

Life

APPLICATION[®]
Bible Commentary

***PHILIPPIANS,
COLOSSIANS &
PHILEMON***

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Life Application Bible Commentary: Philipppians, Colossians & Philemon

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FOREWORD

The Life Application Bible Commentary series provides verse-by-verse explanation, background, and application for every verse in the New Testament. In addition, it gives personal help, teaching notes, and sermon ideas that will address needs, answer questions, and provide insight for applying God's Word to life today. The content is highlighted so that particular verses and phrases are easy to find.

Each volume contains three sections: introduction, commentary, and reference. The introduction includes an overview of the book, the book's historical context, a timeline, cultural background information, major themes, an overview map, and an explanation about the author and audience.

The commentary section includes running commentary on the Bible text with reference to several modern versions, especially the New International Version and the New Revised Standard Version, accompanied by life applications interspersed throughout. Additional elements include charts, diagrams, maps, and illustrations. There are also insightful quotes from church leaders and theologians such as John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Wesley, A. W. Tozer, and C. S. Lewis. These features are designed to help you quickly grasp the biblical information and be prepared to communicate it to others.

The reference section includes a bibliography of other resources and an index.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Letters of all sizes and purposes flood our homes and businesses, filling our mailboxes and lives with envelopes, paper, and requests for urgent responses. Written, stamped, deposited, collected, sorted, routed, bundled, and delivered, millions of these epistles travel daily from senders to receivers with hi-tech efficiency. These days, most of our mail falls into the “junk” category: ads, contests, political endorsements, polls, newsletters, insurance and credit card enticements, and financial appeals for a variety of causes. Monthly bills also march in the postage parade, and occasionally “official” correspondence, business letters, and checks are in the mail. Most of these envelopes are quickly dispatched, with their contents relegated to the appropriate places (often the “circular file”).

Personal letters break through this stack of unwanted paper. Enthusiastically grasping these grand exceptions, we rip open the envelopes and eagerly read each line (and between the lines). Birthday cards, postcard vacation notes, annual family reports, letters from camp, encouragements from friends and relatives, and love letters all receive our full attention.

Twenty centuries ago, before computer labels, color separations, zip and bar codes, high-speed presses, electronic sorting, and photocopy and fax machines, people wrote to each other. Hand delivered by friends or special couriers, these letters carried greetings, instructions, encouragements, and personal words. With no flood of junk mail competing for attention, the epistles were received with joy and were shared with others.

As Paul traveled throughout the Roman Empire preaching the gospel, teaching new converts, and establishing churches, he developed close relationships. To keep in touch with these dear friends and to instruct them further in biblical theology and Christian living, he would write letters—personal epistles. Paul even wrote to believers in cities that he had not yet visited, but whom he knew needed a word of instruction, encouragement, or correction. God used Paul and many of his letters, now contained in the New Testament, to communicate his message to those first-century believers and beyond—reaching to us today.

The three of these epistles in this volume, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, provide an interesting collection of Paul's writings. Although widely divergent in purposes and content, each one comes from Paul's heart—for Christ, for the church, and for individual believers. And imagine the joy with which these letters were received—personal words from their beloved teacher, mentor, and friend.

AUTHOR

Paul: apostle of Christ, courageous missionary, gifted teacher, articulate apologist, and Christian statesman.

Having received an excellent secular and religious education (Acts 22:3), Paul was destined for leadership in Jerusalem Judaism. We first read of Paul in Acts at the stoning of Stephen, a courageous and outspoken deacon in the Jerusalem church. Paul collected the coats of the executioners (Acts 7:58) and approved of Stephen's death (Acts 8:1). Soon afterward, Paul persecuted followers of Christ, capturing them and throwing them into prison (Acts 8:3; 22:4; Galatians 1:13-14). A Pharisee and influential member of the Jewish ruling council (the Sanhedrin), he voted to have these followers of "the Way" put to death (Acts 26:5, 10). As a zealous defender of the faith, Paul found great favor among the religious establishment. But his fast track took a U-turn on the road to Damascus, where he was confronted by the Lord (Acts 9:1-6; 22:5-10; 26:12-18).

Following his conversion, Paul immediately began to publicly proclaim Jesus as the Son of God, and he used his tremendous, now Spirit-filled, intellect to prove Jesus to be the Messiah (Acts 9:22). This enraged the Jewish leaders, Paul's former compatriots, causing them to conspire to kill him (Acts 9:23). Paul escaped and went to Arabia, where he probably studied the Word and preached to the Gentiles (Galatians 1:15-17). Three years later, he traveled to Jerusalem with his "sponsor," Barnabas (Acts 9:27). When Grecian Jews threatened to kill him there, Paul returned to his hometown of Tarsus (Acts 9:30). Soon Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch where they ministered together for a year in the church there (Acts 11:25-26).

In approximately A.D. 46, the believers in Antioch commissioned Barnabas and Paul to take the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles in other lands (Acts 13:1-3). Stops on this first missionary journey included Paphos (on Cyprus), Perga, Attalia, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13:4-14:28). When word came to Jerusalem of the ministry among the Gentiles, a controversy arose over whether non-Jewish converts had to be

circumcised and had to obey the law of Moses (Acts 15:1). So Paul and Barnabas, along with other believers, were sent to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders in order to settle the dispute (Acts 15:2-4). After hearing their testimony, the Jerusalem Council affirmed the ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 15:12-35).

A few months later, in approximately A.D. 50, Paul and Barnabas discussed a second trip, to visit the churches they had established on their first missionary journey (Acts 15:36). But because of a disagreement over Mark, they went separate ways: Barnabas and Mark sailed for Cyprus, while Paul and Silas went through Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:37-41). On this trip, Paul and Silas visited the believers at Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium. Then, passing through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, they journeyed to Troas. There, through a vision, God told Paul to travel to Macedonia (Acts 16:1-10). Obeying the Holy Spirit, Paul and Silas sailed to Samothrace and then to Neapolis. From there they traveled to Philippi, where they ministered for several days (Acts 16:11-40). Upon leaving Philippi, Paul and Silas traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica. Next they went to Berea, and then to Athens and Corinth, where they stayed for some time (Acts 17:1-18:18). Leaving Macedonia, they traveled to Ephesus. Then they sailed to Caesarea and made their way back to Antioch.

