man is comprised of the mind, emotion and will. To strive “side by side” requires that we all be of the same soul. This can happen only as we have our priority to know Him and experience Him, letting the self-life die to its way (Phil. 3:8-10). Some take this term “one soul” as meaning striving together “as one man.” This is how it should look to the outsiders and how it should seem to those who strive together.

The phrase “the faith of the gospel” means the basic beliefs of the faith that comprise the gospel message about Jesus Christ and His work.

1:28 — Not being frightened in the face of opposition is certainly a sign that these saints, as citizens of the heavenly kingdom, are living another life (compare Acts 5:40-41; Heb. 10:34). Their “salvation” is showing! Compare this thought with 2:15 where those who obey God shine as lights in the world. They exhibit a life different from that of the people who are of the world. This living is a proof of their salvation, revealing that they are being delivered in experience from the world and the old life in Adam. This salvation is their sanctification in actual experience.

Such living in this verse is also a proof that God has set them aside for Himself, and will be their God and Deliverer when this present age ends. Conversely, this living of the saints sends a signal to the worldly opponents that they are under judgment. “And *that* from God.” Probably the best translation of the pronoun here is “this,” and it does not refer to some particular prior item as none match in terms of gender. Rather, it means the whole spiritual effect in verses 27-28 is something of God’s doing.

1:29 — This verse begins with a conjunction that is best translated by “because” (as used in the Darby translation and others.) This means that the opposition, perhaps even persecution, that we may face as we stand for the good news of Jesus Christ has a real basis in God’s plan for us. God has graciously given to us the opportunity, or privilege, to suffer for Christ’s sake as well as to believe in Him. Paul tells us in Chapter Three that he sought to share Christ’s sufferings. The Lord’s sufferings included, but are not limited to, the rejection and mistreatment of men. Such suffering produces something for Christ’s sake, for His benefit. As we accept

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suffering simply for His name He is glorified through us, that is His life and character are exhibited for others to see.

Note how Stephen glorified Christ in his shining testimony and prayer for forgiveness of his persecutors (Acts 7:55-60). Also 1 Pet. 4:14 declares: "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." When Christ was persecuted He demonstrated much grace, not reviling those who reviled Him and uttering no threats to those who mistreated Him (1 Pet. 2:21-23). Indeed, He prayed for His persecutors' forgiveness (Lk. 23:34). Hebrews tell us that "although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered." (Heb. 5:8)

1:30 — The Philippians had seen this struggle, this hateful opposition to Paul, when he was first in Philippi (Acts 16:19-23; 1 Thess. 2:2). They now hear of it again in Paul's present circumstances in prison. The Philippians themselves were now engaged in the same conflict with those who opposed their gospel message.

Chapter Two

Live Like Christ

Paul's continued appeal for unity (2:1-4)

¹So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ²complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Verse one begins with “so,” signaling that this passage is a continuation. Paul is continuing his appeal for unity here, which began in 1:27. There he appealed to the Philippians to live as citizens of a heavenly kingdom by demonstrating unity as they strive together for the gospel. Now, as a further word on this unity, in verses 1-4 Paul reveals our resources in Christ for unity. He also gives instructions on how to maintain unity. Interestingly, in these verses the emphasis is simply on unity among the believers without a reference to a specific purpose for such unity, like the gospel work. Unity in itself is a great purpose of God in His plan for redeemed man (Eph. 2:12-15; 4:13-16). The gospel outreach ends with this age. Yet God’s goal to bring redeemed man into a oneness in union with Christ is a significant part of His eternal purpose in summing up all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10; Rev. 21:1-2).

Verse one presents a series of qualities connected to Paul’s deep desire for unity: “*if there is any encouragement in Christ . . . any comfort . . . any participation . . . any affection and sympathy, complete my joy.*” Paul is giving an impassioned plea here to the Philippians. He is pleading with his readers that if there is any

encouragement in Christ, etc.—and there is—then they should take hold of these qualities for the sake of unity and thus complete his joy. All believers need encouragement, which is in Christ, and this encouragement given to others promotes unity. Genuine love, from Christ, affords much consolation or comfort. Our common participation in the same Spirit is a divine resource for unity (Eph. 4:3-4). The final phrase of this verse, “affection and sympathy,” again points to virtues found in Christ as resources for unity. The word for “affection” here is the same word Paul uses in 1:8: “I yearn for you all with the affection of *Christ Jesus*.”

Paul appeals to the Philippians in verse two to “complete my joy.” This shows how important the unity of the believers is to the aged apostle. His heart is longing for them to be unified. Paul’s longing is only a reflection of the longing of God Himself. This personal appeal should touch the heart of the Philippian believers, who greatly respected and supported Paul as a man of God.

Paul’s instructions for unity are given in deeply significant terms:

“being of the same mind” — This means to have the same attitude and thoughts about things as Christ does. It means to see things as He does and then act as He acts. We can see that this idea is in accord with the opening prayer (1:9-10). There Paul prays for the believers to live in love by testing and discovering what is according to Christ. This does not mean that all believers should have the same view on all minor doctrines or non-moral issues of conscience in living out their faith. This is clear from Romans 14:1-8. The issue here is how to live together in unity. This is to be achieved by all of us being *attuned to Christ’s attitude and way of living with one another*. And this attitude allows for different understandings of doctrine or Christian practices related to non-moral matters. This matter of being of the same mind is then modified by two following phrases: “having the same love” and “being in full accord and of one mind.”

“having the same love” — This means having the same love of Christ for each other. Partiality leads to sects, but maintaining the same love towards one another leads to unity. (Note Jas. 2:1-9). Christ’s mind is that of loving each one fully.

“being in full accord and of one mind” — Here I believe the ESV translation is inadequate. Two literal translations read: “one in

soul, minding the one thing” (LITV); “of one soul, minding the one thing” (YLT). “Minding” means to pay attention to something. Here this means that all of us should pay attention to the “one thing.” What is the “one thing?” Paul defines that for us in 3:8-15, where he declares the surpassing value of knowing Christ, and pursues Christ to know Him in experience. Paul does this in order to gain the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. As we seek to know Christ in experience as our goal, this will bring us into His mind of living in unity.

Verse three continues the thought of unity. By “minding the one thing” the thoughts and actions of “selfish ambition” and “conceit” are naturally excluded. “Selfish ambition” is that inner drive that seeks some benefit for the self, like recognition, vindication, financial payoff, etc. Greek scholar Henry Alford renders this word as “self-seeking.” It has self-interest at the forefront (contrast the remainder of verse three and also four). “Conceit,” arrogance and pride are at the heart of division, not unity. “Argument only comes by pride” (Prov. 13:10a, LITV). The saintly Robert Chapman, a man of much experience in Christ, stated, “Humility is the secret of fellowship, and pride the secret of division.”⁷

The contrast to this “selfish ambition” and “empty conceit” is “humility” that counts others as more significant. It means that we have a heart that can be attuned to the interests of others and consider their needs as surpassing our own. *Christ, in His humility, laid aside what would benefit Him, and became a servant, going all the way to the cross for the sake of our needs* (2:7-8).

Humility in us firstly stems from our position as a creature wholly dependent upon God the Creator. In this posture we realize that we have nothing in ourselves of which to boast. Realizing our own need of dependence we will not lift ourselves above others. A classic devotional book on the Biblical view of humility is “*Humility, the Beauty of Holiness*,” by Andrew Murray. This is

⁷ Robert Chapman (1803-1902) was a well-known Christian in England who was called “the apostle of love.” His life of devotion greatly influenced other servants of God of his generation, including Hudson Taylor, George Müller, John Nelson Darby and Charles Spurgeon.

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perhaps my favorite devotional book and has been treasured by many thousands of believers.

Verse four adds a naturally following step to viewing others as more significant. Here we begin to take notice of others' interests, concerns and needs. We can consider these interests and sympathize with the needs of others. This will lead us to a readiness of heart to reach out to them and to serve them at the impulse of the great Servant, Christ, who lives within us. All of this is done not by our efforts, but *by our seeking after Christ to know Him* ("minding the one thing," v. 2). This seeking will lead to love that abounds more and more, as we see and enter into what He is doing and how He is loving (1:9-10).

Life Application

One of the greatest marks of true Christian community is living together in unity. All of us know the challenge of this. Often it seems difficult to live in harmony with others because of differing temperaments, different backgrounds and upbringing, differing goals, etc. Yet, these verses uncover the real root of the problem – the life of the self. It is self, with its pride and its own self-seeking that is the real problem. These verses also give us the solution to the challenge of unity. The solution lies in the resources of Christ Himself—His encouragement, His love, His affection and sympathy, etc. We can never look to ourselves to work up these virtues or attempt to copy them. Christ Himself is what we need in our experience.

Further, the real key for living in harmony with other believers is for each of us to be "minding the one thing." That one thing is to pursue knowing Christ in our daily experience. *It involves making knowing Him the focus of our lives every hour in every situation.* When we seek after this, then we can lay hold of Him as the source of all that we need. All of this involves humility, a dependence upon God whereby we can do nothing of ourselves. Instead, by faith, draw upon the resources in Christ. When we do that then we can regard others as more significant than ourselves and be concerned about their interests and needs, not just our own.

Christ, our example (2:5-11)

⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This section, particularly verses 6-11, is known widely in Christian literature as “the Christ poem.” Because of its highly poetic nature, most writers have considered these words to be an early hymn of the church. In a few words, it beautifully portrays Christ’s divine nature, his incarnation and death on the cross, and His exaltation to the highest position of Lord. The two major movements within the poem are Christ’s humiliation downward (vs. 6-8) and His exaltation heavenward (vs. 9-11).

2:5 — This section begins with a command, telling us that we should be thinking in a certain way. It is a way of thinking that is Christ’s way of thinking. Such a mindset or attitude may have been described to some degree in verses 2-4. But now it is seen most vividly in the actions of Christ’s journey of humility in verses 6-8. It is the mindset of Christ that Paul wants us to experience. The charge to possess this mindset is obviously a continuation of the call to humility (for unity) in the prior verses 2-4.

2:6 — “who, though he was in the form of God.” This clause points to Christ’s eternal pre-existence. He did not become God at a point in time. He existed as God in eternity “past” (see John 8:58 and Ex. 3:14). What does the “form” of God mean? Paul chose this word “form” (*morphe*, Strong’s #3444) carefully. The word does

not refer merely to some outward fashion or features which may be temporary. Rather, it refers to the outward expression of a being's inward nature, his essential characteristics or qualities. In essence, Christ was God. When Christ became a man He took on the "form" of a servant. "A servant" was the visible expression of Christ's humanity. Yet that expression was fully in agreement with His inner essence. The heart of God as One who serves others was revealed through the incarnation.

Although Christ existed in the form of God (the essential divine quality), He "did not count *equality* with God *a thing to be grasped*." This probably means that Christ did not regard His equality with God as something to be held onto, but rather something that He would willingly relinquish. He did not relinquish His essential deity when He became a man (Col. 2:9). However, He relinquished His equality with God in heaven by becoming subordinate to God the Father while on the earth as a man.

2:7 — "but emptied himself." Christ poured Himself out ("emptied himself") *by taking on* the form of a servant. He had the highest form — that of God. But He then "emptied himself" by taking on the form of the lowliest of humans, a servant. His self-emptying was not a matter of subtraction, but of addition. Christ, the Son of God, did not relinquish His divinity when He became a man. Rather, He *took on a new mode* of being as *a servant*, one who is not equal with God. He became a servant of God to carry out His will (Heb.10:7), and He became a servant of all mankind (Mk. 10:45). This is a great step in Christ's journey of humiliation.

In His new role He was born in the "likeness of men." "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14). "In the likeness of men" means that He is like men, a human. Yet, there is some difference. He is also divine and sinless. The glory He had before the incarnation was veiled in human flesh (Jn. 17:5). As a human being Christ relinquished His independent exercise of His divine attributes (note Matt. 24:36). As a servant, Jesus provides for us the great example of servanthood. He came to serve, not to be served (Matt. 20:28). His role as a servant of others is in line with the whole thrust of instructions for the Philippian believers in 2:3-4. Note also John 13:5-17 where Jesus modeled His role of servant as an example for us.

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2:8 — In incarnation Christ was found by others in appearance as a man. He looked like other men, but without the sin of man. Then, as a man, He humbled Himself to be obedient to the will of the Father, even unto death. Crucifixion was reserved for punishment only upon slaves and those who rebelled against the Roman government. It was not only extremely painful and cruel, it was also the most shameful and humiliating of deaths. Although the Romans practiced crucifixion, they abhorred the very thought of it, as something utterly shameful. The Jews considered such a death as a curse (Deut. 21:23). For Christ to be willing to endure this death, which included taking upon Himself the sins of the world, was a great step of humility. It was a total denial of self (Lk. 22:42). The cross was utterly despised by the world, but believers came to honor the cross as the greatest symbol of love and sacrifice in all of human history.

2:9 — Because of Christ's willing humiliation and total obedience as a servant, God took action to exalt Christ to the highest position in the universe. God's raising and exaltation of Jesus is His confirmation that this humble One is His Anointed and the Lord of all (Acts 2:29-36; Heb. 2:9). There is some debate among Bible interpreters about "the name" which was bestowed on Jesus in verse nine. "The name that is above every name" here may mean simply the highest position of glory and honor. It appears that this name was given at the time of Jesus' exaltation, not His birth (Acts 13:33; Phil. 2:9; Heb.1:3-5). This fact would go against "the name" in verse nine being simply the name of Jesus as a personal name. Yet, verse ten says explicitly "the name of Jesus."

On the other hand, some wording in verses 2:10-11 seems directly derived from Isaiah 45:23, which states, "To me [Yahweh – the Lord] every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance." We can at least say that in His exaltation the name of Jesus is now the name of the Lord, the One above all and to whom all must bow (Acts 2:36). In fact, this is the confession made in verse 11, that Jesus Christ is Lord.

2:10 — This is a verse pointing to a future event and the verse is based on Isaiah 45:23. The whole realm of creation should bow to

Him. Those “in heaven” are the angels. Those “on earth” are the living humans. Those “under the earth” are the deceased humans. All of these will bow to acknowledge that Jesus has the sovereign rule over all. This does not mean that all will be saved because that is based upon our faith in this life before the Lord comes or before we die.

2:11 — There is some variance in ancient texts for this verse. Some texts use a verb form that is rendered “will confess” (future indicative), while other texts use a form that is best rendered “should confess” (subjunctive mood). We cannot make too much of this, but simply say that a universal future confession does not equal a universal salvation. The confession will be made when Jesus is openly seen as the Lord in glory and this fact cannot be denied by anyone. None will be able to deny His Lordship in the universe, although they may not submit to Him as Lord in their wills. Even the evil angels now admit that He is the Son of God, but they are still fighting against Him (Matt. 8:29; Mk. 3:11-12).

Life Application

This passage (2:5-11) is one of the most powerful pictures of Christ in the New Testament. It vividly describes His willing humiliation, His servanthood, His obedience and His exaltation. It certainly inspires us to follow Him as He lived. Let us remember that the passage begins with the command, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” I believe we can understand “mind” here as a way of thinking, a mindset. Christ’s mindset was to humble Himself, and as a man, to be an obedient servant to God, even unto death. Let us apply this thought to our lives, and let this mind be in us, day by day and hour by hour. Through receiving God’s empowering grace by faith, we can certainly follow our Lord in His way of living. Our life on this earth should not be about our desires, our preferences and the potential pleasures we might enjoy in this life. God has eternally saved us from the penalty rightly due to us for our sins. Now let us lift our eyes to see Christ and His magnificent life as described in this passage. Let us tell the Lord, “Lord Jesus, I do desire for Your life

to be the example for me. I trust in You to work in me to live Your life as You lived.”

Shine as lights in the world (2:12-18)

¹²Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. ¹⁴Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

2:12 — “Therefore” signifies “seeing Christ’s pattern of obedience.” In light of this pattern Paul instructs the believers to complete their obedience just as they had obeyed before. Paul is continuing his theme of instruction to the believers that he began in 1:27 and continued through 2:5. The clause “work out your own salvation” means that the believer must cooperate with God who works within him (v. 13). Jesus, as our example, “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death” (v. 8). Now we must follow this example and obey God at all costs. The “salvation” here is the ongoing deliverance of the believer from the self-life and sin to a life that honors Christ in his living.

To “work out” means to carry out our salvation to its intended end. Our intended end is to be fully conformed to Christ’s image (Rom. 8:28-29; Gal. 4:19), and to receive a full reward at Christ’s coming. This process is ongoing through the believer’s lifetime and God often uses trials to help that process (Rom. 5:2-5; Jas. 1:2-4, 12; 1 Pet. 1:3-7; 4:12-14). Each trial, like Paul’s imprisonment (1:19-20) and the opposition to the Philippian believers (1:28), presents an opportunity to learn of Christ and honor Him in our lives.

This process of working out our salvation involves knowing Christ in experience. It includes knowing Him in His sufferings and in the power of His resurrection. Paul unfolds this process in Chapter Three. There the apostle tells us that his goal is to become like Christ in His death (a complete death to self) in order to gain a certain prize. This prize speaks of reward, which is coming in the “day of Christ” (v. 16), and we will examine this prize when we look at Chapter Three. This “working out” should be done by us “with fear and trembling.” Why? The next verse tells us why.

2:13 — This verse begins with “for” (*gar* in Greek), which is an explanatory “for” related to what precedes it. The Philippian believers are told to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling *for* it is God who works in you.” Our attitude towards the work of God’s Spirit within us should include a certain fear of a holy God. Modern writers have often gone astray in defining this word “fear” (*phobos* in Greek) as simply “reverence” (meaning an attitude of respect and awe). The word should include not only reverence, but also some fear of punishment (for disobedience) by God the Judge (see Acts 5:9-11 and 1 Pet. 1:14-17).

God is at work in every believer “both to will and work for his good pleasure.” Firstly, this means God’s Spirit is pointing out His will to us and urging us to do it. He is also working to empower us to do His will. But, we must cooperate with the working of the Spirit within, saying “yes” to Him and depending upon Him in faith (Rom. 8:2-4; Phil. 3:10).

He does this working within us “for his good pleasure.” It pleases God to see our lives being delivered from sin, self and the world. This is in accordance with His gracious purposes for us in redemption.

2:14 — “Do all things” means to be obedient in everything that God desires. It is true that there is the background in the context of needed obedience in the matter of unity among the believers (1:27; 2:3-4). No doubt, this is still on Paul’s mind as he writes this passage. But, Paul is also giving them a principle here that applies to all matters of obedience. After all, this verse is written following the example of Christ’s willingness to obey in all points, even to the death of a cross. “Without grumbling or disputing.” The word for

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grumbling (perhaps better rendered as “murmurings”) in the NT speaks of private talks or complaints. Murmuring was a problem for the Israelites in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:10). This seems to point to verbal complaints.

The word used for disputing is almost always used in the NT of inward reasoning or thoughts in the hearts of men. It is hard to say if the apostle means here murmurings or secret reasoning against God and His dealings, or against others. Both may well be included. Too often believers can outwardly “obey” some command but retain some murmuring or reasoning in the process. For example, a child may be told to clean up his room. He may outwardly “obey” his parent and clean up his room. However, if his heart is complaining while doing it, or if he has negative thoughts towards his parent, then this “obedience” is not true obedience. God wants obedience without murmuring or disputing.

2:15 — Full obedience to God produces blameless lives, which means exemplary lives that others cannot criticize. The Greek word for “innocent” means pure, without evil mixed in. Such lives show forth the believers as children of God. They are “without blemish,” as required in the OT Law of an animal that could be sacrificed to God. In a dark world of men who are crooked and morally corrupt, such children of God shine as bright lights with the purity of God. Together, as a community, they are like a light on a hill (Matt. 5:14). But such a community is made up of individual lights (see Matt. 5:15-16; Mk. 4:21-25).

This “shining as lights” by Christians is another description of the honoring of Christ, as in 1:20. This shows that the deliverance which Paul noted in 1:19 is the same as the salvation in 2:12 (with the same Greek word being used). The description of the believers in verse 15 does not mean that such blameless ones have reached some perfection stage in their Christian walk. But, they have an obviously upright walk before others. And, any failure they have is rectified immediately with repentance and confession to God (and men, if necessary). They will also take steps to undo anything that they might have done wrongly in their dealings with others. It is all about a heart to fully pursue and obey Christ.

2:16 — Such shining ones will be those “holding fast to the word of life.” For one thing, this means that they are keeping the word of God central in their lives. They are drawing spiritual life from it, and seeking to be doers of the word. This verb “hold fast” also means to “hold forth” the word of life, holding it out to others so that they may receive life. Both meanings are probably included in this context. The phrase “in the day of Christ” here expresses an emphasis upon the coming judgment of believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ in that future day. Paul will have reason to be proud in the day of Christ if these believers are indeed obedient and shining as lights. In such a case, his labor in Christ toward them would not have been in vain. Instead, it would be revealed in that day to have had much effect in the lives of others.

2:17-18 — The drink offerings of the OT were poured out upon the other offerings to be a combined offering unto God. Paul is already pouring himself out in sacrifice, suffering and labor upon these believers. Paul’s pouring out of himself upon the faith of others will eventually become his martyrdom. The meaning of the phrase “the sacrificial offering of your faith” here includes all of the Philippians’ faithfulness to God. It includes their suffering for Christ’s sake and their service in the advancement of the gospel. Taken as a whole, the life of faith lived by these believers is viewed as a sacrifice unto God.

Whenever we sacrifice all to fulfill God’s calling upon our lives we sense a reason for rejoicing. Here, both Paul and the believers in Philippi each had reason for rejoicing due to their sacrifice unto God. Yet Paul and the Philippians also worked together in the gospel and this is a cause for mutual rejoicing. This joy will be made full in the day of Christ.

Timothy, an example of a selfless servant (2:19-24)

¹⁹I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²²But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. ²³I hope therefore to send him just as soon

as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

2:19 — Timothy was in Rome and in contact with Paul at this time. Paul states that he wants Timothy to go to Philippi because Paul is very interested in learning about the condition of the saints there. Paul's heart was not oriented towards his own situation, but towards the condition of those he cared for spiritually. The name Timothy in Greek means "honoring God" or "honored by God."

2:20-21 — Suddenly Paul makes a shocking statement in relation to Timothy. Timothy is unique among the others with Paul at that time. The meaning of the first clause of verse 20 has been interpreted in two ways by translators. It might mean that Paul has no one else who is *like himself* except Timothy. Or, it may be understood as meaning that among those with Paul no one was *like Timothy*, he was unique. In a sense, it does not matter which position is taken as I believe everyone would agree that in fact Timothy was indeed like Paul. Surely Paul was not governed by self-interest, but only the interests of Christ. I would like to paraphrase verse 20 as follows: "For I have no one like him who is equal in soul to me, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare."

Paul then explains that they (some others besides Timothy) all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. The Greek word here (*Strong's* #2473) often translated as "likeminded" is used only here in the NT. My paraphrase uses a more literal rendering of this word as "equal in soul." Paul's shocking statement means that only Timothy had the same type of soul as Paul did as respects caring for the Philippians with only their welfare in mind. Paul and Timothy also embraced only the interests of Christ in their service, not their own interests.

The question arises: who are these that Paul has in mind that are unlike him and Timothy, ones hindered by self-interest? The context seems to suggest that these are Paul's other co-workers who might be with him at that time. However, Paul did not choose to send them, but only to send Timothy due to Timothy's heart. Many commentators take this view.

One respected commentator on this letter takes another view—that Paul is not talking in verse 20 about others who might have been *sent*. Rather, Paul’s wording, according to this commentator, only puts forth a comparison between *the qualities* of Timothy and *the characteristics* of others whom Paul has in mind (probably not co-workers)⁸. We do know that Paul had some brothers who were “with him” (4:21). These were most likely not in prison with Paul, but were certainly accessible to him. In 4:21 Paul does not name those “with him,” as he does in his other prison epistles (Aristarchus and Mark [Col. 4:10; Phlm. 1:24]; Tychicus [Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7]; Demas and Luke [Col. 4:14; Phlm. 1:24]; Timothy [Phil. 1:1; 2:19-24; Col. 1:1]). We simply do not know for sure who these were with Paul besides Timothy.

Some have written that Paul’s words in verse 21 are hyperbole, or exaggeration. However, that does not seem plausible due to the straightforwardness of this sobering word. In any case, Paul is making a critically important point here we should not miss. Only Timothy had a mind fully like Paul’s, a mind which sought after the interests of Christ Jesus. Such a mind is seen here as being genuinely concerned for the welfare of the Philippians. Self-interest was subordinated to Christ’s interests in Timothy and in his like-minded mentor, Paul.

This reminds us of what we see of Christ’s mind earlier in the chapter. There Christ humbled Himself to be obedient to God as a servant. He adopted the Father’s mind and will. And, He did this to meet our need of redemption. It also reminds us of Paul’s appeal to the Philippians in 2:3-4, to regard others as more significant than ourselves, caring for their interests. In our work for the Lord verses 20 and 21 should greatly impress us. These verses have impressed me perhaps more than any others in my labor for the Lord. We must be sure that we are not serving for some self-interest, like acceptance of ministry, or glory or money (see 2 Cor. 1:12; 2:17; 4:1-2; 1 Thess. 2:3-7).

2:22 — “But you know Timothy’s proven worth” — Timothy had been with the Philippians more than once (Acts 16:1-3, 11-12; 19:22; 20:3-6). Timothy served with Paul as a child serves with his

⁸ Fee., *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, pp. 267-268.

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father. Paul uses an illustration here from common life. In those days a son would learn the family business as he worked alongside his father. We should be careful not to stretch the illustration to an exact description of Paul's and Timothy's relationship. Timothy willingly learned from Paul in his apostolic gospel work. Although Timothy was willing to be sent on assignments by Paul, we should be careful not to say Timothy was a servant of Paul's. Timothy was a servant of God (1:1), and together with Paul they both served God. Timothy learned from Paul and followed his lead as Paul followed Christ. Yet, Timothy must have known from Paul that Timothy's direct head should be Christ, not Paul (1 Cor. 11:1-3).

I think some translations do a disservice here when they translate this verse in such a way as to indicate that Timothy served with Paul in the gospel as a child *serves his father*. The definite implication in some Bible versions is that Timothy was serving Paul like a father in carrying out the gospel work. I really do not see that in the text. The ESV is a much better translation here: "But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel." This may seem to be a small point, but it is actually very important. One great mistake many workers have made is to take other people as their "head" and serve and follow them in the work of the Lord. This kind of allegiance has led to countless cases of people following others (instead of Christ) as the leader goes severely off the path of true discipleship. In America we have a saying for the outcome of those who mistakenly follow others: "they are all going over the cliff together." I have seen it happen.

We should always consciously and daily place ourselves under the headship of Christ alone. This is a protection factor for us and for others. We should always respect and listen to more mature brothers, but never follow them without discernment or due to some loyalty factor. Timothy had picked up a "like soul" as Paul had, but this soul, this mindset, was according to Christ. This mindset places Christ's interests above all else and regards others as more significant than one's self (2:3-4). Together, Paul and Timothy *served Christ* in the advancement of the gospel.

2:23-24 — Paul hopes to send Timothy right away, yet Paul wants to learn something about what is going to happen to himself.

This may mean that Paul wants to learn of his final fate from Caesar's decision. It could also refer to some other matters which Paul wishes to convey to the Philippians via Timothy. In verse 24 Paul expresses his trust in the Lord (as earlier in 1:25-26) that he himself will also be coming to visit Philippi again. It seems Paul is expecting his release soon. Paul mentions his journey to Macedonia in 1 Tim. 1:3, which no doubt confirms that after his first imprisonment he again returned to Philippi.

Epaphroditus, an example of a faithful servant (2:25-30)

²⁵I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, ³⁰for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

2:25 — Epaphroditus means “lovely,” or “charming.” His life as a faithful servant is certainly lovely. Epaphroditus is the one who has brought the gift to Paul from the Philippian congregation (4:18). Paul felt it was needful to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi at this point for three related reasons: 1) to relieve Epaphroditus of his distress regarding the anxieties of the Philippians (v. 26); 2) to relieve the concerns of the Philippians themselves (v. 28); 3) to relieve Paul's own concern about the saints in Philippi (v.28). Here we see that both Paul and Epaphroditus really cared for the interests and burdens of others. This is in line with Paul's word of caring for the interests of others (2:3-4) and in line with Christ's attitude of a servant (2:7).

Paul calls Epaphroditus firstly “his brother,” indicating that they are equal in status before God and in a bond of brotherly love. Paul and Epaphroditus were “fellow workers,” showing that they worked well together in the gospel work. The description of Epaphroditus

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as a “fellow soldier” shows that he, like Paul, had a mind focused on serving the Lord and willing to suffer hardship (see 2 Tim. 2:3-4). Epaphroditus was a messenger, a “sent one,” from Philippi and he was especially one who ministered to Paul’s need. This ministry was probably not limited to just “bringing the gift,” but also to being available to render whatever service he could to Paul. Epaphroditus performed this service as a representative of the church in Philippi.

2:26-27 — God had mercy on Epaphroditus and Paul. Epaphroditus was healed by answered prayer, not by the gift of healing. God sympathized with these two and gave mercy in healing.

2:28-30 — Epaphroditus was sent back to Philippi, bearing this letter from Paul to them. The apostle notes that men of this caliber should be held in high regard. This is because Epaphroditus was so willing to carry out his task that he risked his life. We are not told how this happened, but some speculate that he risked his life by undertaking the journey to Rome. Such journeys could be perilous, especially if one’s health was already fragile.

Epaphroditus made the journey in order to bring the gift to Paul. He saw the need of completing this assignment for the benefit of the work of Christ through the apostle. This great apostle was now on trial as the great proclaimer of the gospel in the Mediterranean world. Epaphroditus had come to Rome in order to complete the service of the Philippian church to the apostle and the gospel work. This was no word of censure here, saying that the Philippians were negligent in their service. Paul later states that they had lacked opportunity to do this earlier (4:10). Some feel Paul may have meant that Epaphroditus’ personal presence was what was missing in their service, and that is what he completed by his coming to Rome.

Life Application

What a picture Timothy and Epaphroditus give to us at the close of this chapter. Earlier in the chapter we see that we are to have the mind of Christ in His humility and servant role. Now, these two men

show forth the life of Christ, exhibited in selflessness and faithful service. There is much instruction for us in these examples. In whatever function God assigns to us for service to others, we should follow Timothy. He put the interests of Christ in first place. He was genuinely concerned for the welfare of others, and did not just put on an outward show of being interested. The example of Timothy charges us to humble ourselves to take grace from God so as to put aside our interests. His example challenges us to be a selfless servant of Christ, seeking to learn His genuine interest and care for others.

In Epaphroditus we see a very faithful servant. He was called by Paul a “fellow worker” and a “fellow soldier.” This means he was willing to put his hand to hard work. He was willing to endure hardship as a soldier in the fight. He performed his service with such faithfulness, even to the point of risking his life. Of course, we cannot be so faithful apart from the strength that God’s grace can give. Yet, we will never be this faithful if we are not willing to pay a price for faithfulness.

May we pray together that God can work in our lives in this way? “Dear Lord, we thank You for the examples of these two servants, Timothy and Epaphroditus. They inspire us to go deeper with You and be the kind of people that You can use in Your work. We ask You to enlighten us day by day to see where we must die to our own self-interest and self-love in order to properly serve Your interests. We ask You to remind us that the way to Your throne of grace is always open. Thank You for Your word that we can find grace to serve You faithfully in the hard times. We are not trusting ourselves to be able to do what is needed. Rather, we tell You that by Your grace we do want to follow Your will and serve You fully and faithfully. Thank You for hearing our prayer.”

Chapter Three

Pursue Christ

Encouragement to rejoice and glory in Christ, with warnings against Judaizers (3:1-3)

¹Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. ²Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—

The Darby translation shows the first words of this verse as “For the rest, my brethren.” I believe this is better. A number of translations use “finally” instead of “for the rest.” This Greek phrase here (*to loipon*) can be translated “finally,” but context should determine the translation. It does not seem that Paul, at this point in the letter, is about to close with one final point. This Greek phrase, which literally means “for the rest,” is also used as a term of transition to a new subject.

What follows next is the injunction to “rejoice in the Lord.” Of course, this matter of rejoicing is one theme that appears throughout the letter. Paul is urging the believers in Philippi to rejoice in the Lord—all that He is in His person, and all that He is to us and for us personally! Such a source of joy is needed as we consider the challenges of life and discipleship. This call to rejoice sits at a juncture here where the believers will now learn of another challenge, namely the possibility of being disturbed by Judaizers. The Judaizers are those who teach that the law must be observed to progress in the Christian life. Paul may also have in mind the need

to rejoice as believers face the costly challenge of following Christ fully in discipleship (3:7-16).

Paul says he is writing to them again about some things, and this repetition is for their safeguarding. What follows next is the very thing he wishes to warn about (again) for their safeguarding in the faith:

“Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.” (Phil. 3:2)

This verse uses three terms to describe one class of opponents to the truth – the Judaizers, a sect of the early church. These were born Jews and seemingly embraced Christ as the Messiah. Yet, they also taught that all believers (including Gentiles) must be circumcised and follow Jewish customs in order to be holy before God. Of course, this controversy was supposed to have been resolved at the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15). That council probably occurred about A. D. 49 or 50. Nevertheless, “the circumcision party” (Gal. 2:12) was still a problem at the time of the writing of the letter to the Philippians (around A. D. 62). That is seen by this warning, where the emphasis is obviously on the matter of circumcision (vs. 2-3). Such legalists must have still been quite active for Paul to issue such strong and repeated warnings.

Paul denounces the false teachers as “dogs,” simply animals that were unclean scavengers at that time. He further condemns them as “evildoers,” meaning religious workers whose teaching was evil. But the most direct reference to their central doctrine is that of circumcision, or “mutilation” as Paul describes it in negative terms in verse two.

3:3 — In this verse Paul states that the born again believers of the church of Jesus Christ (“we”) are actually the true circumcision, in contrast to those promoters of circumcision in the flesh. Note Romans 2:28-29 where the true Jews are described as those who have been circumcised in heart, by the Spirit. This is explained by Colossians 2:11-12, which says our circumcision is the removal of the body of flesh (meaning the fallen life of man). This removal was accomplished through the “circumcision of Christ” (His death on the cross), and made real in our lives by the Spirit.

Therefore, we worship and serve not in an outward way (like circumcision and ritual) but in the Spirit of God. And, our “glory” is in Christ Jesus, not in some religious observance carried out by the effort of man. Thus there is a contrast here between the Spirit and the flesh. Believers in Christ should place no confidence in any effort of the flesh, relying on man’s abilities and power and religious doings.

A preferred translation here is: “who *serve* [not “worship”] by the Spirit of God.” The verb here is *latreuo* (*Strong’s* # 3000), often used in the Greek version (LXX) of the OT for temple service. The same verb is used of Paul serving God in Romans 1:9 and 2 Timothy 1:3. The contrast in this verse is between serving God by circumcision (outward doings in following ritual practices) and serving God by the power of the Spirit.

Paul’s great example — the pursuit of Christ (3:4-14)

⁴though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹²Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

3:4-6 — In these verses Paul tells how his own background in Judaism might have given him reason to have confidence in the flesh. Paul could have reasoned that his religious credentials and accomplishments counted for something before God. “Circumcised on the eighth day”—of the Jewish religion from birth, not a convert to Judaism. “Of the people of Israel”—one of God’s chosen people of the OT. “Of the tribe of Benjamin”—a tribe that gave Israel its first king and never deviated in loyalty to the house of David. Also, the heads of the tribe of Benjamin were among those who went back to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:5). “A Hebrew of Hebrews”—one of those in the nation that held onto the original language and ancient customs. “As to the law, a Pharisee”—of the sect that remained orthodox in doctrine, whereas the Sadducees rejected the doctrine of the resurrection. “As to zeal, a persecutor of the church”—zealous to wipe out any threat to Judaism among the people. “As to righteousness under the law, found blameless”—meaning he kept all the rules exactly, including presenting appropriate offerings when he committed a trespass.

In these verses Paul has catalogued his “good flesh.” He had a proper religious pedigree and been faithful in doctrine. He was zealous for good religious works and upright by God’s standards (the Law). But, when he was in this condition Paul had not yet recognized that his self-efforts to be something or do something for God are worthless before Him. Only what finds its origin and power from the Spirit of God is what is acceptable to God. All religious doings of men, even believers, are of no value if not originating from the Spirit and not performed by the power of the Spirit.

3:7-14 — *Overview:* To understand this section we should begin with a broad overview in order to keep several key ideas in mind. It is easy to get lost in the details of this section and not see the broad sweep of it. By seeing the “big picture,” we can more easily grasp the details. Firstly, we should note that this section (in conjunction with verses 4-6) is autobiographical. It represents Paul’s personal experience and personal aspirations. In verses 4-6 we have Paul’s history before he became a believer. It is a history highlighting all of his religious background and accomplishments.

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In verse seven Paul states that all he viewed as gain in the past, he has counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

In verse eight the apostle moves to the present and explains what his life is all about now. It is clearly about “knowing” Christ, which calls for suffering the loss of all things in order to “gain” Christ. The complete “gain” of Christ refers ultimately to a future outcome. Verse ten again picks up the theme of knowing Christ. In verse eleven Paul looks to the future, stating that he hopes to “attain to the out-resurrection [a literal translation of this special Greek word] from the dead.” Then in verses 12-14 Paul brings in a subtle picture of a runner running a race. He describes himself as one straining forward towards the goal for a prize. Thus, verses 12-14 view Paul’s Christian life as a race for a prize.

Both verses 8-9 and 10-11 speak of a pursuit of Christ now in the present that ends in the future, with a positive result: “gain Christ and be found in him” (8-9); “attain to the out-resurrection from the dead” (10-11). Both of these brief two verse passages speak of the outcome (the positive result) as one that is not certain or guaranteed. This thought is underscored in the final verses, 12-14. There Paul tells us that even though he is pursuing, his race is not yet over and he has not yet laid hold of “the prize.” Therefore, he is single-mindedly pressing on so that he might gain the prize.

Into these few verses Paul has packed a lot of theology about the Christian life. What we will see is that the Christian life is altogether defined as a pursuit of knowing Christ in a very experiential and spiritual way. We will also learn that how we “run the race” of this Christian life now will greatly impact our reward at Christ’s coming. What is at stake in our Christian life, after initial belief, is not our eternal salvation, but is our reward.

Our eternal salvation is forever settled at the moment of belief based upon Christ’s work (Acts 13:38-39; 16:31; Jn. 3:16; 5:24; Eph. 1:13-14). Eternal salvation is not according to any works, before belief, at the moment of belief, or following belief (Eph. 2:8-9). This is one great principle in the Bible, which we may call “Eternal Salvation by Grace” (which is apart from works), or simply the “Gift” principle. However, there is another great principle which runs throughout the Bible: “Reward According to Works,” or

simply the “Reward” principle.⁹ Note some verses that specifically state this principle: Matthew 16:27; Romans 2:5-6; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 22:12. For the believer this happens at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

The main point here is that this passage in Philippians 3:7-14 is about living our Christian life now in view of the possibility (not a guarantee) of gaining a great positive reward at Christ’s coming. In these verses Paul is modeling for us a Christian life lived in this purposeful way. With this overview in mind, let us now look at the details of this very important passage.

3:7 — When Paul saw the glory of Christ on the road to Damascus and realized Christ’s great love for him and for all men, he knew that all of the things he had valued before were nothing compared to Christ Himself. No doubt in the weeks immediately following his conversion he began to see more of the beauty of Christ’s person and work in the Scriptures. This only deepened his conviction that this magnificent One made all his previous life in Judaism seem as a total loss in comparison.

3:8 — Paul now states that there is yet something more besides his initial experience of counting his former life as a devoted Jew as loss. Using the present tense he shows us that his practice is to count all things in the human realm as a loss when compared to the surpassing worth or value of the *knowledge of Christ*. The excellent thing here is not just Christ (although He is excellent), nor is it knowledge about Christ. Rather it is *the experiential knowledge* of the person. *Knowing Him is our experience of Him, our knowing of His life*. It is experiential knowledge, where we learn of Him in our intimate contact with Him in spirit. It is our inward, personal experience of the living God. This is the eternal life that He came to give us, experiencing it abundantly and increasingly (Jn. 10:10; 17:3).

⁹ These two great principles of Biblical truth—Gift and Reward—must be understood if one is to interpret many passages rightly. Sound interpretation must be done carefully, accurately handling the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). A good introduction to these two principles, and to the security of the believer’s eternal salvation, can be found in the booklet titled *Eternal Security* in Appendix D.

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The whole passage is deeply experiential, showing Paul's *one great aim in life* was to experience Christ in the fullest possible way, even living Christ (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:19-21). The great danger and loss to the carnal and worldly Christian is to pursue something of this world instead of Christ. The great danger and loss to the more serious Christian is to pursue something in the Christian realm other than the intimate knowledge of Him (such as truth, right practice, service, gifts, miracles, works, "worship music," etc.). This does not mean that we do not need truth, right practices, service, etc., but all of these things should flow out of our single-minded pursuit to know Him intimately. We should understand that a growing knowledge of Christ means our lives are marked by an increasing conformation to His character and obedience to His will (Col. 1:9-10; 2 Pet. 1:3-8; 3:18). It is very possible for believers to know and preach some truth, do some good works for God, seek after miracles, and spend hours participating in "worship music," and yet not grow in the true knowledge of Christ.