On his third missionary journey, in approximately A.D. 53, Paul concentrated on the region of Galatia and Phrygia. Then he returned to Ephesus where he ministered for two years (Acts 18:23-19:41). Continuing his trip, Paul revisited the believers in Macedonia and Greece. His itinerary included Troas, Neapolis, Philippi, Amphipolis, Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens (Acts 20:1-2). Determined to go to Jerusalem, Paul retraced his steps through Macedonia (Acts 20:3-12). Then he sailed to Assos, Mitylene, Kios, Samos, and Miletus, where he met with elders from Ephesus who tried to dissuade him from continuing on to Jerusalem. But Paul was determined (Acts 20:13-37). Leaving Miletus, he sailed to Cos, and then to Rhodes, Patara, and, finally, Tyre, in Phoenicia (Acts 21:1-3). From there he traveled through Ptolemais and Caesarea to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4-17).

At the temple in Jerusalem, Paul was recognized by Asian Jews who stirred up the crowd against him. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple and would have killed him if the Roman commander had not intervened (Acts 21:18-36). Paul attempted to state his case to the assembled mob. They listened for a while until he spoke of his ministry to the Gentiles; then they called for his death (Acts 21:37-22:21). After revealing his Roman citizenship to the commander, Paul was taken into protective custody (Acts 22:25-23:11). Eventually, after a transfer from Jerusalem

to Caesarea, trials before Felix and Festus, and an audience with Agrippa, Paul appealed to the emperor (his right as a Roman citizen) (Acts 23:12–26:32). On the way to Rome, the ship broke apart in a violent storm, but everyone was miraculously saved on the island of Malta (Acts 27:1–28:10). Finally, Paul, in chains, reached Rome. There he remained awaiting trial under guard in a rented house. During this time, Paul was allowed to have many visitors and to preach and teach (Acts 28:11-31).

Although the Bible makes no mention of this, scholars believe that after two years Paul was released, whereupon he probably left on another missionary journey. This trip took him through Ephesus, Colosse, and Macedonia. He may also have realized his goal of going to Spain (Romans 15:24, 28). After a while, Paul probably journeyed east and visited Crete (Titus 1:5). Eventually, however, he was arrested a second time and returned to Rome, this time to await execution (2 Timothy 4:9-18). Paul was martyred in the spring of A.D. 68.

From the moment he met Christ on the dusty road to Damascus, Paul was committed to telling everyone the Good News. Despite imprisonments, stonings, beatings, life threats, danger, hunger, slander, and shipwreck, he courageously proclaimed God's message throughout the Roman Empire (see 2 Corinthians 11:23–12:10 for a summary of Paul's struggles and hardships). Taking every opportunity, he preached in synagogues, on the beach, in a school, aboard ship, in prison, at a philosophical roundtable, and in court—wherever he had an audience. And he told *everyone*: Jews and Gentiles, men and women, old and young, healthy and sick, wealthy and poor, free and slave, Roman soldiers, God fearers, idol worshippers, prison guards, and magistrates.

Not content to merely preach and spread the Word, Paul was also committed to see the new converts grow strong in their relationship with Christ. So he established churches, trained leaders, and wrote letters—those precious letters, his epistles. Three of these letters—Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon—provide a clear picture of Paul's commitment to the spread of the gospel, his uncompromising stand for the fundamentals of the faith, and his strong love for the lost and for his brothers and sisters in Christ.

In contrast, today many Christians will not walk across the street to tell a neighbor about the Lord because of the inconvenience, or they remain silent about their faith, even when asked, for fear of social embarrassment. May we renew our commitment to Christ and depend on the Holy Spirit for power and courage to spread the Word. May we be like Paul.

INTRODUCTION TO PHILIPPIANS

Picture a baby, rested, fed, and lying in his mother's arms. Looking down with unspeakable love into those precious eyes, Mommy begins to talk to her son and gently strokes his cheek, evoking a sudden smile.

Or imagine a three-year-old playing with his father on the living room floor. With Dad's wrestling moves transformed into tickles, the little boy begins to giggle, and both end up laughing hysterically.

That's joy—contentment, security, and unbridled laughter.

But joy can also be discovered in the pain and struggles of life—at a funeral, knowing, through tears, that your loved one now lives with God; in a hospital bed, knowing that the Lord stands near; at the unemployment office, knowing that God will provide for all your needs. True joy runs deep and strong, flowing from confident assurance in God's loving control. Regardless of your life's situation, you can find joy, true joy, in Christ.

Joy dominates this letter to the believers at Philippi. In fact, the concept of “rejoicing” or “joy” appears sixteen times in four chapters. The pages radiate the positive, triumphant message that because of Christ's work for us (2:6-11; 3:12), because of the Holy Spirit's work in and through us (1:6, 12-14, 18-26; 2:12-13; 4:4-7, 10-13), and because of God's plan for us (1:6, 9-10; 3:7-14, 20-21; 4:19), we can and should REJOICE!

As you read Paul's letter from prison to his beloved friends in Philippi, note all that you possess in Christ, and find your joy in him.

AUTHOR

Paul (see the introduction to this volume).

Evidence for Paul's authorship of Philippians comes from the letter itself, as the very first sentence states: “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at

Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons” (1:1 NIV). Although Timothy’s name also appears in the greeting, it soon becomes obvious that Paul alone is writing since he uses the first person throughout the letter. In addition, the personal references in 3:4-11 and 4:10-16 clearly apply to Paul. The early church fathers Polycarp, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, and others affirmed Paul’s authorship.

SETTING

Written from prison in Rome in approximately A.D. 61 Paul wanted to get to Rome (Acts 19:21), not only to teach and fellowship with the believers there (Romans 1:8-13), but also because Rome stood as the center of the civilized world. It was a strategic city for the spread of the gospel. To reach the Roman Empire, the gospel had to reach Rome.

In God’s sovereign plan, Paul did sail to Rome, but not as a prominent citizen, missionary statesman, or even itinerant preacher. He arrived, rather, as a prisoner, in chains (Acts 28:11-16). Even as a prisoner, however, Paul was free to teach, preach, and write (Acts 28:17-31). During these years of house arrest, Paul wrote what have come to be known as the “Prison Epistles”—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

It is clear that Paul was a Roman prisoner when he wrote this letter because of his words in 1:12-17. He wrote of being “in chains” (1:13, 17) and of being a witness for Christ to the “whole palace guard” (1:13 NIV). Some scholars, however, have proposed sites other than Rome as the setting for these letters.

Some have surmised that Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians during his imprisonment in Caesarea (Acts 23:23–26:32). After all, Paul was imprisoned there for about two years (A.D. 57–59), interrupted by hearings before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. He would have had the freedom and the time to write. The uncertain and menacing situation in Caesarea seems to fit Paul’s indication that death was an imminent possibility (1:20-23, 30; 2:17). And references to a “palace guard” (NIV) or “praetorian guard” (RSV) could fit this location.

Some have even proposed that this letter may have been written from Ephesus, even though the Bible makes no mention of Paul being imprisoned in that city. The main reason for this theory is the distance between Philippi and Rome (or Caesarea). In his letter, Paul implies that several trips have been made to and from the place of his confinement:

- Timothy traveled to Paul. Although not mentioned in the trip to Rome (Acts 26–28), Timothy was with Paul when this letter was written (1:1).
- Someone sent a message to Philippi informing the believers of Paul’s imprisonment (4:14).
- Epaphroditus brought the love gift from Philippi to Paul (4:18).
- News of Epaphroditus’s sickness was sent back to Philippi (2:26).
- Paul received word that the Philippians had received the news of Epaphroditus’s condition (2:26).

Paul also implies the following future journeys:

- Epaphroditus will bring the letter to Philippi (2:25, 28).
- Timothy will travel to Philippi (2:19).
- Then Timothy will return to Paul (2:19).
- Paul will travel to Philippi after his release (2:24).

According to this theory, it is more likely for these journeys to have occurred to and from Ephesus, which is much closer to Philippi than either Rome or Caesarea. But even if all these statements refer to actual trips, there would have been enough time for them to have been taken to Rome, even if the travel time had been seven or eight weeks—Paul was imprisoned for two years. Certainly travel to Rome was both common and convenient, along the Egnatian and Appian Ways.

Despite these alternate proposals, Rome still stands as the most likely location for the writing of the Prison Epistles. Paul’s imprisonment at that time and place fits the statement about his needs (4:17-18), allows time for the trips to and from Philippi, and makes sense of his references to the palace guard (1:13) and Caesar’s household (4:22).

All that is known of Paul’s place of confinement in Rome at this time is that it was his own rented house. Thus Paul’s prison was considerably more comfortable than the environment in which he wrote 2 Timothy. In that prison, the Mamertine dungeon, Paul was suffering and chained like a criminal (2 Timothy 2:9). He had been deserted (2 Timothy 4:10, 16), he was cold (2 Timothy 4:13), and he was expecting to die (2 Timothy 4:6-7, 18). In this setting, however, although guarded constantly, Paul enjoyed great freedom to welcome visitors (Acts 28:17-30) and to preach and teach (Acts 28:31).

Paul was imprisoned in Rome for two years—approximately A.D. 60–62. He wrote Philippians in about A.D. 61. Evidently this was the last letter written from prison—1:21-28 seems to indicate

that Paul was expecting a decision about his fate very soon. (See also note on 1:1 in the commentary section.)

AUDIENCE

The believers in Philippi.

The Macedonian (northern Greece today) city of Philippi was named after Philip of Macedon (the father of Alexander the Great). Surrounded by mountains and close to the sea, Philippi became a strategic city in the Greek empire. In 167 B.C. it became part of the Roman Empire, but it did not achieve real importance until after 31 B.C. when Octavian defeated Antony at the battle of Actium. After that decisive battle, Philippi received a number of Italian colonists who had favored Antony and had been dispossessed of their property. The colony was then renamed Colonia Iulia Philippensis to honor Julius Caesar. Later, in 27 B.C., when Octavian was designated Augustus, the colony's name was changed again to Colonia Augusta Iulia (Victrix) Philippensium, equating the cause of Augustus with that of Caesar. At that time, Philippi was given the right to the Law of Italy together with many rights and privileges, including immunity from taxation. The residents of Philippi were very conscious and proud of their Roman citizenship and heritage (see Acts 16:20-21). Philippi also boasted a fine school of medicine.

Paul visited Philippi on his second missionary journey, in A.D. 51, about ten years previous to this letter. By the time of Paul's visit, Philippi had become a thriving commercial center because of its strategic location as the first city on the Egnatian Way, an important ancient highway linking the Aegean and Adriatic Seas. Travelers to Rome would cross the Adriatic and then continue up to Rome on the Appian Way. Thus, Philippi was the gateway to the East. Although thoroughly colonized by the Romans after 31 B.C., Philippi was still more Greek in culture than Roman. Luke refers to Philippi as "a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia" (Acts 16:12 NIV). Although Philippi was not the capital city of the region (subprovince of Macedonia), it certainly was the "leading city." Luke's statement also reflects civic pride in his hometown.

The church at Philippi in ancient Macedonia was the first European church founded by Paul. Thus, it represents the first major penetration of the gospel into Gentile territory (see Philippians 4:14-15).

Acts 16:9-40 tells how the church began. On the second missionary journey in about A.D. 51, prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching in Asia and in Bythynia, Paul and Silas traveled

to Troas, the farthest Asian port on the Aegean Sea. While there, God spoke to Paul through a vision, telling him to take the gospel to Europe. In this vision, a Greek man begged, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9 NIV). Immediately, Paul and his traveling companions set sail for Samothrace and Neapolis, continuing on to Philippi.

In every city, Paul and his party would go to the synagogue to share the gospel with the Jews. So on their first Sabbath in Philippi, Paul and Silas probably looked for a synagogue. Instead, they found a group of women who had gathered outside the city on the banks of a river. The fact that Philippi had no synagogue indicates that there were few Jews in that city. Therefore, from its inception, the church at Philippi consisted mainly of Gentiles. Acts 16:14-34 tells of two of the first converts in Philippi: Lydia, a businesswoman who may have been a Jew or a Jewish proselyte; and a Roman jailer. The response of these three provided clear demonstration that God’s Good News was for all classes, sexes, races, and nationalities.

Luke also mentions that when Lydia responded to Paul’s message, so did the members of her household (Acts 16:15). The same was true for the jailer—his family responded with him (Acts 16:34). No other specific converts are mentioned in this account in Acts, but the chapter concludes with: “After leaving the prison they [Paul and Silas] went to Lydia’s home; and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters, they departed” (Acts 16:40 NRSV). “Brothers and sisters” seems to indicate that a small but vital group of believers had been forged. Clement, Euodia, and Syntyche may have been won to Christ during this time (see 4:2-3).