Paul saw that the excellent thing was to know the living Christ. As one pursues this unique goal, our Christian activity should flow out of and in concert with our spiritual union with Him (Jn. 15:4). Paul's initial prayer for the Philippians was that in full knowledge and discernment they would "approve what is excellent" (Phil. 1:10). This prayer in Chapter One is linked to the choice of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ in Chapter Three.

Verse eight states: "for his sake I have suffered the loss of all things." This means that Paul has let everything go, in a sense, *in order to concentrate on one goal: gaining Christ*. To "gain Christ" means to gain Him as a person, to increasingly know Him in experience. The strength of Paul's passion and pursuit are interestingly captured in one translation: "Not only those things; I reckon everything as complete loss for the sake of what is so much more valuable, the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have thrown everything away; I consider it all as mere garbage, so that I may gain Christ." (GNB)

All of our gaining of Christ in this life is moving towards a goal: the final and ultimate gain of Christ during the next age, the millennium (the 1,000 year reign of Christ; Rev. 20:4-6). Knowing Him now in our experience naturally means being obedient to Him. This is altogether a matter of discipleship. This matter will be

covered more in verse ten. We can say here, however, that our obedience in this life leads to great positive reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. And, a central feature of this reward is the full knowledge of Christ in the age to come (the 1,000 years). In this regard, consider the following passage:

“Peter began to say to him, ‘See, we have left everything and followed you.’ Jesus said, ‘Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now **in this time**, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions; and **in the age to come, eternal life.**’” (Mk. 10:28-30)

Bible students should learn that the term “eternal life” is used in different aspects in the New Testament. This term occurs 42 times in the New Testament. Sometimes it refers to the life of God we receive as a *gift* in the new birth (e. g., Jn. 3:16; 5:24; 6:40). However, other times the context shows that eternal life describes something that is *to be gained in the future by obedience* or godly living (Rom. 2:7; Matt. 19:16, 29; Mk. 10: 17, 30; Lk. 10:25-28; 18:18-30; Jn. 12:25-26). Therefore, we can see that *eternal life* in the NT can be seen as falling either under the *gift* principle or the *reward* principle, depending upon context. In all cases, eternal life describes our intimate knowledge of God in experience (Jn. 17:3).

The exchange in Mark 10 above between Peter and the Lord happened right after the rich young ruler refused to sell all and follow Christ. This lifestyle of forsaking all to follow Christ describes the path of discipleship, not initial belief. This is what Paul is talking about in Philippians 3:8—counting all things as loss in order to know Christ in experience, to gain Him. Note that in Mark 10:30, Jesus tells His disciples that the one who leaves all to follow Him will gain many times as much in human needs (along with persecutions) **in the present time**, but will also gain **eternal life in the age to come**. Here Jesus is speaking of *reward* for obedience, for being a faithful disciple. This is “reward according to works.” And, the reward highlighted here is “eternal life.”

This “eternal life” in the age to come is a greatly increased and perfected experience of eternal life, the experiential knowledge of

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Christ Himself. In this age we do have eternal life, received as a gift in initial salvation. Yet, our experience of eternal life can be enhanced now through our seeking to know Him more fully. Also, following the Judgment Seat of Christ, the victorious believers are rewarded with a special portion of intimacy and knowledge of Christ. This special portion is enjoyed during the 1,000 year period, designated as “the age to come.”¹⁰ This term, “the age to come,” is almost a technical term for the next age of the millennium, where Christ rules openly on the earth. “The age to come” does not speak of eternity, because the Scripture tells us that there is more than one age yet to come (Eph. 2:7).

In verse eight Paul says he is counting all as loss so “that I *may* gain Christ.” The word *may* is used to give a clear sense of the subjunctive mood of the verb here. Thus there is the sense here of possibility, not certainty, of the outcome of gaining Christ. The subjunctive mood is used in Greek verbs not to describe what presently is, but what might be. It is not used to express present reality, but possibility. Since the activity of the verb in the subjunctive mood is not yet completed, its usage often refers to some future possible happening. In this case, the ultimate fulfillment of Paul’s gaining of Christ is something that hinges upon Christ’s judgment at the Judgment Seat. When Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, he was not yet certain of that final outcome. However, at the end of his life, Paul did have revelation from God that he had finished his course well. He had assurance that he would receive the crown of righteousness, indicating approval for reigning with Christ in His 1,000 year kingdom (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

¹⁰ Victorious Christians, or “overcomers,” refers to believers who have learned how to “overcome” various obstacles to faith and obedience. These obstacles may be sin, the world, the self-life, the devil, difficult circumstances or other obstacles. Such a victorious Christian life does not speak of sinless perfection. Rather it speaks of an increasing consistency of holiness in many aspects of human life. Overcomers do sin, but have also learned how to repent and confess their sins for cleansing (Pr. 28:13; 1 Jn. 1:9). Those who overcome are given positive rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ and reign with Him in the coming Kingdom of 1,000 years. See Appendix D, the booklet on *Eternal Security*, for more information on the Judgment Seat and rewards. Also, for help on living a victorious Christian life, see the author’s book titled *The Victorious Christian Life* at the following website: www.seekersofchrist.org.

3:9 — “and be found in him” — The opening phrase of this verse is linked to the prior verse. The verb form for “be found” is also in the subjunctive mood. This clause is well translated by Darby: “and I may be found in him” (Darby; similarly, the NASB also uses “may”). To be “found in him” (with a certain type of righteousness) is a possibility for Paul. It is surely something that he is striving for. This being “found in him” points to some degree to his present experience on the earth. Paul wishes to be found, to be discovered by others, as a person living in Christ. Yet, it also points to its ultimate fulfillment—to be found by God in the day of judgment as a person whose practice is living in intimate union with Christ. This matches the desire of Paul’s prayer in 1:10: “and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.”

In this verse the words “be found in him” are modified by this phrase: “not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.” It is common for most interpreters to think that the righteousness described here is imputed righteousness, or positional righteousness, granted by faith to the believer at conversion (as in Romans 3:21-24; 4:3-5). Although such an interpretation may sound reasonable upon initial thought, I think that there are good reasons to think this phrase is talking about practical righteousness in the actual living of the believer, not positional righteousness. Here are the reasons that could support this understanding:

- 1) The verb in the main clause is in the subjunctive mood, “*may* be found in him.” Is there any doubt or uncertainty about Paul being found in Christ having imputed righteousness? Certainly not, as Paul himself teaches us that such righteousness is credited to our account upon the moment of initial belief in Christ (Rom. 3:21-24; 4:3-5). However, as to Paul, or any believer, being found in Christ at the Judgment Seat with a life seen as practically righteous by the Judge is altogether uncertain. For one thing, our race is not over yet as long as we are alive. Secondly, only the Judge can truly evaluate our condition (1 Cor. 4:2-5).
- 2) In verse nine Paul compares two types of righteousness. The former type was one produced by his efforts under the Law (vs. 6, 9). That former righteousness was a practical

righteousness, one lived out in life. The righteousness Paul desires to possess is a righteousness by faith. There is no reason why this latter righteousness could not also be a practical righteousness. However, the point of comparison with the former righteousness could simply be *the means of achieving* such a practical righteousness. In fact, the way of achieving practical righteousness by faith, as contrasted with man's efforts to perform under law, is a major theme in the NT. The idea of one possessing a *practical* righteousness by faith is seen in Hebrews 11. The entire context of Hebrews 11 is a display of righteous actions and lives carried out by God's people who lived by faith. The example of Noah is particularly clear. The immediate context, as here in Philippians Three, is reward, not initial salvation. See the footnote for comments on Noah.¹¹

¹¹ Hebrews 11:1-2 opens the chapter often described as a catalogue of "the heroes of the faith." Verse two explains: "For by it [faith] men of old gained approval." Dr. Joseph Dillow explains that Noah's righteousness here is practical, not positional:

"But how did Noah obtain this verdict of righteousness? He obtained it because he *'in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world'* (Heb. 11:7). He obtained it by works. Noah was already a believer before he built his ark. Before he even struck the first nail, God said of him, *'But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord'* (Genesis 6:8). He displayed his saved status when he worshipped God 'in reverence' as he hammered every nail. Thus this verdict of righteousness was something added to a salvation which he already possessed.

What does it mean that Noah became *'an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith'* (Hebrews 11:7). What is this 'faith' and this 'righteousness?' Paul Tanner argues that in Hebrews 11 'faith' does not refer to the initial transaction through which we are born again, rather, 'faith' in this chapter refers to the *'walk of faith'* in every instance. He further points out that the word 'righteousness' is used six times in Hebrews and never of imputed righteousness. In each instance it refers to the moral quality of righteousness. Tanner concludes, *'Since "faith" in Hebrews 10-11 is not "saving faith," and since "righteousness" in Hebrews is not "forensic imputed righteousness," this verse is probably talking about something else. Noah was a man of faith, and as Genesis 6:8 teaches us, he was a "righteous and blameless man." So what did that gain him? It qualified him (or led to) him becoming an heir.'*" (Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny* (Monument, CO: Paniym Group, Inc., 2012), p. 572.)

- 3) The entire context of this section (3:8-14) is pursuing Christ to know Him intimately. The focus here is on living in abiding union with Christ, not positional truth. In the epistle as a whole, as context, there is nothing about positional truth. The whole epistle focuses on the living of the disciple. Additionally, from verse eight onward, the focus for Paul is on the present and the future, not on what transpired at his conversion (imputed righteousness).
- 4) Besides 3:6 and 3:9, the only other mention of righteousness in Philippians is in 1:11. Note its usage tied to verse 10: “and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Here we see righteousness as fruit in the life of the believer, preparing him for the day of Christ (the day of Christ’s judgment, the Judgment Seat of Christ). This righteousness is equivalent to the fruit produced in the believer’s life by abiding in Christ (Jn. 15:4-5). This concept of righteousness matches well with 3:9. Compare the two phrases in Scripture: “filled with fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ” (1:11); “that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (3:9). Both verses have to do with future approval by Christ at the coming judgment. Both speak of a righteousness that prepares us for approval. Both speak of a righteousness that comes from God or Christ. In 3:9 the idea of faith is added. This is easily understood as a living out of righteousness through a living faith in Christ (see Galatians 2:19-20; 3:3-5). Where there may be a misunderstanding is that one may think such a practical righteousness must be perfect in order to be approved by God. Our *positional* righteousness must be perfect for God’s *acceptance* of us and our *eternal salvation*. This righteousness is provided for us through Christ’s work of propitiation and redemption (Rom. 3:21-24; 4:3-5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:11-12; 10:10, 14). However, our *approval* by Christ at His Judgment Seat for *reward* is based upon our works, our doings while in this body (2 Cor. 5:10). There Christ will evaluate our doings since we became a believer. Our *approval* for reward is not

based upon perfect obedience, as no one can have perfect obedience. Rather, it is based upon our faithfulness in living rightly and doing God's work in God's way (Lk. 19: 11-26; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 4:1-5; 1 Pet. 1:13-16; Heb. 10:35-36). When we sin, and we all do, we need to acknowledge our sins before God so that our unrighteous doings may be cleansed from us and our fellowship with Him can be restored (1 Jn. 1:9; Prov. 28:13). If we have been unfaithful in any point, we can repent and confess and begin again to walk in faithfulness. Paul desired to be a servant who was "found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). In the passage in 1 Corinthians 4 Paul was speaking of *future approval* at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 4:5). He uses the same word "found" in 1 Corinthians 4:2 as used here in 3:9: "found in him . . . [having] . . . the righteousness from God that depends on faith." The two passages are speaking of the same thing: preparing for our *approval at the Judgment Seat* of Christ by being faithful in this life.

- 5) The passage in Philippians 3:9-14 is dealing with reward, not eternal salvation or justification. Since reward is "according to works" it makes sense for the righteousness in 3:9 to be talking about practical righteousness, actions in Paul's life. We can therefore easily see that Paul was hoping to be "found" at that future day as a person who has lived righteously, thus worthy of positive reward. At the end of his life Paul did have assurance that he had finished his race well and that Christ, the righteous Judge, would award him a "crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:7-8). It is obvious that this reward is connected to Paul's righteous living.

3:10 — "that I may know him" — This clause does not introduce a new topic, but lays ground for the expansion of the matter under discussion, the knowing of Christ. The knowing of Christ's life is constantly a matter of knowing His resurrection power to obey God and of His dying to self (Lk. 22:42; Jn. 6:38; Rom. 6:10-11). These two aspects of His life always go together. The whole concept of discipleship is one that involves death to the self-life and the following of Christ in His will. Some think that to "share his sufferings" refers to the sufferings of persecution that

come because of our witness for Christ. Such sufferings are certainly included. But, I believe the sufferings of Christ are much broader here. Not all believers will suffer direct persecution to a significant degree.

The sufferings of Christ should first be seen as His willingness to suffer death to His own will in order to obey God. Christ put aside His own will, His own comfort, and His own choices during His entire life (Jn. 6:38). This was His role as a servant being obedient to the Father, as seen in Philippians 2:7-8. His obedience was unto the suffering of death. We see this clearly in the climactic moment of Christ's self-denial in order to embrace God's ultimate will for Him—the cross. “Not my will, but yours, be done” (Lk. 22:42). In the same way, our discipleship must follow in Christ's pattern of choosing to die to self in order to take up God's will for us in obedience. This is a daily matter of dying to self. This is the primary emphasis of what it means to “share his sufferings.”

“And he said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, and **take up his cross daily and follow me**. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.’” (Lk. 9:23-26)

Jesus teaches us that we must lose our life (literally, “soul”) now in order to find it at the time when He returns to reward men according to their deeds. To deny one's self means that we deny our soul the fulfillment of its desires, pleasures, and satisfaction in our choices in this life. We do this in order to take up our cross, meaning God's choices for us. To take up the cross is to do God's will (Matt. 26:39). If we follow this pattern of self-denial and doing the will of God, when Christ returns, we will find the true satisfaction of our soul in the coming kingdom with Christ (that is, eternal life in the age to come; Lk. 18:30). This passage refers to reward, as mentioned in the parallel passage in Matthew 16 (note Matt. 16:27). Discipleship here involves works of obedience.

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To follow Christ in self-denying obedience requires the power of God. As we experience “the power of his resurrection,” then we can follow Christ in obedience. Even Christ Himself did not go to the cross by His own power, but needed empowering grace from God to go to the cross (Heb. 2:9).

To “share in his sufferings” is modified by the phrase “becoming like him in his death.” This phrase means dying to self to the fullest extent, even as Christ did by accepting the death of the cross.

3:11 — “if by any means I may attain to the out-resurrection from among the dead” [a more literal translation] — Now Paul tells us the final goal of this knowing of Christ. His goal is to attain to the “out-resurrection,” which is a special word signifying a unique resurrection status. The first phrase I show here as “if by any means.” This phrase in Greek is *ei pois* and is used only four times in the New Testament (Acts 27:12; Rom. 1:10; 11:14; Phil. 3:11). It surely expresses uncertainty of outcome, as is seen in its uses in the NT. We also see the subjunctive mood of the verb here, again expressing uncertainty: “I *may* attain.” In other words, at the time of this writing Paul was not at all certain that he would attain to this “out-resurrection.”

Unfortunately, most all Bible versions simply translate the word “out-resurrection” (Greek, *exanastasis*) as “resurrection” (Greek, *anastasis*). The Greek text however is clear. Here the apostle penned an almost unique word by adding the preposition *ek* to the normal word for resurrection. W. E. Vine, in his respected lexicon of NT words, comments on this word: “ek, ‘from’ or ‘out of,’ and . . . [*anastasis*], Philippians 3:11, followed by ek, lit., ‘the out-resurrection from among the dead.’”¹² This almost unique word is used only this one time in the NT, and only once or twice in other Greek literature (where its usage has nothing at all to do with a resurrection from the dead).

This word cannot refer to the normal resurrection of the saints, which is a *certainty* (not an *uncertainty*) for every saint (1 Cor.

¹² W. E. Vine, M. A. Entry for ‘Resurrection’. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of NT Words. <https://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/ved/r/resurrection.html>. 1940.

15:22; 51-52; 1 Thess. 4:13-16). We are helped in our understanding to realize that verse 11 is connected to verse 10. That is, our knowing Christ in discipleship is linked to the possibility of attaining to this “out-resurrection.” And, verse 11 is also clearly directly linked to verses 12-14, which speak of pressing onward as in a race for the prize. All of this should make us aware that *the “out-resurrection” speaks of a reward associated with following Christ in discipleship.* Some Greek experts view this word, due to the prefix of *ek*, as signifying an intensification of resurrection. They interpret it as a fullness of life in resurrection. This interpretation fits well with the idea of a special portion of eternal life to be realized by the overcomer in the age to come.

This out-resurrection equals the “better resurrection” of Hebrews 11:35 (KJV). Note that in Hebrews 11:35 some endured torture in order to gain a better resurrection. The “out-resurrection” is a special reward for the overcoming Christian. In line with the other verses we have seen, this is a special positive reward, realized in the coming kingdom of 1,000 years.¹³

The attainment to the out-resurrection is based upon our participation in Christ’s sufferings in verse ten. We can now add a word about suffering with Christ in order to attain to this millennial kingdom reward. Note Romans 8:17, as translated below in a more accurate translation rendered by an expert in the Greek. This translation brings out the important correlative conjunctions in the Greek text meaning “on the one hand . . . but on the other”:

“And if children, also heirs; heirs on one hand of God, joint heirs on the other of Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that also we may be glorified with Him.”

¹³ There seems to be a distinction between the *act* of resurrection and a *state* of resurrection. The “out-resurrection” should most likely be seen as a state of resurrection belonging to the age to come (see Luke 18:30; 20:33-35). An important passage describing this state would be Revelation 20:4-6. The term “first resurrection” in that passage may be better rendered as the “best resurrection.” The Greek word for “first” is *protos* (*Strong’s* #4413), which can mean “chief” or “best” instead of first in a numbered series. An example would be “the *best* robe” in Luke 15:22. Compare this with the thought in Hebrews 11:35.

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Rom. 8:17 is a very important verse that makes a distinction between “heirs of God” and “joint-heirs with Christ.” According to the construction of the Greek text, there is a definite difference between the two heirships here. As children of God, we are automatically in line to inherit some of the blessings God has for us by placing us in His family. In fact, Romans 8:29-30 shows some of these blessings that are the portion of every child of God (see also Galatians 3:29).

To be a “joint-heir with Christ,” however, is clearly conditional. Only those children of God who meet this condition of “suffering with Him” will be joint-heirs with Christ. Christ’s enduring obedience included suffering involved with that obedience (Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8; 12:3). As a result, He was given the highest position by God and will rule over all (Phil. 2:9-10; Heb. 1:9; 12:2). Christ has been made “heir of all things” (Heb. 1:2). When He returns, He will set up the kingdom on the earth and inherit (possess) it (Lk. 19:11-12; Heb. 1:6-9). In that kingdom, Christ will reign in glory (Is. 24:23; Matt. 19:28; 25:31; Mk. 10:37).

We have an opportunity to be fellow heirs, co-possessors of His coming kingdom (ruling together with Him—“glorified with Him”). However, such a possession is *conditional* for us. Our sharing of His rule will require obedience and suffering (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26; 3:21). The suffering here is “suffering with Him.” This means we are willing to suffer in order to be obedient to God, as He suffered by being obedient to the Father’s will (Phil. 3:8; Heb. 5:8; 12:3).

This suffering could include rejection or persecution for our faith. Yet, all types of human trials and suffering are useful in preparing us to reign with Christ in glory. This is because sufferings offer opportunity for us to grow to maturity through faith and obedience (Acts 14:22; Rom. 5:1-4; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Phil. 2:12-16; Heb. 10:35-36; Jas. 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:5-8; 4:1-2, 12-13). To “suffer with Him” means to take up our cross as Christ took up His cross. Our “taking up of our cross” involves a voluntary loss to our soul’s natural desires and choices (self-denial) in order to follow Christ in obedience, choosing His will (Matt. 16:24-26).

It should now be clear that our participation in the coming kingdom with Christ will yield two significant benefits for victorious Christians. Firstly, there is the wonderful promise that

these victors will enjoy a special portion of eternal life, experiencing a fullness of union with Christ. Secondly, they will be awarded crowns and be co-rulers with Christ in His 1,000 year kingdom.

Both of these benefits exactly match God's intentions for man in His creation of man. Genesis 1:26 states: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" For man to be in God's image means man is to express God in His qualities and virtues. This design will be fulfilled when the overcomers enjoy eternal life in fullness. Secondly, God created man to rule over His creation. This also will be fulfilled in the millennial kingdom, as the victorious Christians will be awarded positions of rulership in Christ's kingdom. Because this participation in Christ's kingdom is *conditional*, Paul was running the race for this kingdom reward as his great priority. He counted all else as loss in view of this.

3:12 — "Not that I have already obtained this" — Paul is saying that he has not already obtained what he has been writing about, namely the completed experience of knowing Christ and attaining the goal of the "out-resurrection." "Or am already made perfect." The word for "perfect" means to be brought to a state of completion, or to arrive at a goal. Paul is likely saying here that he has room for more growth in Christ-likeness. Another possible explanation is that he may be restating the fact that he has not yet reached his final goal of approval for the "out-resurrection." In any case the two ideas of Christian maturity and attaining to the out-resurrection are surely linked together.

The idea here of Paul not yet arriving at his goal may be the beginning of Paul's verbal picture of a race. If not, Paul's race picture surely begins with the next clause. "But I press on." Paul definitely presents a picture here, as evidenced by the following verses, of a runner running a race. The verb "press on" is repeated in verse 14 with clear reference to a race at the games. The verb for "press" means here to run swiftly in order to reach the goal. Paul is telling us that although he "has not yet arrived" at his goal, he says he presses on "to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own." I like a more meaningful translation of this clause

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from Young's Literal Translation: "if also I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by the Christ Jesus" (YLT; ASV and NASB similarly). For what was Paul laid hold of by Christ? Very simply, he was "laid hold of" in order to know Christ in the fullest way, to be brought into full experiential union with Christ. Paul is pressing on to know Christ in the fullest possible way in this life. This pursuit has a potential consummation in the next age by attaining to the "out-resurrection." In "the age to come" a greatly increased experience of eternal life would be his.

3:13 — "Brothers" — Paul interrupts his biographical narrative to be sure that the readers are brought into the picture. Paul is desirous that they too will pick up his passion to run such a race for the prize! He then repeats his claim that he has not laid hold of his goal yet. Next, the apostle writes: "But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead." He lets his readers know that he has a single aim, a single pursuit in life that captures his attention completely. He is pursuing the knowledge of Christ and the prize. The "one thing" refers to his single practice and his single aim. As a runner in a race who does not look behind him, so Paul forgets all behind to stretch towards the goal.

In his Christian race Paul is not distracted by anything that is already behind him. The things behind him would include not only his former life in Judaism, but also all of his failures as a believer, and his victories too. Thinking about the past is a great distraction in the Christian life. Many saints have fallen down in the race by focusing on their past failures, past hurts, trials, or tragedies. They may think about what "might have been," or savor memories of past service or past experiences of God. Let us follow Paul and forget about it all in order to concentrate on the goal and the prize still ahead of us in the race.

3:14 — There are three key things in this verse that we must identify. Firstly, what is the goal? The Greek word for "goal" here indicates the distant mark, or goal, in view. The runners in the games looked ahead at this mark and ran forward in a focused way toward it. As part of the race metaphor it would indicate the finish line of the race. The aim of Paul's race, his overarching goal, was to know Christ. This would include knowing the power of His

resurrection, and sharing in His sufferings. He *pressed toward* this mark. This is clear from verses 8-13. He was throwing aside everything to reach his goal of knowing Christ as fully as possible by the time he reached the end of his race.

Now, we must identify the prize. The race towards the goal is for the prize. If a runner won the race at the games, passing the goal as the victor, then he would be awarded the prize. It is most helpful to look at another Scripture portion where Paul also uses the picture of a race for a prize.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the **prize**? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified. (1 Cor. 9:24-27)

The Greek word for prize here is *brabeion* (*Strong's* #1017). It is used only twice in the NT. It is used here in Philippians 3:14 and also in 1 Corinthians 9:24 quoted above. It refers specifically to the prize (a perishable wreath) given to the victor in the athletic games of the time. The prize here for the believer equals the reward given to the overcomer for his victorious race. It is the reward related to the coming 1,000 year kingdom. It is the special portion of eternal life and co-ruling with Christ in His millennial reign. It is the “out-resurrection.” From my study the reward seems to be strongly related to the 1,000 year kingdom age, although some carry over of special status into the eternal age for the overcomer may be possible.

We should note that the prize is a reward for running a victorious race. Paul was concerned in 1 Corinthians 9 quoted above that he would run in such a way as to win. He was concerned about being disqualified from being awarded the prize. The prize is awarded to the victorious believer at the Judgment Seat of Christ. There Jesus will examine the believer's life and decide if the believer will receive this prize or if he will forfeit this reward in the kingdom of the next age.

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Although Paul's goal was to know Christ fully, he also constantly kept this final examination at the Judgment Seat in view. He knew this examination awaited him at the end of the race and his desire for approval on that day governed his life. Note the following passage in 2 Corinthians 5:

“So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” (2 Cor. 5:9-10)

It is instructive to note how some other notable men of faith kept the Judgement Seat of Christ uppermost in their minds, as Paul did, in their Christian life.

George Whitefield:

A biography of Whitefield noted that his awareness of an accounting at the Judgment Seat of Christ greatly affected his behavior. He constantly lived with this guiding principle in mind.¹⁴

George Müller:

He kept continually before him *his stewardship* of God's property; and sought to make the most of the one brief life on earth, and to use for the best and largest good the property held by him in trust. The things of God were deep realities, and, projecting every action and decision and motive into the light of the judgement-seat of Christ, he asked himself how it would appear to him in the light of that tribunal. Thus he sought prayerfully and conscientiously so to live and labour, so to deny himself, and, by love,

¹⁴ Details are noted in Arnold Dallimore's biography titled *George Whitefield*. See Vol. 2, p. 518. Whitefield was a mighty evangelist much used by the Lord in "The Great Awakening" of England and America in the 1700s.

serve God and man, as that he should not be ashamed before Him at His coming.¹⁵

Next we need to examine “the upward call of God.” This is the third item in this verse that needs to be identified. This may be the most difficult item of which to be certain. A few Bible teachers understand this “call” as paralleling the call to the victor in the ancient athletic games. After a victorious run, the victor was called by a herald to the victory platform where he received the prize. One interpreter sees it as a summons by God for the prize, and then equates it with the prize (reward) in this way. But, it is hard to see a summons to a prize equaling a prize. The upward call is definitely related to the prize, but probably has a deeper significance than a call to receive the prize. It is the “upward call of God *in Christ Jesus*.” Hebrews 3:1 says that believers “share in a heavenly calling.” God’s call to believers is to something “upward,” or heavenward, away from this earth. It is something in Christ Jesus Himself. It seems to be God’s call to us to gain Christ, laying hold of Him to the fullest extent (note verse 12).

The upward or heavenly call to us is one that prompts us to seek and know Christ above. It stands in contrast to the practice of those in Philippians 3:19 who have “minds set on earthly things.” Paul reminds us in Philippians 3:20 “that our citizenship is in heaven.” The “prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” seems to me to be the prize (the kingdom reward) that brings fulfillment to at least part of God’s calling to us in Christ. All believers will experience the spiritual realities of Christ and God in the New Jerusalem in eternity. This is part of their inheritance as children of God. But, only victorious believers will receive a special portion of these spiritual realities during Christ’s 1,000 year reign. The prize is likely the reward portion of our upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵ Arthur T. Pierson, *George Müller of Bristol* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, no date), p. 299. Müller was one of the most famous and influential believers of the late 1800s. He was known for his prayer life. Without any public appeals for money, the Lord used him to raise up an orphanage that eventually served over 1,000 orphans in Bristol, England. All funds for the orphanage were raised solely by dependent prayer to God.

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Paul's entreaty to follow his example (3:15-21)

¹⁵Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶Only let us hold true to what we have attained. ¹⁷Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

3:15 — “those of us who are mature” — In 3:12 Paul says he had not yet become perfect. That reference to “perfect” (Greek, *teleios*), in context, probably meant Paul had not yet reached the final goal of fully knowing Christ. Here, using the same Greek word, the context lends itself to translate the word as “mature,” as of adult stature (in contrast to a child or a youth). So here it means spiritual maturity. All words must be translated according to context, of course.

Paul is saying here to the Philippian believers: All of you who are mature ones should be constantly holding this way of thinking. What exactly does he mean? Paul is referring to the mindset he has just been talking about—a mind to pursue knowing Christ as the great goal in life. It is the desire to experience the power of His resurrection and to share in Christ's sufferings. It includes a willingness to die fully to self in order to obey God.

Then note that Paul tells us that if such mature ones start to drift from this attitude in any point, God will make that deviation known to them. I used to wonder why so many saints seemed to be oblivious to the fact that they were “off the path” of God's way. This verse tells us that *only those* who are spiritually mature, with a genuine discipleship attitude, will get enlightened by God when they start to deviate from this attitude. In other words, those who have

not held this attitude are already “in the dark” that they are missing God’s way.

Thank God that He is faithful to enlighten the mature ones when they start to drift! Any mature one who gets enlightened by God in this way should humble himself in repentance and turn once again to the right path and the right goal: knowing Christ in experience so as to become more like Him. It is actually very possible even for mature believers to misstep because their pursuit can undergo a subtle change. There can be a drift from the goal to know Christ to pursuing and focusing on Bible knowledge, proper Christian practice, Christian ministry, good deeds, etc. Such is the essence of the warning to the church at Ephesus: “But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first” (Rev. 2:4).

3:16 — The verse begins with the Greek word *plen* (*Strong’s* #4133). This word in this verse has been translated in various ways: “however,” “but,” “nevertheless,” “yet,” and “only” for example. I like “only,” which is how the ESV translates the word. Paul is saying here that the attitude that has brought us to any stage of maturity is the very one we should keep living by. Paul is reinforcing his appeal in verse 15 to maintain the right attitude, the right mindset. True spiritual maturity and growth come solely through the principle of seeking to know Him intimately in our experience, especially in the power of His resurrection and in the sharing of His sufferings (3:10).

Life Application

In Philippians 3:7-14 we have seen the passion that drives Paul. It is a passion to gain Christ, to know Him in the fullest possible way. Paul has also unfolded to us a picture of the Christian life as a race towards a goal for a prize. The goal of the race is to gain Christ to the fullest extent in our time on earth in this life. And the prize for running a good race is a special reward in the coming millennial kingdom. This prize will consist of a greatly magnified experience of eternal life (knowing Christ) and will include sharing the responsibility of rulership with Him. Now, it is up to us to pick up this goal in our lives. This is the goal we must learn to embrace as

our life's priority every day. We can seek this priority even in the midst of routine matters, like performing a job, going to school, and living with family members. Of course, this goal also applies to our service to God in the church.

May I suggest that you pause just now to pray about this priority and ask God to work in you to hold onto this mindset each day? Ask Him to strengthen you to seek Him daily for the fulfillment of God's upward call to you to know Christ. Ask God to let you know when you are drifting away from this mindset of pursuing Christ to gain Him. Be on the alert that even good things, perhaps Christian things, may become a subtle replacement for seeking Christ Himself. God is for us and He will hear our prayers on these matters as we pray with a true heart to Him.

3:17 — Now Paul urges the believers in Philippi to take note of himself as an example to follow. See 4:9 also in this regard. Paul was not saying this from pride. Rather, like a loving father or friend, he was urging those close to him to walk in a way pleasing to God. Paul had confidence that he was walking uprightly with God. He was confident that he was following the best path, the path of seeking to know Christ as his goal. In addition, Paul makes note that there are others who also walk according to this pattern. These others would surely include Timothy and Epaphroditus, whom the Philippians could also observe in person.

3:18-19 — The apostle now turns to a negative example, describing "many" who have a walk contrary to his walk. Before we get into the details of these persons and who they might be, let us consider why Paul now speaks to the Philippians about these people. It seems logical to me that Paul is mentioning such people because he has some concern for his readers. He is concerned that they might be influenced by the negative example of those who walk, or live, wrongly. Paul specifically notes that he has often spoken about these "many" to the Philippians. Since Paul is not one given to gossip, his speaking has a true purpose. It is a warning about the possible influence of these who walk wrongly.

Even though interpreters might have differing views on the details related to these "many," the summary of their problem is plain: they are those with "minds set on earthly things." Paul's

overall thought is: don't follow the example of those who set their minds on earthly things, because our citizenship is in heaven. We should be those who set our minds on heavenly things, seeking the spiritual realities of knowing Christ Himself.

Now I share my understanding of the details concerning these who constitute a negative example. The reader may come to a different conclusion about their identity. The main thing we should take away from this passage is that Paul does not want the Philippians to be influenced by the negative example of this group. Their example of living is exactly opposite of the example Paul is trying to set in his own life as a Christian.

Paul writes "for many, of whom I have often told you." This certainly suggests that this group of "many" was not part of the Philippian assembly. When Paul wanted to speak about some or many *among* those addressed in a letter, he makes this identification clear (1 Cor. 4:18; 6:11; 11:20; 15:12; 2 Cor. 12:21; 2 Thess. 3:11).

Paul then uses this phrase: "and now tell you even with tears." We do not have much Biblical information about Paul weeping for others. This deep concern for certain people would indicate that they are straying believers, not unbelievers taken as a whole (note Ephesians 4:17 where Paul speaks of unbelievers as a whole.) Paul speaks of his weeping for believers in Acts 20:31. Paul labored much over the churches and his emotions were affected by them (for example: 2 Cor. 6:11-13; 11:28-29; 12:15; Gal. 4:19; Phil 1:8; 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:8).

How should we understand Paul's statement that "many . . . walk as enemies of the cross of Christ"? To many Bible readers this clause may make them immediately think that this description must be of unbelievers. But, what is the context here? The context of this chapter is all about discipleship, seeking after knowing the Lord and following Him in obedience. Even the cross in Philippians 2:8, where Christ is our example, is not from the perspective of its redemptive work. Rather, it is from the perspective of Christ's willing obedience to the Father as His servant. Then, in Chapter Three, the emphasis on the cross is on Paul's desire to know Christ by sharing in His sufferings. Therefore, the context is the cross of discipleship, not the cross of redemption. The cross of discipleship is the cross we voluntarily take up (self-denial and obedience) to

follow Christ. The cross of redemption is the cross where Jesus bore our sins as our substitute (Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18).

Can believers act as “enemies” of God? James makes it clear that they can (Jas. 4:1-5). To be an enemy of the cross of discipleship is to be unwilling to follow the Lord in obedience. Unfortunately, we can find a number of examples of this in Scripture. And, we all know believers who resist denying themselves in daily life and thus refuse the cross of discipleship. The overarching description of their resistance of the cross is that they have “minds set on earthly things.”

Unfortunately, this describes many genuine believers in the church today, especially in America. These believers are captured by materialism and are pursuing the things of this life, at the expense of seeking the heavenly and spiritual things. Some of the “things of this life” that can affect the focus of Christians might be “success” (whether financial success or achievement in other areas of life), family life, entertainment and pleasures. Christians may also be preoccupied with the “worries of life” (Lk. 8:14; 21:34). Those who set their minds on such things are not looking at the goal of fully knowing Christ. They are not making it their aim to please Christ in preparation for the coming Judgment Seat of Christ.

Another significant phrase is “their end is destruction.” Here is where many readers and interpreters make too quick of a judgment. When they see that the end of these “many” is called “destruction,” they assume this equals eternal perdition. Therefore they tend to think that these “many” are unbelievers, or some type of false believers, or believers who have now lost their salvation. But in interpreting Scripture we must take time to carefully look into things. It is well to remember that probably no Greek word has any explicit and definite theological meaning! These words were part of the language of the day and were used by the common people in all types of conversations, not just theological discussions. The exact meaning of any word must be determined by its context and also in comparison to its other uses in Scripture. The study of key words should be done carefully. Appendix B lists some resources for this type of study. A number of good resources are accessible for free on the Internet.

The Greek word for “destruction” here is *apoleia* (*Strong’s* #684). This noun is used in 19 verses in the NT. Sometimes it does

describe the eternal destiny of the lost (examples: Rom. 9:22; Phil. 1:28; Rev. 17:8, 11). Other times it does not. For example, this word appears in 1 Timothy 6:9: “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires which plunge people into ruin and destruction (*apoleia*).” If one examines the context (1 Tim. 6:6-12), one sees that the warning about desiring to be rich is applied here to the believer. The very next verse states: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” The reference is to believers, who after yielding to the temptation to get rich, end up wandering away from the faith (meaning that faith which was once held by them and influenced them). Thus, they end up being pierced with many pangs. Since these are true believers, if we hold that the destruction in verse ten must mean eternal perdition, then we have a real problem. Taking that line of interpretation means we have to cancel out the clear truth of eternal security by grace!

The word here in 1 Timothy 6:9 must mean to suffer some temporal (not eternal) ruin or loss. In this case, a believer who yielded to the temptation does suffer a ruin or loss, certainly at least the loss of fellowship and comfort from God. This also leads to sorrow and emotional pain. This noun is also used to mean “waste” in Matthew 26:8 and Mark 14:4. There it refers to the woman who poured out the flask of expensive perfume upon Jesus to prepare Him for His burial. Some stated that this expensive perfume was “wasted” in this way.

We should also consider that this noun (“destruction”) is derived from the verb *apollumi* (*Strong’s* #622). This verb has a variety of meanings, *dependent as always on the context*. For example, the verb can mean to destroy, to lose, to render useless, to be deprived of, to put out of the way and more. Paul is talking in Philippians 3:17-19 about patterns of living, both positive and negative. I have described how Paul’s pattern is that of proper discipleship. Its end is the reward of the “out-resurrection.” Now we can review a key passage on discipleship, which shows both a positive and negative recompense, with the verb *apollumi* used in relation to a negative recompense.

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²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose [*apollumi*] it; but whoever loses [*apollumi*] his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done." (Matt. 16:24-27)

This passage above from Matthew 16 is one talking about discipleship. Note also that the passage ends in verse 27, which speaks of repayment according to works. Since works are the basis here for recompense, this passage is most certainly *not* talking about eternal salvation, which is apart from works (Eph. 2:8-9). Verse 24 contains the basic terms of discipleship. One must be willing to "lose" his life (the word here for life is "soul") for Jesus' sake in order to "find" his life. This means that the believer who chooses to follow Christ in discipleship must be willing to lose, or forego, what satisfies his soul in order to follow Christ.

Notice how this soul-satisfaction is described in terms of "gaining" what this world has to offer (verse 26). Notice that *apollumi* is used to mean to "lose" one's life, or soul. To "save" one's life means to preserve it, keep it untouched from any damage or loss. To do this means we want to hold onto what pleases us and makes our soul happy in this life. On the other hand, if we are willing to deny ourselves what we want in order to follow Christ then we will be recompensed with finding our soul's real satisfaction. This recompense takes place when the Son of Man comes again. At that time He will repay every man according to his deeds. The deeds of men are viewed here in two simple categories: preserving one's soul or losing one's soul for Christ's sake.

The possibility of loss to the disciple's soul is seen in verses 25 and 26. If we keep our soul whole and happy now in this world (unwilling to suffer loss to its desires), then when Jesus comes we will "lose our soul." To lose our soul, through Christ's judgment at His Judgment Seat, means at least to lose all that we might have

gained in positive reward had we followed Christ in discipleship. We will lose the benefits of the out-resurrection, with its special enjoyment of eternal life. And, we will lose partnership with Christ, co-ruling with Him in the coming kingdom age of 1,000 years.

Bearing these discipleship and reward principles in mind, we can now readily see how the persons in Philippians 3:18-19 *provide an exact contrast to Paul's pattern of discipleship*. Paul's pattern is one of willing to suffer loss to everything in order to know Christ, and attain to the out-resurrection reward. In contrast, those whose "god is their belly" and have minds "set on earthly things" will suffer great loss at Christ's Judgment Seat. All that they could have possessed in the coming kingdom is lost and ruined! Any believer who rejects the path of genuine discipleship is moving toward *an end that is ruin*.

Another key clause is "their god is their belly." It certainly seems like this means more than bodily appetite in eating. It surely means that they value and seek after what satisfies their appetites belonging to the old nature and the self-life. A very similar wording is used by Paul in Romans 16:17-18 to describe those who were deceiving saints and causing parties in the church. There the wrong appetites mean some selfish desire.

The phrase "whose glory is in their shame" means that these believers take delight in things that they should view as shameful for a believer. Some interpreters make this matter of shameful things extreme, meaning immorality. But, I do not believe it needs to be that extreme. The fleshly appetite and the glorying in things that should be shameful are clearly modified by the clause, "who set their mind on earthly things." Just the pursuit of earthly pleasures and earthly things, not necessarily immorality, is enough to be considered shameful in God's eyes. After all, we should be those, as God's people, who are not seeking these things (Lk. 8:14; 16:13; 17:31-33; Col. 3:1-3; 1Tim. 6:6-11; 2 Tim. 4:10; 1 Jn. 2:15-17).