When Paul and Silas departed from Philippi, they left Luke there, in his hometown, to carry on the ministry. A few years later, at the end of his third missionary trip, Paul visited Philippi prior to spending the winter in Corinth. When Paul wrote this epistle, the church in Philippi was thriving, and he felt very close to the believers there.

OCCASION AND PURPOSE FOR WRITING

To thank the Philippians for their gift and to strengthen the believers in their faith.

This is a very personal epistle. It is obvious from Paul’s opening comments that he enjoyed a close friendship with the Philippian believers: “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now”

(1:3-5 NIV). During their visit to Philippi, Paul and Silas had witnessed immediate and dramatic response to their message. And despite the fact that they were attacked and imprisoned, they had seen the church begin and then grow into a strong core of believers (Acts 16:40). During the course of Paul's ministry, the Philippian believers had continually come to his assistance through their gifts (4:15-18). At this time, nearly ten years later, the Philippians had again sent a gift to Paul to help him in his time of need: "I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. . . . It was good of you to share in my troubles" (4:10, 14 NIV). Perhaps their donated funds were helping to pay for the rented house to which Paul was confined (Acts 28:30). In response to this gift and to their relationship over the years, Paul wrote to express his deep appreciation for their love, faithfulness, and generosity.

Paul also took the opportunity of this letter to deal with important issues in the church. He had heard of divisive rivalry and selfish ambition (2:3-4), so he gave strong counsel and even named names (4:2). Paul knew that the Judaizers could be a problem, so he gave clear instructions to avoid those men (3:2-3). He also warned of those who would go to the opposite extreme and live totally without the law or any personal discipline (3:17-19). None of these issues were full-blown problems that were threatening the life of the church, but Paul knew their destructive pattern. So he warned his beloved Christian brothers and sisters, encouraging and challenging them to continue to stand strong and united and to live for Christ (1:27; 4:1, 4-9).

Paul's sensitivity to the needs at Philippi stands as a great example. He didn't wait for a crisis; instead, he confronted potential problems early, before they could fester and infect the whole body. When we see a fellow believer begin to struggle or stray, we should follow Paul's example and lovingly confront that person, urging him or her to stay on track.

MESSAGE

Joy, Humility, Self-Sacrifice, Unity, Christian Living.

Joy (1:3-6, 12-26; 2:1-4, 17-18; 3:1; 4:4-13). Although Paul had suffered much for the cause of Christ and was writing this letter as a prisoner of Rome, still he was filled with joy because of what God had done for him, because of his hope in God's plan for the future, and because of the faithfulness of the Philippian believers. Paul knew that his beloved brothers and sisters in Christ would be tempted and tested, so he urged them to stay strong in their

faith, to be content, and to “rejoice in the Lord always” (4:4 NIV). Regardless of the circumstances, believers can have profound contentment, serenity, and peace. This joy comes from knowing Christ personally, depending on his strength, and trusting in his plan for our lives.

Importance for Today. Far from content, people today truly believe that they need every new product, toy, or appliance. Or they think that they will find happiness and personal fulfillment through relationships, travel, adventure, or something else. Thus, most people are discontent and continually seeking meaning and peace. But true, lasting contentment comes only through knowing Christ. With sins forgiven, our future secure, and our lives in God’s control, we can be content . . . and have joy. Yes, we can have joy, even in hardship. Joy does not come from outward circumstances but from inward strength.

In addition to discontent, Paul highlights other joy stealers: selfish ambition (1:17; 2:3), complaining and arguing (2:14), self-centeredness (2:21), hedonism (3:18-19), anxiety (4:6), and bad thoughts (4:8). What steals your joy?

Rely on Christ within you to give you joy, not on what you own, who you know, or what you experience.

Humility (1:15-18; 2:5-11; 3:7-14). If anyone had the right to boast, it was Paul. Yet he continued to lay aside personal ambition and glory in order to know Christ (3:7-11) and to glorify him (3:12-14). Paul knew that Jesus had left glory to come to earth in order to live as a man and to die on the cross. Paul held up Jesus as the example to follow, urging the Philippians to humble themselves as Christ had done.

Jesus showed true humility when he laid aside his rights and privileges as God to become a human being (2:5-11). He poured out his life to pay the penalty that we deserve. Laying aside self-interest is essential to being Christlike.

Importance for Today. We naturally worry about ourselves first, making sure that we are comfortable and that we get the credit and glory we deserve. But as Christ’s representatives, we should live as he would. This means putting others first and renouncing personal recognition. It also means serving others and looking out for their best interests. When we give up our self-interest, we can serve the Lord with joy, love, and kindness. True humility is a by-product of seeing ourselves from Christ’s perspective and recognizing that we are nothing without him.

What can you do to see yourself and the world from Christ’s point of view? What can you do to give your life for others?

Self-Sacrifice (1:15-26; 2:4, 17, 25-30; 3:7-14; 4:14-19). Christ suffered and died so that all who believe might have eternal life. Following Christ's example, with courage and faithfulness, Paul sacrificed himself for the ministry, taking every chance to tell others God's Good News, preaching and teaching even while in prison. For Paul, living meant opportunities for serving the Lord, but dying would mean going to live with the Lord (1:20-24). So Paul lived with his goal always before him, motivating him to forget the past and press on to win the prize (3:13-14).

Importance for Today. "Sacrifice" seems like a dirty word these days. Instead, people want to indulge themselves and do everything they can to have a comfortable and easy life. Unfortunately, this cultural attitude can carry into the church. For example, many believers are more concerned about not having padded pews than the fact that people are headed for hell. But reaching people for Christ, helping those in need, and changing our world will involve personal sacrifice. Christ gives us the power to do that. We must follow the example of Jesus and of godly leaders like Paul who demonstrate self-denying concern for others.

What will it take—what sacrifices will you have to make—for you to be an effective witness for Christ in your neighborhood? at work? What will it take for your church to make a difference for Christ in your community?

Unity (1:15-18, 27-30; 2:1-4, 14-16; 4:2-3). In every church, in every generation, controversial issues, personality conflicts, and other divisive issues arise. The tendency toward arguments and division intensifies during hard times, when people can turn against each other. Although the church at Philippi was strong, it was not immune to these problems and, in fact, had experienced some internal conflicts. Paul encouraged the Philippians to get along, agree with one another, stop complaining, and work together.

Importance for Today. Christians should contend against their common enemy—Satan and his work in the world—and not against each other. We need all our resources, focus, and energy for the battle. When we are unified in love, Christ works through us, and we can make a difference for him. We need to keep before us the ideals of teamwork, consideration of others, and unselfishness.

What tends to break your unity with other believers? What issues threaten to divide your church? Keep your focus on Christ and his mission in the world; don't be sidetracked by petty jealousies, competition, hurt feelings, or minor irritations.

Work together with your brothers and sisters in Christ to make a difference in the world.

Christian Living (1:6, 9-11, 21-29; 2:12-13; 3:12-21; 4:4-13).

Paul could not stay in Philippi, teaching the new believers, encouraging them to live for Christ, and holding them accountable. When he was with the Philippians, they were careful to obey the Lord (2:12) because they were aware of Paul's powerful example and strong encouragement. But now, in his absence, they should be even more careful to live the Christian life (work out their own salvation—2:12). They could be confident that God was with them and in them, changing them from the inside out (2:13). Certainly God would complete his good work in them (1:6).

Paul also explained the steps these believers could take to live for Christ: be unified with other Christians (1:27-30), remember Christ's work on the cross (2:5-11), rejoice in God's work for them and in them (3:1), keep focused on the goal (3:12-14), guard their thoughts (4:8-9), be content with what they have (4:10-13), and help those in need (4:14-19).

Importance for Today. In this day of media evangelists, celebrity Bible teachers, and articulate preachers, it can be easy to depend on others for our spiritual nourishment and motivation. Yet the Christian life always depends on the relationship an individual believer has with the Lord Jesus. Instead of relying on others for our "faith," we must depend on Christ and the Holy Spirit working within us. And instead of expecting growth to happen because we have a strong Christian environment, we must keep our focus on Christ, discipline ourselves to pray and to read the Bible, and apply God's Word to our lives.

On whom do you depend for your motivation to live for Christ? Where do you find your spiritual nourishment? Christian living depends on Christ living in you and you then living in obedience to him.

VITAL STATISTICS

Purpose: To thank the Philippians for the gift they had sent Paul and to strengthen these believers by showing them that true joy comes from Jesus Christ alone

Author: Paul

To whom written: All the Christians at Philippi and all believers everywhere

Date written: About A.D. 61, from Rome during Paul's imprisonment there

Setting: Paul and his companions began the church at Philippi on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:11-40). This was the first church established on the European continent. The Philippian church had sent a gift with Epaphroditus (one of their members) to be delivered to Paul (4:18). Paul was in a Roman prison at the time. He wrote this letter to thank them for their gift and to encourage them in their faith.

Key verse: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (4:4 NIV).

OUTLINE

1. Joy in suffering (1:1-26)
2. Joy in serving (1:27-2:30)
3. Joy in believing (3:1-4:1)
4. Joy in giving (4:2-23)



LOCATION OF PHILIPPI

Philippi sat on the Egnatian Way, the main transportation route in Macedonia, an extension of the Appian Way, which joined the eastern empire with Italy.

Philippians 1:1-26

GREETINGS / 1:1-2

As Paul wrote this letter, he was under house arrest in Rome. When the Philippian church had heard about Paul's imprisonment, they had sent Epaphroditus (who may have been one their elders) to Rome to visit and encourage him. Epaphroditus had arrived with words of affection from the church, as well as a financial contribution that would help make Paul's confinement more comfortable. Paul wanted to thank the believers for helping him during his time of need. He also wanted to tell them why he could be full of joy despite his imprisonment and upcoming trial. He wanted them to remain strong in the faith, realizing that although he was in chains for the gospel, God was still in control and the truth of the gospel remained unchanged. In this uplifting letter, Paul counseled the Philippians about humility and unity and warned them about potential problems they would face.

1:1 Paul. The undisputed author of this letter is the apostle Paul, missionary to the Gentiles, imprisoned in Rome for preaching the gospel. Paul had founded the church in Philippi, so the recipients of the letter were his dear friends and children in the faith. Paul filled his letter with joy and love as he sought to dispel the Philippians' fears regarding his imprisonment, to thank them for their financial support, and to encourage them in their faith.

"Paul" is the Greek version of the Hebrew name Saul (Acts 13:9). From the tribe of Benjamin (3:5), Paul was born in Tarsus, was raised as a strict Pharisee, and was educated in Jerusalem under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Though born to Jewish parents, Paul was also a Roman citizen (Acts 22:27-28).

Out of this diverse background, God formed and called a valuable servant. God used every aspect of Paul's upbringing to further the spreading of the gospel. God called him: "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15 NIV). Paul fulfilled his calling. So far, he had taken three missionary journeys, covering thousands of miles as he carried the gospel from Jerusalem, across Asia, and into Europe. His ultimate goal

had always been to take the gospel to Rome itself—capital of the vast Roman Empire that had spread over most of Europe, North Africa, and the Near East. The fact that all roads led to Rome made Rome a perfect center for the gospel message to spread across the known world.

Paul wrote this letter from Rome. He had arrived there through a series of unusual circumstances. He had been arrested in Jerusalem by the Romans for seemingly inciting a riot. A plot to kill Paul caused the Romans to take Paul to Caesarea (on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea). There Paul gave the gospel message to Governor Felix and his wife Drusilla (Acts 23:24; 24:1-26). Felix didn't make a decision in the case, leaving Paul in prison for two years until Festus became the new governor. Then Paul was able to present the gospel to Festus, and then to King Agrippa and Bernice (Acts 25:1-26:32). Paul did indeed carry God's name to Israel, and to the Gentiles and to their kings, just as God had said (Acts 9:15).

Every Roman citizen had the right to appeal to Caesar. This didn't mean that Caesar himself would hear the case, but that the citizen's case would be tried by the highest courts in the empire. As a prisoner being unjustly tried, Paul used the opportunity to get to Rome by appealing his case to Caesar (Acts 25:12). Paul had wanted to preach the gospel in Rome, and he eventually got there—in chains, through shipwreck, and after many trials (Acts 27-28).