Most likely the "many" of 3:18-19 refers to Christians who did not live in Philippi, but could exert some negative influence upon the Christian community in Philippi. They may have been itinerant travelers who could have passed through Philippi from time to time. Philippi was a leading city of the province of Macedonia, and thus was a place of traffic for travelers. These may have included some from Corinth, the capital of the neighboring province of Achaia. Or,

it could have been that the Philippians might visit Corinth or Achaia and be wrongly influenced by some believers there. That worldly-minded believers were existent at that time is surely true (see James 4:2-4).

We should not be at all surprised that there were “negative examples” of Christians existent at that time, ones who had their “minds set on earthly things.” This problem is still plaguing the church today. Moreover, now we even see a significant problem beyond just a *focus* on earthly things. Material blessings in this life has even become a *key doctrine* in some circles. This is true in the so called “prosperity gospel” movement. That message is all about God’s supposed aim to bless believers in this age with worldly goods and other worldly “blessings.” This is false teaching that is creating blight upon the testimony of the church.

Finally, the Scripture contains a particularly powerful example of one who suffered loss because he focused on the things of this world and disregarded spiritual realities. That example is Esau, and Hebrews 12:16-17 describes how his choice brought a great loss for him. For a full interpretation of this warning concerning Esau, see Appendix C for an article titled *The Birthright*. This article explains how the birthright, which was despised by Esau, has everything to do with recompense for the believer in the next age.

3:20 — In great contrast to some who were focused on earthly things, Paul reminds the believers that our real citizenship is in heaven, where Christ now is and where our real life now is (Col. 3:1-4). Those who were citizens of Philippi were privileged to have Roman citizenship, as Philippi was a Roman colony (Acts 16:12, 21). In the Mediterranean world of that day, to be a Roman citizen was something of special status and privilege. Yet, we are indeed citizens of God’s kingdom (Col. 1:13), where Christ is our Lord, not Caesar. Christ is the One we must follow in our lifestyle (2:5-13). The verb here translated “await” includes both the notions of hope and patience. With hope and patience we are waiting for Christ to come from heaven and to change our bodies. We should long for His coming, and not be focused on earthly things.

3:21 — When Christ comes again He will use His power to change our body, which is decaying, into a body like His gloried,

resurrection body (1 Cor. 15:43). In this sense Christ will be our Savior at His coming. This same hope is stated in Romans 8:23-25. Rom. 8:25 says that “we wait for it [the redemption of our body] with patience.” This change removes the presence of sin from us.

Life Application

In Philippians 3:17-21 Paul the apostle is urging the Philippian believers to take note of how he and others live the Christian life. Their living was in contrast to “many” who were living much differently. Paul urges the believers to live as citizens of heaven, which they truly are in reality. Paul was living with a mindset of seeking heavenly things. He desired to forsake all in order to increasingly gain Christ and be ready for His return. This is the way of discipleship, learning of Jesus and how He lives. But, those who focus on the earthly things of this life are termed “enemies of the cross of Christ”—the cross of true discipleship.

In much of Christianity today the cross of discipleship has been lost, both in teaching and in practice. This message of the cross is not popular. Instead, a “me-centered” message is often preached and sought after. It falsely teaches that God wants to give you whatever makes you happy in this life. The true message of discipleship is one that calls us to deny ourselves and take up our cross—God’s will for us—and follow Jesus. Only by responding to this call can we be truly satisfied spiritually. This is true now and also especially in “the age to come” (the next age of Christ’s 1,000 year kingdom). Those who only want to satisfy their earthly desires (the god of their appetites) will suffer great loss at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

So, let us be humbled before God and believe His word. Let us reject the message of the false teachers. Let us seek and find His grace to take up our cross and follow Jesus. This is a daily choice, made by seeking God in humility and sincerity each day. Let us set our minds on the things above, where Christ is, and eagerly await His return. He is our life, and to know Him as fully as possible is our goal. Let us run the race of our Christian life with endurance, looking to Jesus (Heb. 12:1-2).

Chapter Four

Christ, our Contentment and our Strength

Directions for steadfastness, unity, joy, reasonableness and peace (4:1-9)

¹Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. ²I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. ⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

4:1 — Paul expresses his closeness in heart to these saints, calling them beloved and longing to see them. He calls them “my joy and crown.” These believers are a joy to Paul now, and an anticipated joy in the presence of Jesus at His coming. Another verse expresses this future desire also: “For what is our hope or joy

or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not even you?" (1 Thess. 2:19). Paul viewed the believers at Thessalonica and at Philippi as his joyful work in the Lord, which would result in reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Chapter Four begins with the word "therefore." This means that his admonition to "stand firm *thus* in the Lord" has its basis on what has been said before. The Greek word for "thus" means "in this manner." Here Paul is pointing back to the excellent way of pursuing Christ to know Him. Another Bible version makes this more apparent: "So then, in this way, my dearly beloved brothers, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord, dear friends" (HCSB). If his readers follow this pursuit of knowing Christ, *then* they will "stand firm in the Lord."

To stand firm means not to falter or be defeated by things coming against us. In the case of the believers in Philippi, the evil workers (3:2) and those setting their minds on earthly things (3:18-19), as well as disunity (4:2-3) were threats to the stability of the believers' walk. There is also mention of "standing firm" in 1:27, where the opposition from opponents of the gospel message was a threat. *The single-minded pursuit of Christ to know Him intimately is the greatest secret to not being knocked off the path in the Christian race.* No matter what happens to us, if we maintain this focus, we can have stability and victory. If we seek something else, like appreciation from others, a successful ministry, an overcoming church life, or a relatively trouble free human life, then we are subject to being knocked down in our race. May we pay attention to Paul's words: "So then, in this way . . . stand firm in the Lord." (HCSB).

4:2-3 — These two women of Philippi had been workers together with Paul for the advancement of the gospel. Most probably this took place when Paul was in Philippi previously (second and third missionary journeys; Acts 16:12-40; 20:1-6). We do not know fully the nature of their disagreement. It may have been related to how the gospel work was to be carried out. I have learned that strong personalities come out when the Lord's work is being done. It is easy for such ones to think that their way is right. Conflict can occur when workers want to be recognized as "leaders" or when they imagine themselves as the one who is "the leader."

But, in the work of the Lord, we have only one Leader, Jesus Christ Himself (Matt. 23:10). All of us together must be submitted to Him as the Leader, and to one another in humility (Eph. 5:21; 1 Pet. 5:5).

Paul's remedy for these sisters is for them "to mind the same thing in the Lord" (LITV). This translation is a literal translation, which I think captures the idea better than to "agree in the Lord." The same Greek phrase is the first one used by Paul in 2:2. It may also mean to be of the same mind or have the same mindset. In Philippians 2:2 this phrase is modified by phrases which follow. A literal translation puts the whole thought of the phrase in 2:2 this way: "mind the same thing—having the same love—of one soul—minding the one thing" (2:2, YLT).

These ideas surely suggest that the charge in 4:2 involves something much deeper than normal human conflict resolution. It means much more than finding some common ground for agreement and some compromise on matters on which they differ. It is something that Paul says that the two sisters are to experience "in the Lord." Paul is entreating the sisters that they should both *pay attention to the same thing, or have the same mindset about something*. What same thing are these two sisters to mind? It must be the "one thing" that Paul has been speaking about in Chapter Three. This one thing is also the secret noted in 4:1 that enables believers to "stand firm in the Lord." The thing that must dominate our thinking and our intentions is the pursuit of Christ, to know Him intimately. If both of these sisters did this—*seeking to know and experience Christ* in their present situation of disharmony—then harmony would come in. The issue at hand is unity with fellow believers. These sisters need to be attuned to *Christ and His way and attitude of living with others*. See the comments on 2:2-4 for more details.

Paul enlists the help here of someone Paul terms as his "true companion" or "yokefellow" [a more literal translation]. This person is not identified and there have been different suggestions for his or her identity. The term "yokefellow" suggests a stronger identification with Paul in ministry than "fellow worker." It may well be Luke (see footnote).¹⁶ The Clement noted here as a fellow

¹⁶ In His commentary (*Paul's Letter to the Corinthians*) Gordon Fee puts forth a case for the possibility of Luke as this true companion. This proposal is

worker is supposedly Clement of Rome, an early bishop in Rome. This identification is according to a church history written by Eusebius, perhaps around A. D. 320.

Paul is enlisting this “true companion” and Clement to help Euodia and Syntyche in seeking and knowing Christ in their relationship and fellowship with one another.

4:4 — “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!” This charge is not disconnected from the previous verse. We can and should rejoice because our names are written in the book of life. Even in the midst of difficulties, like personal controversies (vs. 2-3), we should find rejoicing in Christ Himself and all that we possess in Him.

4:5 — Here is a command: “Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.” The word translated “reasonableness” is also translated variously as forbearance, gentleness, or moderation. The Greek word is *epieikes* (*Strong’s* #1933). The word is used to describe a quality of Christ Himself (2 Cor. 10:1). This virtue is one that involves the treatment of others without a sense of strictness. A person exhibiting forbearance does not press others for what may be exactly and justly due. Instead, he exhibits reasonableness, gentleness and patience in dealing with others. He is even willing to suffer some wrong done to him without complaint in order to preserve peace. J. B. Lightfoot, a noted scholar and English bishop in the 1800s, writes that this word

summarized as follows. Luke’s written record in Acts uses the pronoun “we,” as evident in Acts 16 while at Philippi. But then the use of “we” in the narrative does not appear again until Acts 20:1-6 when Paul returned to Philippi a few years later. Thus, Luke may have stayed at Philippi for some period of time. At the juncture of Acts 20:6, both Paul and Luke left Philippi. However, identifying the “yokefellow” as Luke would also have to make allowance for the fact that Luke was with Paul in the early part of his first imprisonment. It was then that Paul wrote to Colossae and to Philemon (Col. 4:14; Phlm. 1:24). Yet, Luke could have returned to Philippi before the epistle was written to the believers there. It seems that the epistle to Philippi was written late in Paul’s imprisonment. It may have been written after his letters to Colossae and to Philemon (2:24).

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forbearance is “the opposite to a spirit of contention and self-seeking.”¹⁷

Paul wants all of us to have this virtue displayed towards everyone. It reflects the attitude of God toward us (Ps. 130:3-4). I believe the apostle here still has in mind the disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche as he writes this verse. There is the need for them to hear this command, which would help cure their contention.

Paul adds “the Lord is at hand.” Technically, in terms of the Greek, this could mean “near” in time (speaking of His imminent return) or “near” in space, always near and available to us. I favor an interpretation that means the Lord is “at hand” in terms of His coming again. All other NT uses of this clause point to the nearness of Christ’s return. This idea also reinforces the command that we should indeed allow our forbearance to be known to others. This is because when the Lord suddenly comes we will have to give an account to Him at His Judgment Seat. This realization should surely give us the incentive to treat others with forbearance. If we deal with others strictly, without mercy, then Christ may deal with us in the same way at the Judgment (Jas. 2:12-13). An interesting parallel to the thoughts of this verse is seen in James 5:8-9:

“You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.” (Jas. 5:8-9)

4:6-7 — Paul writes these verses to comfort and reassure the Philippian believers in the midst of all of their trials and pressures. These believers had opposition from the unbelievers (1:28), potential threats from the legalists (3:2), threats to a godly walk (3:18-19), and problems of unity in the church (4:2). They also knew of the constant challenge of discipleship, dying to self in order to gain the prize (3:8-11). In addition, Paul wrote (approximately five years earlier) that the churches in Macedonia had suffered “a

¹⁷ J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1888), p. 160.

severe test of affliction” and that these churches were marked by “extreme poverty” (2 Cor. 8:1-2).

For all causes of anxiety the apostle gives the unique remedy—trustful prayer to a hearing and caring God. He tells us that “in everything” (every circumstance) we should let our requests be known to our God. “Prayer” is the general word for all kinds of prayer. “Supplication” involves prayer about specific needs to God. Prayer requests are to be made along with thanksgiving. Such thanksgiving acknowledges God’s goodness and care in every situation (see 1 Peter 5:7). “Supplication with thanksgiving” probably does not mean to thank God in advance for His answer to our prayer, although there is nothing wrong with that. Rather, thankfulness should describe our approach to God. We are simply grateful to Him for Him being there in our lives.

Prayer is the most concrete expression of our dependence upon God. Therefore, we should pray “in everything.” Great men of God, like Hudson Taylor and George Müller, have testified that they prayed over the smallest details of their lives.¹⁸ The following story is recorded about George Müller: “In the early days of his [Müller’s] love to Christ, visiting a friend, and seeing him mending a quill pen, he said: ‘Brother H___, do you pray to God when you mend your pen?’ The answer was: ‘It would be well to do so, but I cannot say that I do pray when mending my pen.’ Brother Müller replied: ‘I always do, and I mend my pen much better.’”¹⁹

One time a man asked Hudson Taylor about Taylor’s prayer life. Taylor simply replied that the man might be surprised about Taylor’s habit of praying for the smallest of things. We can surely learn from these great giants of the faith in this matter of praying over the smallest things.

¹⁸ Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) was used by God for probably the largest foreign missionary work of modern times, the evangelization of inland China. George Müller (1805-1898) was used of God in England to build and maintain a sizeable orphanage solely by prayer to God. He had over 10,000 recorded answers to his prayers. Later he traveled worldwide to share with Christians how to have a confident prayer life.

¹⁹ Arthur T. Pierson, *George Müller of Bristol*, p. 373.

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Hudson Taylor also said this about the connection between doing the Lord's work and prayer: "You can work without praying, but it is a bad plan, but you cannot pray in earnest without working."

Bringing matters to God in prayer and truly entrusting them to Him for His working and His will brings in peace. It is the very peace of God, something infused into us. We cannot fix or control many problems and situations. However, we can bring them to the One who has all power, all lovingkindness, and all wisdom. We can trust Him. We can rest in peace with Him in charge. Often the circumstances that give rise to anxiety are not resolved the moment the trustful prayer is over. The circumstances may continue for some time. So it is beyond our understanding how nothing might change outwardly, but peace is experienced inwardly. Anxiety is replaced by peace simply through our trustful prayer, and surely this is a mystery which surpasses all understanding!

Such peace guards (the Greek word means like a military guard) our hearts and keeps us from the damage of distressing and anxious thoughts. This takes place "in Christ Jesus." It is in the reality of our spiritual union with Christ that peace is realized.

4:8 — The apostle is nearing the close of his letter and says "finally." Here is a closing exhortation to the readers to think on certain character virtues. Such thinking will help the believer dispel the lesser and baser thoughts of man and inspire him to be in line with Christ's character. Let us give a brief definition of each of these virtues.

True: That which is genuine, honest and reliable. This points to Christ (Jn. 14:6). Dwelling on Christ as the reliable and honest One helps us to live in accordance with this trait.

Honorable: That which is noble in character.

Just: That which is just and equitable. This is surely defined by God's standards as to what is right.

Pure: Morally pure, again according to God's standards.

Lovely: That which is beautiful and pleasing, drawing out the love or admiration of others toward it.

Commendable: Conduct in persons that is admired and well-spoken of by others.

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Excellence: Virtue or moral excellence. (Note 2 Peter 1:3, 5)

Worthy of praise: Conduct worthy of praise by others because it is according to God.

The verse ends with “think about these things.” Considering and thinking about these virtues will impact a Christian’s walk.

4:9 — This verse begins (in the Greek) with “*which* things you also learned.” In other words, the very virtues noted in verse eight were ones that Paul said were taught in his ministry and lived in his life. Paul was not bragging here, but telling his readers honestly that his teaching exalted the very virtues of Christ. And, Christ was also honored or exalted in his life (1:20). As with prayer in verse six, peace is the result of this practice. But, here it is not the “peace of God,” but “the God of peace.” The more we walk in the ways of Christ, the more we experience the God of peace.

Thanksgiving for the gift from the Philippians (4:10-20)

¹⁰I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹²I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me. ¹⁴Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. ¹⁵And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit ¹⁸I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus ²⁰To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

4:10 — Paul rejoices at the recent gift received from Philippi through Epaphroditus (4:18). The saints in Philippi were concerned

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about Paul, but “had no opportunity” to share with him before this point in time. We do have some details, perhaps not all, of gifts given to Paul by the Philippians. On Paul’s second missionary journey he preached the gospel at Philippi and then went to Thessalonica (Acts 16:12-17:9). While in Thessalonica, the Philippian church sent a gift to Paul more than once (Phil. 4:15-16). It appears that when Paul later went to Corinth on the same journey, a gift was brought to him again from the Philippians (Acts 18:3-5; 2 Cor. 11:7-9).

Paul did visit Philippi again (twice) during his third missionary journey (Acts 20:1-6). It seems likely that the church there did support him again at that time. But, then there may have been a gap of perhaps a few years during which there was no gift given to the apostle from the assembly at Philippi. Yet, now, in this letter Paul greatly rejoices that concern for him has “blossomed again” (he uses a Greek word derived from the plant world). What circumstances caused a “lack of opportunity” in the apparent years of non-support is unknown. One may suppose that Paul is just being polite in saying the church had no opportunity for a long while. However, it is more likely that Epaphroditus, who brought the gift (4:18), gave Paul some information about the delay in the care for him by the church at Philippi. Now their partnership in the gospel has been wonderfully revived.

4:11-13 — Paul assures the Philippians he is not speaking from a position of want. The apostle states the reason: “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.” The idea here of contentment is contained in the Greek word *autarkes* (*Strong’s* #842), used here in the text. This idea of contentment was part of the Stoic philosophy among the Greeks of that day. The Greek word meant “self-sufficient,” being able to handle all circumstances by one’s own power. It meant being content with whatever life brought along. There is a huge difference, however, in Paul’s ability to handle all kinds of circumstances. He did so not through his own strength, but in Christ (v. 13).

Following on verse 11, which indicates that Paul has learned to be content in *whatever* situation he finds himself, Paul begins verse 12 with a general statement: “I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance . . .”

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Although Paul is writing in the context of the financial gift, it seems here that he is not limiting circumstances to material goods or food. He does go on, however, at the end of the verse, to apply his experience of contentment to food and material goods.

Paul had been brought low (or “humbled”) in many circumstances during his ministry, and in all of them he learned Christ as his strength (1 Cor. 4:13; 2 Cor. 4:7-9; 6:4-5; 11:23-29; 12:7-10). There were also times when Paul “abounded,” and this may include in scope both things material, and spiritual (2 Cor. 12:1-4; Phil. 4:16, 18).

For Paul, any positive or negative circumstance of life did not disrupt his contentment, or his sufficiency in Christ. He was a person who found in Christ all power to endure every situation in life and steadfastly maintain his pursuit of knowing Him. In difficulties we can learn to wait upon the Lord, and deepen our trust in Him. In prosperous times we can learn in humility and thankfulness that all good things come from God, not ourselves. Also, we can then offer all that we have back to Him for His use and His glory.

Negative circumstances can make a person’s heart bitter, or make his faith in God waver. Positive circumstances can potentially turn one’s heart away from the Lord to the pleasures of this life or the pride of life. So, in every circumstance of life we must seek the Lord, learn of Him, and draw strength from Him to be faithful to God. Paul here tells us that: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

The clause “I have learned the secret” derives from a Greek verb which was used for the initiation rites into the pagan mystery cults. Paul’s “learning the secret” here refers to his learning to experience Christ as his strength and contentment in every circumstance of life.

Life Application

It seems that the most challenging things of human life are the various circumstances in which we find ourselves. Circumstances usually determine people’s level of contentment. In contrast, Paul tells us in verses 4:11-13 that he has learned to be content in

whatever circumstance he is in. He illustrates the spectrum of personal circumstances when he uses terms like being “brought low” and abounding, or abundance and need. Do we let our circumstances affect our contentment? Or, like Paul, are we *learning* to be content regardless of the circumstance? Learning contentment is a process. And Paul tells us that the secret of this contentment is found in Christ Himself.

Christ empowered Paul to be content. The literal translation of 4:13 is “I have strength for all things in Christ the One strengthening me” (LITV). The phrase “in Christ” describes our vital union with Christ. When we are living in this vital union, experiencing Him, then His power enables us to do all that God calls us to do. We may have to endure difficult circumstances, but with Christ’s power we can do so while exalting Christ in our living.

Donnie Preslar, a godly pastor I know well, made this spiritual observation: “Contentment will come from a sense of our completeness in Christ.”²⁰ We can learn that Christ is really all we need. This contentment comes from Christ; it is found in Him. He is the resource. He is the power. “The reality of the vital union we have with the Lord Jesus Christ is the basis of our learning contentment.”²¹ We may have no control over our circumstances, but we can control how we respond to them. Paul had learned to respond to them in Christ and thus in contentment. We humans tend to think that if we get what we desire then we will be content. However, as Donnie Preslar superbly explains: “Contentment is not the fulfillment of what we want but it is the realization of how much we already possess in Christ.”²²

Contentment is surely a learning process. Paul learned it in his circumstances, high and low. We learn contentment *in Christ*, who is our sufficiency and strength. “In our identification with Him—our union with Him—we find the empowerment to learn contentment in any circumstance in life.”²³ So, let us decide to seek Him and know Him in all circumstances. It is all right for someone

²⁰ Shared in a sermon on November 29, 2017.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

to try to better his circumstances if he can. But, if not, will we learn contentment in Christ?