In Rome, Paul was under house arrest. This meant that he could receive visitors and write and receive letters. Paul had to finance his imprisonment. Acts 28:30 states that Paul had to pay for his own rented apartment in Rome; plus he had to pay for the guards as required by Rome. Although Paul's normal policy was not to accept support from the churches so that he could not be accused of having a "profit motive," he did accept a gift from the Philippians for his support in prison (see 4:10-18).

Paul wrote several letters during this imprisonment. These are called the Prison Letters, or Prison Epistles, and Philippians is one of those (the others being Ephesians and Colossians). Paul also wrote personal letters, such as the one to Philemon. Luke was with Paul in Rome (2 Timothy 4:11). Timothy was a frequent visitor, as were Tychichus (Ephesians 6:21), Epaphroditus (4:18), and Mark (Colossians 4:10). Paul witnessed to the imperial guard (that is, the Roman soldiers, 1:13) and was involved with the Roman believers.

Paul had arrived in Rome around A.D. 59 and had spent two years under house arrest. The letter to the Philippians was probably written toward the end of Paul's imprisonment there, in

A.D. 61. The reasons for a late dating of this letter include the following:

- Paul expressed expectation of an impending decision on his case (2:23).
- Enough time had gone by for the Philippians to have heard of Paul's imprisonment, send Epaphroditus, hear back of Epaphroditus's sickness, and then send back words of concern. (Some scholars contend that travel back and forth between Rome and Philippi could not have occurred during this short time period, and so they say that Paul was writing from either Caesarea or Ephesus, not Rome. See the introduction to Philippians for a full discussion.)
- Philippians must have been written after Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon because Paul says in Philippians that Luke was no longer with him (2:20), and Luke had been there when Paul wrote Colossians (Colossians 4:14) and Philemon (Philemon 24).

And Timothy. Timothy was a frequent visitor during Paul's imprisonment in Rome (Colossians 1:1; Philemon 1) and was with Paul in Rome when he wrote this letter. Then Timothy went as Paul's emissary to the church in Philippi (2:19). Timothy had a special interest in the Philippians (2:20), for he had traveled with Paul on his second missionary journey when the church at Philippi had begun (Acts 16:1-3, 10-12). Although he is mentioned in the salutation, Timothy is not considered a coauthor. Paul wrote in the first person throughout this letter.

Timothy grew up in Lystra, a city in the province of Galatia. Paul and Barnabas had visited Lystra on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 14:8-21). Most likely, Paul had met the young Timothy and his mother, Eunice, and grandmother Lois (2 Timothy 1:5) on this journey, perhaps even staying in their home.

On Paul's second missionary journey, he and Silas returned to several cities that Paul had already visited, including Lystra. There Paul invited Timothy to accompany them. Timothy would travel the empire with Paul, preaching and teaching the Good News, traveling with Paul as his assistant and sometimes for him, as his emissary.

Paul and Timothy had developed a special bond, like father and son (2:22). Paul had led Timothy to Christ during his first missionary journey. Timothy would become an important leader in the early church and, like Paul, eventually would be imprisoned for his faith. The writer of Hebrews mentioned Timothy at the end of that letter: "I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you" (Hebrews 13:23 NIV).

Servants of Christ Jesus.^{NRSV} While Paul usually used the designation “apostle” in the beginning of his letters, here he referred only to his and Timothy’s role as *servants of Christ Jesus*. The Philippians had been an encouragement to Paul, readily accepting his position and message. Apparently, Paul did not feel the need to mention his apostleship or to present his credentials as in some of his other letters.

The word *doulos*, translated “servant,” means “slave,” one who is subject to the will and wholly at the disposal of his master. Paul expressed his and Timothy’s absolute devotion and subjection to Christ Jesus. In Greek culture, the custom of manumission enabled a slave to be set free but remain devoted to a master for life as a bondservant. Paul may have had that in mind as he wrote to this audience. More likely, he was using the Old Testament concept of “servant of *Yahweh*,” as used of Moses (Exodus 14:31) and other prophets (Jeremiah 25:4; Daniel 9:6-10; Amos 3:7). This concept conveyed their dignity as authoritative messengers of the Lord.

The pattern of ancient letters was for the writer to first identify himself or herself (as opposed to letters today that are signed at the end). Paul always declared his Christian faith from the very start. Paul and Timothy were not mere servants, they were servants of the divine Lord, Christ Jesus himself.



SERVING

The work that servants perform benefits both their masters and those whom their masters wish to help. When we serve others, as Paul did, we can call ourselves servants of Christ Jesus. We serve Christ by serving them. Jesus made our servant job description very clear during his last evening with his disciples. After washing their feet, he said, “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14 NIV). What can you do to serve others this week?

To all the saints in Christ Jesus.^{NKJV} The word “saints” was a common term designating believers. It did not mean those who were without sin. The Greek word is *hagioi*, meaning “those set apart.” Like Paul and Timothy, these believers were also *in Christ Jesus* because of their faith; they had accepted Jesus as their Savior and had joined God’s family. Only through faith in Christ and our union with him in his death and resurrection can we be set apart from evil and for service to God.

The first “saint” or convert in Philippi was a woman named Lydia. Because few Jews lived in the city, there was no synagogue

for Paul to visit. Thus in Philippi, Paul did not face the problem of false teaching from the Judaizers as he had faced in so many other areas with significant Jewish populations. The Romans tolerated religious practices other than their state religion, but often relegated them to territory outside the city. Thus, these people were outside the city gates beside the river (Acts 16:11-15). From those humble beginnings began the faithful Philippian church.

The church at Philippi was about twelve years old when Paul wrote this letter. It had been a significant source of financial support for Paul (4:15-16; 2 Corinthians 11:9). Paul had often commended the church, holding it up as an example of generosity (2 Corinthians 8:1-2).

Who are in Philippi.^{NKJV} The city of *Philippi* had a rich history. The site of the city was northern Greece (called Macedonia). The city of Philippi, with mountains on every side, and its port city of Neapolis on the Aegean Sea, had originally been strategic sites in the Greek empire. Gold was discovered at Mount Pangaeum to the west, tempting settlers from the Aegean island of Thasos to seize the area. They founded a city near the site of Philippi, naming it Krenides (meaning “spring” for the spring-fed marshlands in the valley).

When Philip II of Macedon (the father of Alexander the Great) ascended the throne of the Greek empire, he captured the city in about 357 B.C., enlarged and strengthened it, and gave it his name. Philip used the yield of the gold mines to outfit his army.

In 168 B.C., the Romans conquered Macedonia. The mountain’s gold was exhausted, and the city declined. But in 42 B.C., the city became a Roman colony (see Acts 16:12). On the plains surrounding the city, Augustus had defeated Brutus and Cassius (assassins of Caesar). He then gave the city the status of a “colony” to celebrate his victory. A colony was considered a part of Rome itself. Its people were Roman citizens (a standing that carried high privilege), had the right to vote, were governed by their own senate, and had Roman law and Latin language. Later the city was given the right to the Law of Italy, giving it many privileges and immunities—most significantly immunity from taxation. Philippi was also a “garrison city” with a Roman garrison stationed there to keep it secure. The Philippians were proud of their Roman heritage and standing (Acts 16:20-21).

At the time of Paul’s visit, Philippi was a thriving commercial center at the crossroads between Europe and Asia. During Paul’s second missionary journey, he tried to continue his ministry northward into Bithynia and Mysia, only to be stopped by the Spirit. In Troas, “Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia

standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9 NIV). Thus in about A.D. 50, Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke crossed the Aegean Sea from Troas and landed at Neapolis, the port of Philippi (Acts 16:11-40).

At Troas, Paul received the Macedonian call, so he, Silas, Timothy, and Luke boarded a ship. They sailed to the island of Samothrace, then on to Neapolis, the port for the city of Philippi.

Paul certainly had a memorable experience in Philippi. While he didn’t face Judaizers, he did find opposition of another kind. Paul cast a demon out of a young slave girl who had been earning a great deal of money for her owners through fortune-telling. When the demon was released, the girl’s fortune-telling powers disappeared, so the girl’s owners were furious. Paul and Silas were arrested, stripped, beaten, flogged (the Roman punishment that Jesus also received—a punishment so severe it sometimes killed the receiver), and thrown into prison, where they were put in an inner cell with their feet fastened in stocks (Acts 16:16-24). Paul later wrote to the Thessalonians, “We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know” (1 Thessalonians 2:2 NIV).

But Paul and Silas praised God and sang hymns in their prison cell. “Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody’s chains came loose” (Acts 16:26 NIV). As a result, the jailer and his family believed, and Paul and Silas were released to continue their journey.

It seems that Luke remained in Philippi, because the “we” account in Acts ends in chapter 16 and picks up again in 20:5 when Paul again leaves Philippi on his return to Jerusalem. Luke’s presence could account for the growth and strengthening of the church in Philippi. Luke would have been a logical choice to remain there, for Philippi may have been Luke’s home. The city had a famous school of medicine, where Luke, a medical doctor, may have studied.

Together with the overseers and deacons.^{NIV} While Paul greeted all the “saints,” meaning the entire church, he singled out the church’s leadership for greetings as well. *Overseers* (also called elders) were in charge of the church, “overseeing” it—watching over, nourishing, and protecting the spiritual life of the believers. The church in Philippi had several overseers drawn from the church membership. Paul had appointed overseers in various churches during his journeys: “Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust”

(Acts 14:23 NIV). In Acts 20:28, Paul spoke to the “elders” in the Ephesian church: “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (NIV). The sheer number of churches meant that neither Paul himself, his companions, nor all the apostles could administer the day-to-day workings of each church. So Paul wisely set up groups of leaders, allowing church members to govern themselves with guidance from the apostles. The new churches needed strong spiritual leadership. The men and women chosen were to lead the churches by teaching sound doctrine, helping believers mature spiritually, and equipping them to live for Jesus Christ despite opposition. The qualifications and duties of the overseers are explained in detail in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. (See Philippians 1:1-5 for Paul’s view of partnership.)



TEAM SPIRIT

Paul knew that God had given him unusual spiritual gifts and a special mission, but he also knew that he was not a one-man band.

Right away, before his teaching and doctrine and pastoral words, Paul displayed his team spirit, referring to Timothy, the deacons, the elders, and all the Christian brothers and sisters near and far.

We who are “in Christ Jesus” need each other. A one-person team will not stay in the game for long. Neither will your team if you drop out. Christians need to work together, side by side, to see God’s kingdom grow.

Deacons were selected to handle the church’s external concerns. In the secular culture, the *diakonoi* handled certain welfare-type duties such as distributing food or other gifts. Some scholars think that the office of deacon first arose in response to a need in the Jerusalem church. Distributing food and caring for widows was drawing the apostles away from preaching and teaching, so seven men were carefully chosen to care for the physical needs of the congregation (Acts 6:1-6). These men, though they were not called “deacons,” functioned as deacons because they were responsible for specific administrative details of the church. The qualifications and duties of deacons are spelled out in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

1:2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.^{NKJV} Paul used *grace* and *peace* as a standard greeting in all his letters. *Grace* and *peace* were the typical Greek and Hebrew greetings (respectively) utilized by Paul to express God’s desire for the believers’ well-being. “Grace” is God’s undeserved

favor—his loving-kindness shown to sinners whereby he saves them and gives them strength to live for him; “peace” refers to the peace that Christ made between sinners and God through his death on the cross. “Peace” also refers to that inner assurance and tranquility that God places in the heart, producing confidence and contentment in Christ. Only God can grant such wonderful gifts. Paul wanted his readers to experience God’s grace and peace in their daily living.

The world offers a temporary and counterfeit version of grace and peace. Grace might be considered luck; peace might be seen as the absence of conflict. But for believers in Philippi and today, God’s blessings are not the result of luck, but because of God’s grace; peace is not a fragile calm, but an inner security. Grace and peace are abundant and available even in troubles, conflicts, and turmoil. Paul was in prison and the Philippians were experiencing persecution (1:28-30), yet Paul greeted them with the assurance of grace and peace.



UNOPENED GIFTS

We get upset at children who fail to appreciate small gifts, yet we undervalue God’s immeasurable gifts of grace and peace. Instead, we seek the possessions and shallow experiences the world offers. “Grace” and “peace” easily become common religious words rather than names for very real benefits that God offers to us. Compared to the big and bright “packages” of our culture, grace and peace appear insignificant. But when we unwrap them, we discover God’s wonderful personal dealings with us. Not a single heartbeat or breath occurs outside of God’s grace. We live because of his divine favor. His favor cannot be earned by effort or bought with money. Jesus calmly spoke of “peace” as a personal possession that he gladly left to those who would follow him (John 14:27). Inside the tiny package marked “Grace and Peace,” we find an inexhaustible treasure of God’s daily presence in our lives. Using these two words in his greeting to the churches, Paul wasn’t offering something new. He was reminding his readers of what they already possessed in Christ. Thank God for his grace, and live in his peace.