Will you join me in sincerely praying this prayer, which we both need? “Dear Lord, we confess that we are too much affected by our circumstances in life. We experience mere human contentment or discontentment most of the time because of our circumstances. Lord Jesus, we want to learn something more of You instead. We desire to find Your strength to do all things that You call us to do in every circumstance. You surely are calling us to discover You as the source of our contentment. We want to learn that what we have in You makes us complete, without any lack. We want to learn *this* as the basis of our contentment. Thank You, Lord for hearing our prayer. We ask You to remind us of these things as we walk through the circumstances of life.”

4:14-16 — In spite of the fact that Paul did not speak from want, and that he could handle all circumstances, he tells the Philippians that their care for him is commendable. They have shared their material goods with him while he was experiencing trouble. This “trouble” must refer to his imprisonment. In verses 15 and 16, the apostle reviews the wonderful history of the Philippians’ partnership in the gospel with him.

4:17 — “Not that I seek the gift” — At no time was Paul seeking money from others in an attitude of selfish concerns. See 1Thessalonians 2:4-6. Although as an apostle he felt his work should be worthy of some wage or support (1 Cor. 9:3-14), he was always willing to forego such a “right” where it might hinder the gospel (1 Cor. 9:12-19). He often supported himself and others with him through his trade of making tents (Acts 18:3; 20:34-35; 1 Cor. 4:12). He did this also as an example, showing that believers should work hard and not be a burden to others (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:6-9). He also worked to be an example to believers that we should work in order to help others materially (Acts 20:34-35). Yet, he obviously felt that support of his work in the spreading of the gospel was good.

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Paul's heart for the welfare of others let him view their financial support not as a "gain" for him, but as "fruit" for them. This attitude once again shows Paul's selflessness in service (2:19-21). This fruit speaks especially of reward in the coming day of Christ. This thought reaches back to the prayer in the first chapter. Those who "approve what is excellent"—determining what things are of Christ—are preparing for approval in the day of Christ. These are "filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ" (1:11). The same Greek word for "fruit" in 1:11 is also used in 4:17.

There is no doubt that Paul viewed the financial support of the Philippians as part of the "good work" (1:6) that had its source in Christ. Therefore, as the believers in Philippi participated in this good work they could expect their gift to be counted as a "fruit of righteousness" at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Through their gift Paul found great encouragement that the lives of the Philippian believers were doing well spiritually.

4:18 — Paul describes the gift in an overflowing description as meeting his needs in full. Epaphroditus is acknowledged as the faithful messenger from Philippi who brought the gift. Most significantly, the gift is described in OT terms as a sacrifice on the altar, which fills God's senses with a soothing aroma (Lev. 1:9). This sacrifice is fully acceptable because it is derived from Christ Himself; it is work done out of Christ Himself. This makes it pleasing to God. Our actions, when done in union with Christ, out of His life and in His power, are pleasing to God. This is fruit borne from abiding in Christ (Jn. 15:4).

4:19 — The apostle boldly tells the Philippians that God will in turn supply their needs. This is not a promise that all believers can "claim" for material supply from God. It is a promise for the Philippians. They had shared their goods with the apostle for the gospel work, and he now tells them that God in turn will take care of their needs. Paul assured them that God would supply their needs in accordance with His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Today, those who give material things to others in need, and do so through Christ,

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also provide “sacrifices” which are pleasing to God (Heb. 13:16). This verse is not one any believer can claim in order for his needs to be met. However, there are clear promises in the Word of God that assure us that God will meet our needs if we meet certain conditions. This is certainly true of Matthew 6:33.

4:20 — Paul concludes this section on the acknowledgement of the gift with praise! His heart is filled with awe of God’s working in the Philippian believers. Their gift, seen as a sacrifice well pleasing to God, and his certainty that God will generously respond to their needs, lifts Paul into praise! Such a God deserves to be praised and glorified forever.

Closing remarks (4:21-23)

²¹Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. ²²All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household. ²³The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

4:21 — Paul asks that every saint be greeted. He wants each one to know that he recognizes and cares for them all. Also, there are some brethren with Paul who join in greeting the saints in Philippi. These would be those close associates who are in some way involved directly with Paul in ministry. Under the comments for 2:20-21 are listed some names Paul mentioned in his other first imprisonment epistles.

4:22 — “All the saints” would be those besides the ones “with” Paul, meaning the other saints in Rome. He makes special note of those of Caesar’s household. What a glory to God that the gospel had reached right into the imperial residence of the most powerful earthly leader. Those of “Caesar’s household” does not necessarily mean those who were blood relatives of Nero. This term also included the slaves and other people who served in the residence. It seems more likely that these servants were the ones who had responded to the gospel message.

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4:23 — This closing benediction is basically a prayer that the saints will *experience* the grace of God, His very presence, in their human spirits. The Spirit of Jesus Christ (1:19) is experienced in the regenerated human spirit (Jn. 3:6; 4:23; Rom. 8:16).

Appendix A

Excerpt from an article titled “The Day of Christ in Philippians” by Dr. Robert Wilkin, published in “Grace in Focus” magazine (July & August 2012):

But Paul uses a singular here, *good work*. The good work is their financial support of Paul’s ministry as the previous three verses show (Phil. 1:3-5). Their “fellowship in the gospel” (v 5) is a clear reference to their financial support. That is why Paul says he thanks God for them (v 3) and prays with joy for them (v 4). Compare Phil. 4:17, which confirms this understanding.

Paul is saying that he is confident that God will take their gifts and keep on using them right up until the Bema [Judgment Seat of Christ]. That means that our gifts can keep on having eternal significance until the Rapture, even if we die long before that time.

Did not the gifts of the Philippians result in several of Paul’s letters? Aren’t those letters still bearing fruit two millennia later? That means the believers in Philippi are *still* gaining eternal rewards for their support of Paul’s gospel ministry.

A detailed academic article (in two parts) by Professor John Hart on this subject is also available on the Internet (“Does Philippians 1:6 Guarantee Progressive Sanctification?” Parts 1 & 2). This article is in *The Journal of The Grace Evangelical Society*. See the Spring and Autumn, 1996 issues of the Journal at www.faithalone.org/journal.html).

Appendix B

Free Study Resources for the Bible Student

If you have a computer:

An excellent Bible Study program can be downloaded for free and it is very popular worldwide. That program is called e-sword. It can be downloaded from the following site: www.e-sword.net. This program has many free resources that can be added onto the basic program, such as different Bible versions, commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc. Other resources can be added for a fee. This program has been put together by Christian volunteers as a service to believers all over the world. This is the Bible study program I use.

The Internet Bible study sites listed below can also be a great help with study, providing many free resources.

If you have access to a computer, such as through a family member or at a library or Internet café:

There are a number of different Bible study sites which have various study tools that can be used while on-line (no download needed). Two of the sites that may be most useful to students are:

www.Biblestudytools.com This site has many features for searching the Bible and comparing versions, etc. It also has a number of commentaries and Bible dictionaries, along with other resources. Most of the commentaries and dictionaries are older, not requiring copyright permission for quoting.

www.studylight.org This site is similar to the one just above. It does have one general Bible dictionary that is a more modern book and entries could reflect current scholarship (*Holman's Bible Dictionary*). General Bible dictionaries are extremely helpful, having scholarly entries on names, places,

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Bible topics, books of the Bible, etc. This site also has a NT word dictionary, as well as an OT word dictionary. (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words*; *Vine's Expository Dictionary of OT Words*). These dictionaries are designed with the entries listed according to the English words as they appear in the King James Version. *Vincent's Word Studies* is another excellent book on certain NT words (keyed to verses) and you can find it under Commentaries on the site. An additional valuable resource on this site is *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. This modern academic work gives definitions of theological terms. This book is also on the Bible Study Tools site shown above.

Another useful site is www.biblehub.com. Besides a number of commentaries and dictionaries, this site also has an Interlinear Bible. The Interlinear shows the English text along with the Hebrew text for the OT and the Greek text for the NT. This Interlinear gives much information on the original language words. There is a text analysis tool which shows the various linguistic aspects of the Hebrew and Greek words. For the Greek NT it provides information on the part of speech, the gender, the case, as well as the tense, the voice and the mood of verbs, etc.

Finally, one more popular site is www.blueletterbible.com.

Appendix C

THE BIRTHRIGHT (The Rights of the Firstborn)

The warning concerning Esau and the birthright (Heb. 12:16-17).

Esau's birthright (actually plural: literally "rights of the firstborn") was what belonged to him because he was the firstborn son. The Old Testament reveals special privileges for the firstborn of the family. This passage on Esau's loss of this birthright privileges is a part of the fifth warning passage given to the Hebrew believers in the letter to the Hebrews. Chapter 12 taken as a whole may be considered as the fifth warning.

Immediately following the case of Esau a contrast is given between the Old and New Covenants (Heb. 12:18-24; OT in verses 18-21 and the NT in verses 22-24). One of the blessings of the New Covenant is the fact that we have come to the "church of the firstborn." Although God has given us certain privileges belonging to a firstborn, it is clear from the warning passage that these privileges can be *forfeited by our actions*, as was the case with Esau. The "birthright" does not have to do with our eternal salvation, which cannot be lost because it is not based upon our works (Eph. 2:8-9): rather, it has to do with our reward.

The birthright as seen in the Old Testament

The birthright of a firstborn son in Israel consisted of the following major three privileges²⁴:

1. He had a double portion of the inheritance from his parents, whereas the other sons had only a single portion (Deut. 21:15-17)

²⁴ Insights into these three privileges come from chapter 7 of the book "*In the Arena of Faith*" by Erich Sauer.

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2. He received a position of authority in the family, and also in the kingdom if the king's son (Gen. 27:37; 1 Sam. 20:27, 29; 2 Chron. 21:3).
3. Priestly service. Instead of the firstborn of all Israel serving in the tabernacle, the Levites were taken for service (Num. 3:12-13; 8:17-19). Besides the temple service given to the tribe of Levi, there was also a measure of priestly duty within the family given to the firstborn son. The record of 1 Samuel 20:27, 29 indicates that the (eldest) brother made arrangements for the family sacrifice.

The birthright could be transferred to one who was not literally the firstborn. In 1 Chronicles 26:10 we see that Shimri, not the firstborn, was made first ("chief") by his father, giving him the privileges of the firstborn. The *main meaning* of being the firstborn, then, becomes one of being chief, or having the pre-eminence in rank. This is in distinction from just being biologically the first son born. This privilege of having the chief rank normally belonged to the first one born, but could be transferred. The meaning of Christ as "the firstborn of all creation" (Col. 1:15) carries with it the idea of pre-eminence and ruler over all, not birth order.

Examples of loss of the rights of the firstborn:

1. Esau sold his birthright to his brother Jacob. Gen. 25:31-33.
2. In Jacob's family, Reuben was literally the first one born. However, he lost his birthright due to his sexual sin (Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4) "Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (for he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel; so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright." (1 Chron. 5:1). Reuben's sexual sin and loss may have been the thought behind the first clause of Heb. 12:16: "that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau . . ."

When Reuben lost his birthright, those privileges were divided up as follows:

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1. The double portion of the inheritance (of the land) went to Joseph through his two sons (Ephraim and Manasseh), each being given a portion of the land. Genesis 48:21-22 reads: “Then Israel said to Joseph, ‘Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers. **I give you one portion more than your brothers**, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow.’” See also 1 Chronicles 5:1 above.

2. The priestly service was given to the tribe of Levi. (Num. 1:47-51; Deut. 33:8-10)

3. The position of authority was allotted to Judah, the tribe from which the Messiah, the future King, would arise. (1 Chron. 5:2)

New Testament application

The “rights of the firstborn” in the Old Testament typify the privileges of the overcoming believer of the New Testament. The Greek verb for “to inherit” is *kleronomeo* (*Strong’s* #2816) and it means to obtain an inheritance. The OT Israelites took possession of their allotments of the promised good land through the casting of lots (Num. 26:52-55, 34:2). Their inheritance of the land pictures our inheritance of spiritual possessions. Lots are not cast, of course, for our inheritance, but God’s will determines our inheritance. In the OT family, **all sons received a portion** of the inheritance, **but the firstborn received a double portion** (Deut. 21:17). In God’s NT plan, all believers freely receive eternal salvation through grace, apart from works (Rom. 4:1-4; 11:5-6; Eph. 2:8-9). However, the New Testament affirms again and again the principle of *reward according to works*. It is on this principle that some Christians will obtain an *extra portion* of spiritual possession or blessing.

The common single portion of eternal salvation inheritance is spoken of in verses like Ephesians 1:14 and Hebrews 9:15, where our works are not noted. The extra portion of the inheritance has to do with *the 1,000 year Kingdom reward*, and is spoken of in verses like Colossians 3:24: “the **reward** [consisting] **of the inheritance**.” Note that the context of Colossians 3:24 is related to our doings, our works.

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One verse in particular points out both the common inheritance of all believers and the extra portion of inheritance together with Christ (in His 1,000 year Kingdom)—“and if we are children, we are also **heirs—heirs on the one hand, of God, and on the other hand, co-heirs with Christ**, if we suffer together with Him, so that we may also be glorified together with Him.” (Rom. 8:17, translation by Zane Hodges, Greek professor). In this verse being an heir of God is dependent solely upon being His child. However, being a co-heir with Christ when He inherits His coming 1,000 year Kingdom is dependent upon our willingness to suffer with Him (experience His crucifixion in our lives to die to the world, sin and self).

The threefold spiritual possessions of the Kingdom reward for the overcomer:

1. A special portion of the enjoyment of eternal life (the life of God and Christ—Jn. 17:3) in intimate fellowship with Him during the 1,000 year Kingdom age (Mk. 10:30; Lk. 18:30; Rom. 2:6-7).
2. Priestly service in partnership with Christ (Jn. 12:25-26; Rev. 1:6 with Heb. 3:14 [“partakers” means companions or partners], sharing priestly service with Christ; Rev. 20:6).
3. Ruling with Christ (Lk. 19:17, 19; Rev. 2:26, 27; 20:6).

The warning to the believer of the possible loss of the birthright.

The sole place in the NT where the loss of the “birthright” is mentioned specifically is in Hebrews 12:16, where Esau’s story is brought forth as a warning. The lesson here is that Esau despised his birthright by selling it for a bowl of stew. The spiritual meaning for us is that he traded the temporal enjoyment of the pleasures of this world for the future enjoyment of the Kingdom reward. He did not clearly see the value of his birthright. The decision he made was irrevocable. Once the decision was made, it could not be reversed. The verses on Esau may be paraphrased as follows:

“Lest there be any fornicator or profane person, as Esau, who for one serving of stew sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance—a change of mind by Isaac,

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altering his father's decision—though he sought the blessing diligently with tears.”

The great spiritual warning to the believer is that one's heart may be so subtly enticed by the pleasures of this world that an inward decision is made, setting his course to pursue worldly pleasures. This pursuit is at the expense of a complete consecration to follow Christ, at any cost, for the Kingdom reward. Hebrews 12:16 shows us that what we may think of as “sin” (“lest there be any fornicator”) is not the only danger to the Christian's life and the Christian's reward. Equally dangerous is the love of this world and the pleasures it offers, as depicted in Esau. These pleasures can often seem quite “innocent” compared to immorality, yet they *can be just as costly to a believer as gross sin*.

The warnings against the dangers of worldly pleasure are numerous in the Scripture (Lk. 8:14, 12:19-21, 17:31-33; Phil. 3:17-20; 1 Tim. 6:6-10; 2 Tim. 3:4, 4:10; Jas. 4:3-4; 1 Jn. 2:15-17). Yet, the loss of the 1,000 year Kingdom inheritance can stem from other lifestyle problems besides the love of this world. Note 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5-7. The “kingdom” in these verses refers to the coming Kingdom of 1,000 years, the “age to come.”

Appendix D

Eternal Security

John H. Smith
(with others)

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what the Lord sends in to finance this project, we do not send this booklet out indiscriminately. We seek to use wisdom and discretion in the matter, for “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2).

Copies may be downloaded at:

http://www.seekersofchrist.org/SMITH/eternal_security.html

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Free printed copies can also be ordered by contacting Dan Elkins at this email:

[`dan.elkins@cox.net`](mailto:dan.elkins@cox.net)

Statement About the Bible

The writers of this booklet believe the Bible to be the Self-revelation of the one true eternal God. Fallen mankind worships many different gods and holds many different beliefs concerning what is truth. Therefore, absolute truth must come from outside of man. Without an absolute standard of truth, mankind has no solid basis from which to reason and arrive at valid conclusions concerning why he exists and what his purpose is on the earth. The writers of this booklet believe the Bible is that absolute truth. The Bible alone reveals the only true and living God and shows us how to know Him personally—one God Who is triune as Father, Son, and Spirit. God's Word, the Bible, did not originate from man, as stated in 2 Peter 1:21, "No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." This writing seeks to present only what God says in His Word. It is the sole authority for faith resulting in salvation, practical Christian living, and full maturity in Christ.

A Simple Outline of Bible Truth

From eternity to eternity God's kingdom rules over all (Ps. 90:2; 103:19). God is "the King of the Ages" (1 Tim. 1:17) and "He will reign unto the ages of the ages" (Rev. 11:15). Mankind was created in God's image for dominion according to God's purpose and His heart's desire. God loved the man that He created and could never be defeated in His purpose. Therefore, Christ came to redeem fallen mankind and creation so that God's image could be perfected in him, thus qualifying him to rule on God's behalf. The first stage of God's purpose for man is fulfilled when, at the close of this present age, Christ will reign with His overcoming saints for 1,000 years on the earth (Rev. 20:4, 6). Following this is His eternal reign from the eternal city, the New Jerusalem, where all of His redeemed will reign with Him forever and ever (Rev. 22:4-5).

ETERNAL SECURITY

To the beloved brothers and sisters who are in Christ, that they may stand firmly and joyously on the assurance of their salvation.

Eternal security is a vast subject that is integrated in biblical truth as a whole. This makes it imperative that we understand the great themes and principles of God's purposes and working that run throughout the whole Bible. Obviously, we can't cover all of these great themes and principles in one little booklet; however, we will note certain governing principles of Bible interpretation.

To begin with, we must understand that the Bible is a unity of truth. Passages of Scripture must be interpreted (1) taking note of their cultural context, (2) according to their historical context, (3) according to their immediate context, (4) according to the context of the entire Bible, and (5) in light of other Scriptures that are very plain and clear in their bearing on the issue, especially where hard-to-understand passages are concerned. The divinely inspired, God-breathed Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21) never contradicts itself. If one passage seems to contradict another, there is a problem with our understanding rather than the text itself. If one verse seems to contradict a large number of references that are unmistakably clear, then this one verse is not being interpreted correctly. Also, we must realize that we are dealing with the Word of the infinite, all-knowing eternal God Who is not limited to time and space as we are.

God's wisdom in a mystery, that was predetermined before the ages of time for our glory, can only be understood as the spirit of the believer communes with the Spirit of God Who indwells his human spirit. The Spirit of God alone searches and knows all the deep things of God. The things God has prepared for those who love Him are spiritually discerned and taught by the Spirit. The thoughts of our natural man are not the thoughts of God. God's thoughts are much higher than our thoughts, even as the heavens are much higher than the earth (Isa. 55:8-9). Therefore, we must always approach the Word of God with prayer for a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. Only by revelation will we understand the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10-13; Eph. 1:17-23; Col. 1:9-13).

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Please meditate on and carefully consider all the verses given in this booklet. Praise our God, that the Holy Spirit in our spirit will give revelation increasingly if we seek for it. (Remember that the Old Testament was first written in Hebrew, the language of the Israelites. And, almost all of the New Testament was first written in the Greek language that was commonly spoken in Jesus' time. Since then, it has been translated into numerous languages.)

There are a very large number of Scriptures that speak plainly of the eternal security of the believer. Scriptures that are said to teach otherwise are being misinterpreted. Some of the reasons for this are: (1) Lack of understanding concerning the coming kingdom which involves the matter of reward or loss of reward. Such rewards are based upon the believer's life and service to the Lord, which has nothing to do with being eternally lost (explained later in this booklet); (2) Mixing law and grace in the matter of salvation so that salvation by grace alone is actually denied; (3) Confusing Israel with the Church; (4) Lack of sight concerning God's eternal purposes in the creation of man in God's image for dominion. These purposes run from Genesis 1:26-27 through the entire Bible and without which the Bible cannot be clearly understood; (5) Not understanding that eternal life is the free gift of God's grace. This gift must be distinguished from reward, or recompense, rendered to believers at the judgment seat of Christ (where only believers appear). These are positive and negative rewards given in respect to the believer's works; (6) The need to see more deeply the believer's relationship to God as that of a new creation child born of Him as Father and predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son, and (7) The need to thoroughly understand the great provisions for our salvation in the finished work of Christ. When on the cross our Lord Jesus Christ said, "It is finished," He had completed the work the Father gave Him to do for the salvation and redemption of mankind and the universe. As far as God is concerned, from His eternal viewpoint, His work is all done and only remains to be worked out in man on the earth and in the heavens. As long as Christians do not understand the items mentioned in this paragraph, they would tend to believe that a truly born again Christian can be lost for eternity.

There is little doubt that every born again child of God has at some time been attacked with regard to the assurance of their salvation. Satan is the accuser of the brothers (Job 1:9, 2:5; Zech.

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3:1-2; Luke 22:31; Rev. 12:10). God's purpose in creation is to have humanity (mankind) in His image to express Him and to rule on His behalf (Gen. 1:26-27). Satan's desire is to interfere with and destabilize our relationship with God. Satan does this in order to prevent our maturing into the full image of Christ, which is necessary for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose of image and dominion. When this image is fully reached, believers will be qualified to rule and reign with Him (Rev. 20:4, 6), and Satan will be cast down (Rev. 12:9-11). Therefore, he fights fiercely to occupy believers with the possibility of becoming lost and thinking about what works they must do to keep themselves saved. This interferes with the Father-child relationship and stunts the believers' growth to maturity. In view of these crucial matters, let us consider some great indisputable passages that testify to the eternally secure salvation of every believer.

We Were Transferred Out of Adam Where All Die and Placed in Christ Where All Are Made Alive

We were born positioned in Adam, being sons in his image with a fallen nature (Gen. 5:3). We were completely lost and without any hope (Eph. 2:12). In our natural birth position we were dead in trespasses and sins, but "in the Christ, all shall be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22, YLT; Eph. 2:1; Rom. 5:12, 19).

Beloved brothers and sisters who make up the Body of Christ, in the counsels of God in eternity (the timeless realm where God exists with no beginning or ending), the blessed God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with the power and reality of every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3). The language of the original Greek text is indisputable. It shows that although the fulfillment of these blessings is a process in our individual experience, in God's timeless sight all these blessings are already accomplished. Consider the blessings that will follow!

God our Father placed us eternally in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 1:30). Our Father chose us "in Him" before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). As a lost and helpless child of the streets is often rescued and placed as a son in a loving home, so God marked us out beforehand (predestined us) to arrive at sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself (Eph. 1:5). Full sonship means spiritual maturity through

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transformation into the image of Christ in Whose image we were created (Gen. 1:26-27; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). Think of it! In eternity past, before the foundation of the world, God took pleasure in choosing you to be His son! Praise Him! We are viewing here the God of the universe doing what pleases Him (Eph. 1:5). In Isaiah 46:10, God says, “My counsel will stand and I will do all my pleasure” (lit.). And in verse 11, “I will work and who shall hinder it?” (lit.). Is it not unbelief if one dares to stand before God and declare that our Almighty God will lose one that He chose before the foundation of the world? (See John 6:38-40.)

Some have asked the question: “Does God then also predestinate some to destruction?” For an answer, hear with a hearing ear the infallible Word of God. God is love, and He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16). God is also righteous (Rom. 3:26; Deut. 32:4; etc.). He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11). Therefore, He does not predestinate to destruction. His choosing and predestination are in accordance with His perfect foreknowledge of the choices every child of Adam will freely make in his life on the earth (Rom. 8:29; 1 Peter 1:2). With regard to these matters, Satan will both accuse us and slander God just as he did to Eve in the garden. Let us, as finite beings, bow before our infinite God in wonder, awe, humility, and worship, and let us stand upon the unmistakable statements of His holy, infallible Word.

Now chosen and placed in Christ, our Father has taken us into His grace and favor (Eph. 1:6). Please see this picture dear brothers and sisters! You are in Christ Who is in the presence of the Father; therefore, *you* are in the presence of the Father. So the Father accepts you just as He accepts Christ! God has put us in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30). Christ ascended to the Father with us in Him (Eph. 2:6). Now our life is hidden there, with Christ, in God (Col. 3:3). God accepts us because He is satisfied with Christ and the salvation He has wrought on the cross and through resurrection. Positioned by God in the Beloved (Christ), in living union with Him, we continually have the completed redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offences (Eph. 1:7). In Him also we were *chosen* as His inheritance—those marked out beforehand to participate in God’s plan to bring all things in the heavens and the earth (i.e. the whole universe) under the headship of Christ. Thus we are

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predestined according to His purpose that, transformed and transfigured, we shall be to the praise of His glory. As Israel was chosen of old to be an elect nation, believers were chosen beforehand to be an eternal gift to God the Father. This predestination is according to God's eternal purpose and will absolutely be accomplished by the will and power of God (Eph. 1:10-12).

Furthermore, having believed, we were *sealed* with the Holy Spirit of promise, Who is now indwelling us as the down payment, the pledge, the *guarantee* of our inheritance. Our inheritance will be the full redemption (that is, the full transformation of our souls and the resurrection of the body) of God's own purchased possession (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30). We are that possession purchased by the price of Jesus' blood (1 Cor. 6:20). In ancient times, a seal gave legality to a document and marked its ownership. A king stamped his seal on certain possessions indicating they belonged to him (Esther 3:2; 8:8; Jer. 32:11). So the Christian is confirmed as God's child by the seal of the indwelling God, the Holy Spirit Who never leaves us (John 14:16; Rom. 8:16, 23; 2 Cor. 1:22; 1 John 3:24). We are one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). The Holy Spirit in us is God's seal signifying that He owns us (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

To summarize, in this glorious portion of the Word (Eph. 1:3-23) we find ourselves: (1) *blessed* with every spiritual blessing in Christ, (2) *chosen* in Him before the foundation of the world, (3) *predestined to sonship* (becoming mature sons), (4) *taken into favor* (accepted) in the Beloved, (5) *forgiven* of our sins, (6) *predestined to an inheritance* when all things are headed up in Christ, (7) *sealed* with the Holy Spirit of promise, and (8) in verses 22-23 *a part of His body* that fills all in all (the universe). What grace, what mercy, what love, what safety in the eternal arms! All these unspeakable blessings are the acts of our eternal God Who says, "I act and who can reverse it?" (Isa. 43:13, NASB). None can reverse it! The believers in Christ will never be lost.

Brothers and sisters, God is your real Father. When you received Christ by believing on His Name, you were born of God. This birth was neither of man's will nor the will of the flesh. God gave birth to you by the exercise of His own will (John 1:12-13; James 1:18). We were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God (1 Peter 1:2). Peter then uses a strong expression: "God caused us to be born

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again” (1 Peter 1:3, NASB). It is an obvious truth that one born to natural parents cannot be unborn! Due to irresponsible or wicked behavior, the father may withhold that son’s inheritance, but he will never cease to be a child of his father. (We will explain this further in the last section of this booklet.) God’s work in giving birth to us according to His will cannot be undone by man (Isa. 43:13). Man’s will is not the initiating cause of the new birth, nor does man have the power to produce the new birth. But man is responsible to exercise his will to receive by faith the gift offered by the Holy Spirit. It is also true that God knows who will receive and who will reject this free gift (1 Peter 1:2), and that man has free will to do either (1 Thess. 1:6-9; 2:13; Matt. 23:37; John 5:39-40). Man’s responsibility to receive, together with God’s will and choice, is easily seen in John 1:12-13—those who “received” were “born of the will of God.” Whosoever (literally “every one who”) believes on Him will not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16). Jesus commanded all men to repent and believe the good news (Mark 1:15).

The new birth of every believer, which is 100 percent by the power of the Holy Spirit, is a new creation that had not existed before (2 Cor. 5:17). Every believer’s human spirit is now a new creation, having been regenerated and created anew by being born of the Spirit of God (John 3:6). Many other verses explain this further. You were born again by the Spirit of God entering your human spirit as the Seed, the Sperm of God (1 John 3:9). Sperm (Greek, *sperma*) is the actual word translated as Seed. Surely it is easy to understand that a father’s human sperm brought his life into his children. In the same manner, the Sperm of God brings the life of God into the spirit of man. Stated in a stronger way, in our salvation the Sperm of God brings in God Himself.

The Person of all three of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Spirit) is eternal life. In 1 John 1:1-2, John clearly tells us that the Person Who came from the Father—the One Who he and others had heard, had seen with their eyes, and had handled with their hands—was eternal life manifested on the earth. Jesus Himself said, “I Am the Life” (John 14:6, NASB). Again John writes in 1 John 5:20: “He [Jesus Christ] is the true God and eternal life.” The book of Hebrews speaks of the Spirit as an eternal Person (Heb. 9:14). The gospel of John says that eternal life is to know the only true God and the One

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Who He sent, Jesus Christ (John 17:3). So it is clear from all these verses that the Person of God *is* eternal life.

As an example, if the person of John H. Smith could become a spirit and enter your body, then you would have John's life come into you. Just so, the entrance of the Person of the Holy Spirit into your human spirit was the entrance of eternal life. By this vital, living union of the Holy Spirit with your spirit, you were joined to the Lord as one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). So this Seed of God that came into you is incorruptible, and therefore it is imperishable. Its source and cause is the constantly living and constantly abiding Word of God (1 Peter 1:23). If a saved person can be lost, then you are found saying that the Seed of God, which is the very life of God, is perishable.

When a child is born into a human family, he quickly recognizes his father and begins to call him "Daddy!" In the same way, as a son born of God, Who is your Heavenly Father, you have received the spirit of sonship in your spirit in which you cry, "Abba, Father!" (Rom. 8:14-15). Yes, even Christ within you cries, "Abba, Father!" (Gal. 4:6). The Indwelling Spirit of God within you bears witness with your spirit that you are a child of God (Rom. 8:16).

Salvation Is by Grace Through Faith

According to Ephesians 2:8-10, salvation is by grace through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works that no one may boast. Verse 8 specifically says, "By grace you have been saved through faith." This phrase "have been saved" is a Greek perfect tense that emphasizes the continuing, eternal effect of our initial salvation. Our fallen self with its works has no part in our regeneration into a new creation. Christ alone is the means of our salvation. It is impossible to earn it by our works (Rom. 4:4-5). Otherwise, grace would no longer be grace (Rom. 11:6). We are exclusively His workmanship. This workmanship is a completed action of creation in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:10). We are a new creation that God alone can create (2 Cor. 5:17).

However, the works *following* our becoming a new creation are not to *obtain* eternal life; they are works that follow *after* we have received eternal life. They are works that God prepared beforehand for each one of us to walk in *after* we are saved. They are works that

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we do in the power of God's gift to us, which is His new creation life (2 Cor. 5:17), and His all-powerful, all-sufficient, empowering grace (1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Tim. 2:1).

So it is clear that we cannot obtain or keep eternal life by any works or any righteousness of our own. There is no way to obtain salvation other than by receiving it as a gift on the basis of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, followed by His victorious resurrection and ascension. His righteousness is imputed to us as a gift when we believe. The word "imputed" means that Christ's righteousness is put to our account. God, the righteous Judge, accepts it. As Isaiah said long ago, "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6, DARBY). It is as if you owed a debt that you could not pay, and then someone came along and totally freed you from that debt by putting their money to your account.

We lack space to further explain imputed righteousness, but for your study consider the following: (1) It is of necessity a righteousness apart from law-keeping because no one could keep the law to obtain it (Rom. 3:19-21); (2) It is a righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:22-23); (3) On the basis of Christ's work this righteousness is put to our account as a gift when we believe (Rom. 4:5-6, 13; 5:17); (4) Christ Himself is made this righteousness to us by an act of God when He put us in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30). Paul also tells us in Romans 10:3-4 that Israel did not obtain righteousness because they were seeking their own righteousness through keeping the law. Further, they refused to submit to the righteousness of God, which is the only righteousness acceptable to Him. Verse 4 tells us that Christ is the end of the law (the termination of the law [law-keeping] as a means of righteousness) for righteousness to every believer. There is no more law-keeping in order to obtain righteousness. He fulfilled all the demands of the law (Matt. 5:17), and now by faith we receive Him as our righteousness. "Knowing that a man is not justified on the principle of the works of the law, but by faith, therefore we believe on Christ Jesus that we might be justified [literally, placed in a right standing with God] on the principle of faith" (Gal. 2:16, lit.). Galatians 2:21 says emphatically that if anyone insists that he must gain righteousness by his own works through the law, then he sets aside the grace of God and treats Christ as if He died for nothing. This, brothers and sisters, is an awful thing in God's sight

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because His free grace and the finished work of Christ are despised. To insist on establishing your own righteousness by your own works actually perverts the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:7). Paul terms it as “another gospel” and pronounces a curse upon anyone who teaches so (Gal. 1:6-9).

John 10:27-30

In the gospels, the Jewish leaders had refused Christ’s claims to be the Messiah and rejected the miracles that proved His claims. He had plainly told them Who He was, but they did not believe because they were not of His sheep (John 10:24-27). Surrounded by a crowd of Jews in the porch of Solomon, Jesus then spoke words of eternal assurance and comfort to those there who were His true sheep, and to all believers until He comes again (vv. 27-30).

I give to My sheep right now (present tense, not future) eternal life and they shall never, no never (a strong double negative) perish (v. 28). In John 5:24 Jesus said, “He that hears my word and believes on Him Who sent Me has eternal life [right now as a present possession] and does not come into judgment [eternal death], but has passed out of the death into the life” (lit.). Notice the use of the article “the.” *The* death means the realm or sphere of death into which we were born as children of fallen Adam (Rom. 5:12, 14; 1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 2:1). *The* life is the realm or sphere of life into which we pass immediately when we believe in Christ. That sphere is “in Christ” where we will be eternally. God is eternal life, and Christ personally is eternal life (John 17:3; 1 John 1:1-2; John 14:6). As is God Himself, this life has no beginning or ending. By the very definition of the word “eternal”, if a person could lose it, then he never had it. This is because it is God’s life which has no beginning or ending. The phrase “has passed” is a Greek perfect tense, which means this life continues unendingly in our experience. So the sheep can joyfully shout, “We have passed out of the realm of spiritual death in Adam into the realm of eternal life in Christ!”

Our Lord continues by saying that no one can seize one of His sheep out of His hand. Furthermore, the Father, Who is greater than all, gave us to Christ and no one can seize us out of the Father’s hand. Rejoice, believer, that the Father gave you to Christ, and neither man nor devil can seize you out of Their hand! Praise the

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Lord, the impossibility of believers being lost does not depend upon any strength of their own, but rests upon the finished work of Christ and the mighty power of God (vv. 28-30).

Romans 8:28-39

All believers are called according to and for the fulfillment of the eternal purpose of God (Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:9-11; 3:9-11). We were called before the ages of time (2 Tim. 1:9). It was a call into the fellowship of the Son (1 Cor. 1:9). The One Who called us is the eternal God “of Whom and through Whom and to Whom are all things” (Rom. 11:36, lit.). This is to say that: (1) God is the source of all things; (2) He brings everything to pass that He planned in His eternal counsels; (3) and all things ultimately return to Him for His satisfaction and eternal glory. Therefore, we are confident that nothing will stop Him from accomplishing His purpose. He will cause all things to work together for good to those who love God, believers whom He has called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

We were *foreknown*, in eternity past, by God (Rom. 8:29). We were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God on the basis of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus and the sanctifying work of the Spirit (1 Peter 1:1-2). The believers whom God foreknew He predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son. This confirmation to the image of the Son is mature sonship (Eph. 1:5) that is also described as the measure of the stature of Christ (Eph. 4:13). Can someone say that those foreknown, chosen, and predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son could ever be lost? Never! To say such a thing contradicts the plain Word and is an affront to the very character of our God Who foreknew, predestined, and will see us conformed according to His unalterable purpose for which we were called.

In Romans 8:30 we have four terms: *predestinated*, *called*, *justified*, and *glorified*. In the original language all four of these verbs are action words, which are in what is called the aorist tense. This means that these four actions of God on behalf of His eternal purpose and us, His children, are viewed in their entirety. You may say they are timeless. As far as our sovereign God is concerned, they are already accomplished. Therefore, all is viewed as one entire,

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eternally completed salvation described in these five timeless (eternal in character) words: foreknown, predestinated, called, justified, and glorified.

All of this takes place in Christ where God put us (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1). Every believer was eternally foreknown, called, justified, predestinated to be conformed to Christ's image, and glorified. We, living in time, are in the process of transformation and glorification that God sees as already done. It is impossible that God would fail. It is therefore impossible that a saved person could be lost and end up in the lake of fire. To believe this would be questioning the character of God.

As Paul continues his triumphant praise we hear the language of heaven that is beyond human thought. Meditate on it, brothers and sisters, with a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. If God be for us, who can be against us? (Rom. 8:31). The answer, of course, is NO ONE! Neither man nor devil can defeat our Father God. Our enemies are His enemies. The irrefutable argument continues. Since God did not spare the greatest possible gift, His own Son—God manifest in the flesh—then He will surely give us all things. The “all things” are gifts immeasurably less than the supreme gift of the Son and are actually included in Him (Rom. 8:32).

The next verses in Romans 8 speak of our clearance from guilt and condemnation (vv. 33-34). God is the judge before Whose court we have been justified. Anyone who would bring a charge against God's chosen ones must face the Judge (God) Who has justified them, that is, set them in right standing with Him (Rom. 3:21-31). Neither man nor Satan, the accuser of the brethren, is able to bring a charge against them (Rev. 12:10-11). Neither can anyone condemn God's elect because Christ has already condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3) and now stands as our Advocate, our Representative in God's court. Christ has already fully satisfied God's just requirements for our sins and those of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2). All who would bring false accusations against God's chosen and justified ones will be turned away in defeat.

And finally, our glorious risen Lord at God's right hand is constantly interceding for us (v. 34). He is there ever living to intercede and complete the process of our full salvation (Heb. 7:25). This begins with the regeneration of our spirit, proceeds through the

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transformation of our soul, and is consummated with the resurrection and glorification of our body. In Jesus Christ's matchless prayer in John 17, He wills to have us kept in the Father's name (v. 11), kept from evil (v. 15), sanctified by the truth (v. 17), and to be with Him where He is (v. 24). The only lost one, Judas Iscariot, was never a child of God; he was never saved. He was the son of perdition, the son of destruction. His spiritual parentage was of the devil, not God. This is the very phrase used for Antichrist in 2 Thess. 2:3. Jesus said plainly that of the twelve He chose, Judas Iscariot was a devil (John 6:70-71). In John 8, Jesus told the Pharisees that they did the works of their father (v. 41) and that their father, their spiritual parentage, was the devil (v. 44).

In the closing verses of Romans 8, Paul triumphantly states that no circumstance and no created thing can separate the chosen and called believers from Christ because of His love for them (vv. 35-39). Christ's love, from which we cannot be separated, is perfect (John 13:1; 15:9; 1 John 4:8). So regardless of what is happening to us, we may abide in His love continually.

The terms in Romans 8:35 describe pressure from the outside, inner distress and anxiety, persecution from any antichrist source, deprivation of food, deprivation of normal things of life such as clothing, and even danger by the sword that brings physical death. Suffering and even death has been and presently is the lot of many of God's people (v. 36). But such cannot separate us from the love of Christ. Rather, we are more than conquerors, super-conquerors, through Him that loves us. From the blood of the martyrs recorded in the Bible, through the multitudes who suffered persecution and death through the centuries, to the present day (when 90,000 yearly shed their blood for Christ's sake), the triumphant shout goes up: "More than conquerors through Him Who loves us!" "It has been granted to us on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil.1:29, lit.). Paul himself gloried in his tribulations (Rom. 5:3; 2 Cor. 12:9-10).

What marvelous words close this chapter: neither death, life, angels, evil principalities, human or supernatural powers, things present in this world now, things to come, height, depth, nor any created thing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord! The Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul, traverses

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the universe and finds nothing that can separate the chosen, called, and justified believer from his Lord.

1 John 5:6-13

Although there is some repetition of previous statements, it is profitable to look into this passage by itself. Near the end of his gospel (glad tidings), John tells us that the signs in his gospel were written “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31, NASB). And in his first epistle he says, “These things I have written to you who believe on the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13, NKJV) and be filled with joy in fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:4).

Now let us notice carefully the apostle’s language. The Spirit Who is Truth bears witness to Jesus, the Christ (1 John 5:6). The testimony of the Spirit is the testimony of God. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater, for this is the witness of God which He testified of His Son (v. 9). He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son (v. 10; Rom. 8:16; Gal. 4:6, NASB). And this is the testimony: that God has [once for all] given us eternal life and this life is in His Son (v. 11). Then verse 12 concludes, “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (NASB). “These things (in verses 9-12) I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you (those who believe in the name) may know that you have eternal life” (v. 13, NASB). The stress here is upon believing God’s testimony about His Son, that the eternal life is in Him. Therefore, we who believe in and have the Son may be assured that we have eternal life. Our assurance is based upon God’s testimony concerning His Son, not on our condition! And as stated above, we have the witness in ourselves that what God has said about His Son is true.

We feel that we must again strongly emphasize the Person of Christ. Notice that the original text and the NASB use the article “the” in verse 12 and read “the life”, emphasizing that the Person of

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Christ is the eternal life. If you are given a bag with several items in it, you receive not only the bag, but also the items contained in the bag. Just so, when you receive “the Son” you get “the life.” In his gospel, John wrote, “In Him was life” (John 1:4). Jesus said, “I [personally] Am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25, JS). In John 14:6 He said, “I [as distinct from any other source] Am the life” (JS). The word “Am” means that His very being is life. In Colossians 3:4, Paul declares that Christ is our life. By this he means that the Person of Christ is our life. Then we come to that matchless passage (1 John 1:1-2).

Here, John tells us that the disciples heard, saw, and handled the Word of Life that was from the beginning. The first verse of John’s gospel states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). This is Jesus Christ Who became flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us (John 1:14). The eternal life that was with the Father was manifested! When they heard, fixed their gaze upon, and handled Jesus Christ, they were hearing, seeing, and handling eternal life (1 John 1:1-2). We all believe that Christ came into us when we were born again. How glorious is the fact that eternal life is one of the names of Christ! When our spirit was born of the Holy Spirit (John 3:6), Christ Who is our life came into us. Christ dying for us on the cross became Christ in us to be our life. So John says, “He that has the Son has the life” (1 John 5:12; John 14:20; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27).

Now John assures us that he wrote these things (the epistle of 1 John) in order that we who believe on the name of the Son of God might *know* that we have eternal life (5:13). The Greek language has several different words that define different aspects of knowledge. All are usually translated by the English word “know.” The word “know” used in verse 13 means a settled inner knowledge, a conscious absolute knowledge that we possess eternal life in the Person of Jesus Christ Who indwells us. We shall never be separated from Him. We have seen this already from many references in the Word. Beloved brothers and sisters, rejoice! Stand upon this mighty truth and grow in Him.

In closing, John sums up the whole epistle, “And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding [through our spirit] so that we may know Him Who is true; and we are in Him

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Who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. He IS the true God and eternal life” (5:20, JS).

Thus far, we have shown that eternal life is a gift received by grace through faith with no works of man’s fallen self involved in gaining it (Eph. 2:8). Now, in the closing sections of this booklet, we will briefly consider some crucial misunderstandings that lead dear believers to doubt the security of their salvation.

Two Great Principles of Truth

Often there is confusion regarding two great principles in the Bible. The *first principle* is that eternal life is a free gift of God by grace through faith totally apart from works. The *second principle* is that there will be positive or negative rewards for the works of a believer during his Christian life *after* his new birth. These two great principles of truth concerning God’s salvation and God’s righteous government run throughout the Bible. Many Scriptures relate to one of them or the other, but not to both of them.

As an illustration, suppose there are two shelves in a home. On one shelf the family keeps all of the utensils they use for eating and drinking. But, on the other shelf, only the pots used for cooking are kept. These two shelves are similar to the two principles we are talking about. All of the items on each individual shelf have a common purpose, but confusion results if eating utensils and cooking pots are mixed on the same shelf. One is for the principal of eating, while the other is for the principle of cooking. This illustrates how confusion arises over the matter of our eternal security. If verses that teach reward according to the works of a born again believer are viewed as referring to eternal life, then confusion will result. If verses that teach eternal life is the gift of God through grace are viewed as reward for works, this also will result in confusion. We will refer to these two principles as “*Gift Principle*” and “*Reward Principle*.” (Please note that the two original Greek words usually translated in our Bibles as “reward” or “recompense” have the varied shades of meaning, as translated in their various contexts, of pay, wages, reward, recompense, gain, retribution, punishment, repay, and return. You can easily understand how all these terms fit in with the two terms, reward or recompense.)

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Concerning the *Gift Principle*, we have established that man's eternal salvation (eternal life) is a gift of God. A gift is something prepared by the giver. God prepared our eternal salvation for us through the finished work of Jesus Christ (John 17:1-4). The person receiving the gift does nothing to earn it by any of his own works; he simply takes the gift by faith. "It is God's gift, not on the principle of works" (Eph. 2:8-9, lit.). Paul was very careful to explain to us that eternal life is by grace alone and cannot be gained by any works of our own (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16, 21).

A large number of Scriptures teach us that positive or negative reward for our life and service to the Lord is according to works. Jesus said: "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done" (Rev. 22:12, NASB). The works of all men who are not saved by grace will be judged, and their reward (their recompense) will be the lake of fire (Rev. 20:12-15). The only possible escape from this judgment is for one's name to be in the Book of Life by virtue of the *Gift Principle* (Rev. 20:15). The question is sometimes asked, "Does this mean that a Christian can freely sin and live a fleshly life with no consequences?" The answer is, "No, he cannot!" This is because Jesus promises to reward every man, both unbeliever and believer, according to his works. For the believer, this judgment will take place at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10; Matt. 16:27; 1 Peter 1:17; Rev. 11:18).

Because he has both the old "flesh principle" and the new life resident within him, the believer's works may be good or bad. The intense warfare between the two, Spirit and flesh, is described in Galatians 5:16-23. The reward, or recompense, from Christ may be positive or negative (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:23-24). Christ will judge only those works committed *after* we become Christians (1 Cor. 3:8-15). Please rest assured, however, that sins we commit after becoming Christians will not be held against us at the judgment seat of Christ *if* we sincerely confess these sins (1 John 1:9). Notice carefully that this verse says "If we confess our sins," *then* God is faithful—and on the basis of the blood (1 John 1:7) is righteous—to forgive the confessing Christian and cleanse him from all unrighteousness.

The timing of the application of these two principles in the life of a Christian is important and helpful to us. The *Gift Principle*

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applies to us the very minute we place our trust in Christ for forgiveness. As stated earlier, at that moment we are eternally forgiven, we pass from death to life, we are born again by the Spirit of God, and we become a child of God. Also, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit unto the day of our future completed redemption when our body is transfigured. We are eternally saved! (Acts 13:38-39; Eph. 1:7; John 5:24; 1 Peter 1:23; John 1:12; Gal. 3:26; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; Phil. 3:21).

As shown previously, it is by the gift of righteousness put to our account that we receive eternal life. But having received the gift of righteousness and thereby the gift of eternal life, we must now pay attention to the *Reward Principle*. This is especially important in light of the fact that our entire Christian life will be evaluated by Christ at His judgment seat.

Paul likened our whole Christian life to that of an Olympic race, all with the goal of winning the prize (1 Cor. 9:24-27). He was racing for the prize of an imperishable crown, the positive reward given at the judgment seat for those who run victoriously. This crown, like other crowns gained by believers, points to the reward of ruling with Christ in His coming 1,000 year kingdom (1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:2-4; Rev. 2:10; 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6). Other writings will explain this more fully. These overcoming believers bear His image and rule with Him over the earth in the millennial (1,000 year) kingdom. That kingdom is the first stage of the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose for the creation of mankind (Gen. 1:26; Ps. 8:4-6). This will be followed by the eternal day seen in the last two chapters of the whole Bible (Revelation 21 and 22). With such a great calling, it is little wonder that Moses, who could have had power and riches in Pharaoh's court, considered "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward" (Heb. 11:24-26, NASB). In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Paul wrote that he might be disqualified (rejected or disapproved) if he did not maintain strict self-control over his body. Christians, who take this to mean that Paul could lose his salvation, put these verses on the wrong "shelf." Paul's buffeting and leading captive his body was with the view of gaining the reward of the crown according to works. It was *not* with the view of gaining eternal salvation (which he already possessed). So by reading these verses carefully, you will see that Paul was not

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racing for eternal life, which he already possessed as a born again believer. Rather, he was racing for a prize, which was a reward for how he ran the race.

The coming kingdom was prophesied in the Old Testament and was portrayed as a time of great blessing. The earth would be gloriously renewed from much of the curse and the Messiah would rule (Isa. 2:1-4; 11:1-10; 24:23). The Jews understood that participation in that blessed era was determined by God's judgment upon one's works after the resurrection, and *life in that age* was designated "eternal life" (literally, *age-lasting life*) (Dan. 12:2). Here we need to point out that the term "eternal life" can have various meanings in the Scriptures, even as terms tend to have in any language. There is no word in either Hebrew or Greek that explicitly means endless or eternal. A literal translation of the term would be "age-lasting life" or "life belonging to the age." Both the Hebrew word (*olam*) and the Greek word (*aionios*), which are sometimes translated as "eternal" or "everlasting," mean a long period of time (perhaps indefinite) or an age. *The context of the term must determine the exact meaning.* When the Greek word *aionios* is used in conjunction with God's life, it clearly means eternal, because God is eternal and His life is eternal (Gen. 21:33; John 1:1-4; Rom. 16:26; 1 Tim. 6:15-16, Heb.1:10-12; 7:3, 15-17; 1 John 1:1-2). As we have received God's eternal life as a gift, we have an eternal relationship with Him and an eternal salvation (John 3:14-16; 5:24; Rom. 6:23).

However, for proper interpretation of many Scriptures we must realize that *the Jews of Jesus' day had no concept of eternal life as God's life inwardly experienced in the new birth.* Nicodemus, for example, was waiting for Messiah's coming kingdom, which was prophesied repeatedly in the Old Testament. But his question about returning to his mother's womb and coming out again shows that he had no idea of the new birth (John 3:3-10). The rich young ruler also had no idea of the new birth. It was Messiah's kingdom, *life in the age to come*, which the young ruler sought. And Jesus confirmed that entry into life in that age was to be gained through obedience to God—not just to His commandments, but by following Him (Jesus) (Matt. 19:16-21; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-30). The young man asked Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (literally, "life for the age" or "age-abiding life"). The correct literal translation is,

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“What must I do to inherit life for the age [or age-abiding life]?” He was clearly asking, “What must I do to inherit a place in the kingdom of the next age?” (See the same thought in Jesus’ conversation with a lawyer in Luke 10:25-28.)

Jesus defined the issue in their meeting as having “treasure in heaven.” The word *treasure* carries the meaning of a deposit. How the young man followed Jesus would determine his deposit of treasure (reward) in the coming kingdom age. Here again we mention that at birth a child receives the irreversible free gift of life and a place in the family. Receiving the kingdom age inheritance, however, will depend upon his conduct of life. In Colossians 3:23-25, verse 24 shows us that the reward (recompense) consists of the inheritance and is based on service to our Lord Christ. In the passage concerning the rich young ruler, Jesus was speaking of His coming 1,000 year kingdom as being realized in “the age to come,” which would also be the “regeneration”—the era of the earth’s renewal (Matt. 19:28-29; Luke 18:29-30). The “age to come” (singular) cannot speak of eternity because there are “ages to come” (Eph. 2:7; 3:21; 1 Tim. 1:17).

Eternal life is realized in our spirits now, through the new birth, as a gift of God (John 3:6; 17:3; Rom. 6:23). But *eternal life* is also viewed as a reward for our obedience as a believer, and this reward is in the 1,000 year kingdom age to come. Conditions in that age will be wonderfully blessed: “for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9b). The *reward* in that age for the obedient disciple— “*eternal life*”— will entail *a greatly magnified and perfected experience of our fellowship with God and our experience of His life* (Luke 18:28-30). This reward in the coming kingdom is only for those believers who forsake all to follow Him (Luke 18:28-30). For the obedient disciple, Jesus promises: “and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mk. 10:30; Lk. 18:30).

The Bible has warnings about believers missing the blessings of the kingdom. If, as some Corinthian believers, we persist in fleshly living, we will not possess the kingdom (1 Cor. 6:7-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:3-5). Also, in Matthew 10:38-39, 16:24-27, Mark 8:34-38, Luke 9:23-26, and John 12:25, Jesus teaches us that we must lose our life (soul life) now in order to find it at the time when He returns to reward men according to their deeds. This means that if

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we will deny our soul the fulfillment of its desires, pleasures, and satisfaction in this life today, and take up our cross to do God's will (Matt. 26:39), then, in the future when Christ returns, we will find the true satisfaction of our soul. This passage refers to reward, as mentioned in Matthew 16:27. Discipleship here involves works of obedience. When the Lord returns, a believer can lose the satisfaction of his soul by missing the kingdom joy, or he can gain it in the kingdom by denying himself now and following Jesus in obedience.

The faithfulness of our Christian life will determine our participation in Christ's coming 1,000 year kingdom. We must live according to the highest standard of practical righteousness in order to enter the kingdom (Matt. 5:20). We must do the will of the Father in order to enter the future kingdom (Matt. 7:21). If we are faithful in our service to Christ, He will reward us with entry into the joy of the kingdom and the privilege of ruling with Him (Matt. 25:14-23; Luke. 19:11-19). But, if we fail to serve Him, we will forfeit this reward (Matt. 25:24-30; Luke. 19:20-26). Thus, we shall be cast into "outer darkness," a picture of exclusion from the glory of the kingdom (Matt. 25:30). This will cause the weeping of sorrow and regret. All of the Lord's judgments of His slaves (believers) are based upon works of service, so "outer darkness" *cannot mean loss of eternal salvation. These passages all have to do with positive or negative recompense at the judgment seat of Christ* (Matt. 25:19; Luke 19:15).

The book of Hebrews speaks of the inhabitable earth to come in the next age and that man, not angels, will co-rule with Christ (Heb. 2:5-6). Jesus, as the captain of our salvation, is bringing (leading) many sons to glory (Heb. 2:10). That is, through the progressive sanctification of their lives and their service to Him they can gain participation in the glory of His kingdom. Remember that mankind was created for God's purpose of manifesting His image and ruling on His behalf (Gen. 1:26-27). God's purpose will be fulfilled in its initial stage (before the advent of the New Jerusalem when all evil will be put away) in the next age when Christ, with the overcoming believers, rules on earth for one thousand years (Rev. 20:4, 6). Therefore, the various warnings in the book of Hebrews have nothing to do with the loss of eternal salvation. Rather, they clearly set forth the danger of missing entrance into the land (the kingdom

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in type) through various shortcomings mentioned in Hebrews: unbelief, disobedience, hardening of the heart (Heb. 3:18-19, 4:6-7), not going on to spiritual maturity (Heb. 5:11—6:8), not holding fast the confession of their hope based on the complete sufficiency of Christ and His work (Heb. 10), neglect in running the race looking to Jesus while under the Father's child-training (Heb. 12:1-11), and selling one's birthright as Esau did (Heb. 12:12-17). Space forbids detailed explanation of these passages, but rest assured that the principle we stated above applies. Christ is presented in many aspects as the complete solution for entrance into the kingdom (Sacrifice, High Priest, Intercessor, etc.).

The children of Israel were delivered from Egypt and into the wilderness, from which only a few entered the reward of the land, which is a type of entering the millennial kingdom (Deuteronomy, chapters 1-10 and many other passages). This history of the Israelites is probably the clearest, simplest, and best-known example concerned with the free gift of salvation and positive or negative reward. Besides the significant example in Hebrews, First Corinthians 10:1-13 clearly sets forth as instruction and warning the same wilderness examples for those of us upon whom the completion of the ages has come. We will now briefly retell the story that many of you already know.

As God's people, they were *all* redeemed by the blood and passed out of Egypt through the sea into the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:1-2). They *all* ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink. The manna represented Christ as their food and the water from the Rock represented Christ as their drink (vv. 3-4). But because of their repeated disobedience (Num. 14:22), most of them did not please God and died in the wilderness (vv. 5-11). *All* of them were redeemed from Egypt and could never go back even though they proposed such a thing (Num. 14:1-4). As their journey continued, it is clear that they remained the children of God. They were fed with miracle food and drink, and their clothes did not wear out. Nowhere in the account of their journey or in the whole Old Testament does it say they ceased to be the people of God. Yet it is also clear that most of them missed out on the reward of entering the good land, which was not entering God's promised rest—a type of the reward of the coming 1,000 year kingdom (Heb. 3:12-19, 4:1-9).

James 2:14-24

Now that we understand the two principles of *gift* and *reward*, James 2:14-24 becomes clear. If the gift of eternal salvation is truly by faith alone, why does James speak of being justified by faith plus works? Many Bible readers have not been able to reconcile this passage with Romans 3:26—4:6. It is apparent that James is trying to motivate his Christian readers to proper living and good works. In verses 12 and 13 he begins with speaking about the coming judgment of believers: “So speak and so act as those who are to be judged” (James 2:12, NASB). Verse 13 follows with a continuation of the theme of the coming judgment seat of Christ where only Christians appear to be judged for their service, not with respect to eternal life. Immediately following is James’ question: “What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works?” Can that faith save him? (v. 14, NASB).”

The key to understanding this passage is the meaning of the word “save.” The verb “to save” in Greek simply means to keep from loss, danger or ruin, or to make whole (see uses in Mark 5:23; Luke 8:36; Acts 27:20). The meaning of the word “save” *must be determined by the context*. Only in some cases does it mean to deliver from eternal condemnation to eternal life (Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:8). Here in James it is salvation from a negative judgment regarding a Christian’s life and service at the judgment seat of Christ that would prevent him from entering the kingdom as a reward. Those without good works are pictured by the unprofitable servant, who is negatively judged and loses his reward (Matt. 25:24-30). When Paul was assured that he had victoriously finished his course (2 Tim. 4:7), he could say, “The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me unto his heavenly kingdom: to Whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (2 Tim. 4:18, ASV). (For another example of being saved for the kingdom, compare Matthew 24:12-13 with 2 Timothy 2:12.)

So there are two justifications in the New Testament. According to the *Gift Principle*, “justification is a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24, lit.). As shown earlier, this means that God declares us righteous as a legal act because of our faith in Jesus, apart from works (Rom. 3:26-28; 4:5-6). Because of this justification we can never be eternally

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condemned (Rom. 8:30-34), and we have new life in Christ (John 5:24; Rom. 4:25; 5:18). According to the *Reward Principle*, there is also a justification by works mentioned by James (James 2:21-24). This is justification for satisfactory service as a believer that brings reward. All believers must appear before Christ, Who will judge our works (1 Cor. 3:12-14; 4:4-5; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Peter 1:17). We may be disqualified from receiving a positive reward (1 Cor. 9:27) or we may be approved (James 1:12). There is justification through faith alone unto eternal life and justification through works bringing millennial reward. When, at the end of his life, God revealed to Paul that he had run victoriously, he was then confident that the righteous Judge would approve him to receive the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Paul's possession of eternal life was never in question.

Conclusion

We now trust that each reader can apply the two principles of *gift* and *reward* to the many passages that were once confusing. May all be confident that the God Who chose us for Himself and predestined us to be His sons will also keep us for eternity (Eph. 1:3-5; Rom. 8:29-39). None of the threatening passages speak of the loss of eternal salvation, because God has delivered us from eternal punishment by the work of the cross. However, God, as a loving Father, may chastise us in this life, or according to His righteous governance may have some dealing with us in the kingdom age. The penalties thus incurred may be severe, but not eternal (1 Cor. 5:1-5; 11:29-32; Luke 12:41-48). In the unending ages of the ages "there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying or pain; the first things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4b, NASB). By His astonishing mercy and grace the days of discipline unto transformation will be over. There will be no more curse and we will serve Him and see His face. His name will be on our foreheads, and we will live in His light and reign to the ages of the ages (Rev. 22:3-5).

Imagine a father who runs a great business enterprise. His heart longs that his children mature and prove themselves responsible so that they may run the family business with him. In the same way, God now longs that we would grow up in all things in Christ (Eph. 4:15) and be responsible servants, willingly serving Him now and

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ruling with Him in the ages to come. Let us grow to maturity, standing upon the firm foundation of our eternal security in Christ. Let us count the sufferings of this present and strategic time not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed in us and unto us (Rom. 8:18). Let us then fulfill our responsibility to the cursed creation that is waiting with anxious longing to be liberated from the bondage of the curse at the revealing of the sons of God (Rom. 8:18-23). So, let us “run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1, NASB).

May the Lord bless every reader with a “spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened” (Eph. 1:17-18) that each may stand on a firm foundation of truth and walk in a way pleasing to his Lord. “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen” (Jude 24-25).

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