The phrase *God our Father* focuses on the family relationship among all believers as God’s children. By using the phrase *Lord Jesus Christ*, Paul was pointing to Jesus as a full person of the Godhead and he was recognizing Jesus’ full deity. God the Father and Christ the Lord are coequal in providing the resources of grace and peace.

**PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE
PHILIPPIAN BELIEVERS / 1:3-11**

Following the convention of first-century letter writing, Paul extended his greeting by expressing thanksgiving and saying a prayer for the believers. Paul's words in this section are tender and sincere; he was genuinely thankful for the Philippians' gifts and partnership in the gospel, and he was confident that they would continue in the faith. Paul truly loved these believers, as expressed in these gentle words; and they truly loved Paul, as expressed by their concern and support. Paul's prayer for this church gives us an example for a prayer we can pray for our church and for believers around the world.

1:3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.^{NKJV} In these words, Paul expressed his love for the Philippian believers. Every time he thought about the Philippians, he thanked God for them. Paul's love for these believers had not diminished; nor had theirs for him, evidenced by their generous support (4:10-20). The Philippian church had brought Paul much joy and little pain. Some of the churches had developed severe problems, and Paul's letters had focused on dealing with the problems. For example, the churches in Rome and Galatia were threatened by Judaizers, who wanted the believers to return to obeying the Jewish law; the church in Corinth was plagued by internal strife; the church in Ephesus was being plagued by false teachers; the church in Colosse was turning away to a heresy all its own; the church in Thessalonica was dealing with false rumors about Paul, disrespect toward leaders, laziness among the members, and false teaching about the resurrection. Paul's letter to the Philippians, while mentioning some concerns and giving some advice, could be considered a beautiful thank-you note for their unwavering support.

Paul probably visited Philippi on three separate occasions: (1) on the second missionary journey, when the gospel was planted (Acts 16:12); (2) on his journey from Ephesus through Macedonia on his way to Greece, where he stayed for three months; and (3) on his way back to Jerusalem (Acts 20:6). While the length of time of each stay is uncertain, his time with the Philippians had cemented a strong relationship.

Some Bible versions expand *you* to read "you all," and correctly so. At the start of his letter, Paul focused on the unity of the fellowship, thanking God for all the believers.

1:4-5 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.^{NIV} Here again, Paul focused on unity in the fellowship.

He prayed for *all of you*, referring to all the believers in the church. The words *I always pray* are in the present tense, meaning that Paul was praying for them continually. Paul planted churches and then kept those churches in prayer as he continued in his ministry.



CLASS REUNION

Assemble a group of old classmates, or army buddies, or teammates, and memories become so vivid you can almost reach out and touch them. Paul hinted that such memories can put new energy into prayer. Try this:

- Today when a bank clerk reminds you of a friend from long ago, pause for a moment to pray.
- When a kid on a bike reminds you of a grandchild, take a minute to pray.
- When a song reminds you of an old boyfriend or girlfriend, pray for that person you once couldn't get out of your mind.
- When a different dialect jogs your memory of a foreign friend, pray for Christians in his or her country (and for your friend too).

Let your memories spark the engine of prayer. And let people know that you thank God when you think of them.

When Paul prayed for the Philippians, he thanked God for them, and he prayed *with joy*. This is the first of many times that Paul used the word “joy” in this letter. The focus on joy sets this letter apart from all of Paul’s other letters; the word “joy” (in its various forms: joy, rejoice) is found fourteen times in this short epistle (see the outline on page 11). Coming from an itinerant preacher imprisoned for his faith, joy would be the last attitude one would expect. Paul had joy despite his imprisonment and the uncertain decision on his case. Paul’s life was on the line, yet he could rejoice and encourage others.

We today might take the lesson to heart that the sign of our professed love for the gospel is the measure of sacrifice we are prepared to make in order to help its progress.

Ralph P. Martin

A standard dictionary equates joy with happiness, but in Scripture the two words are quite distinct. For example, when life is going well, we may feel happy; but when hard times come, we lose that feeling and become unhappy or sad. True joy, however, rises above the rolling waves of circumstance; true joy keeps us on an even keel no matter how happy or sad we might feel because of

our situation. Happiness reflects a horizontal perspective, focusing on circumstances on one's plane of experience. We are happy when events are going our way. Joy reflects a vertical perspective centering on God. We can feel joy in trials because we know that God is still in control (as stated in Romans 8:26-28). True joy is found only in relationship with Jesus Christ. Joy is the gladdening of the heart that comes from knowing Christ as Lord, the feeling of relief because we are released from sin; it is the inner peace and tranquility we have because we know the final outcome of our lives; and it is the assurance that God is in us and in every circumstance. In his final words to his disciples, Jesus promised, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11 NKJV). Jesus said these words as he faced crucifixion. Clearly, for Jesus and for Paul, joy was separate from their circumstances.



REMEMBERED WITH JOY

The Philippians were willing to be used by God for whatever he wanted them to do. When others think about you, what comes to their minds? Are you remembered with joy by them? Do your acts of kindness lift up others?

One reason for Paul's joy was the Philippians' *partnership* (in Greek, *koinonia*) in the gospel. The Philippians were partners through their generous and valuable contribution to Paul's ministry of spreading God's message. They contributed through their practical help when Paul was in Philippi and through their financial support over the years, even when he was in prison. By helping Paul, they were helping Christ's cause to bring the gospel to all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). This partnership had never wavered; Paul mentioned that their support had been constant from the very first time they heard the gospel right through to the day that he was writing this letter (a span of about twelve years). These people did not just sit back and applaud Paul's efforts; instead, they got actively involved in his ministry through their fellowship with him and their financial support. As we help our ministers, missionaries, and evangelists through prayer, hospitality, and financial donations, we become partners with them.

Not only did the Philippians help Paul, but they also got involved in other ministry needs. During his third missionary journey, Paul collected money for the impoverished believers in Jerusalem. The churches in Macedonia—including Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea—were not wealthy, yet they gave



PRAYER IN PAUL'S LIFE AND LETTERS

(verses quoted from NIV)

For Opportunities to Minister

- Romans 1:10 "I pray that . . . the way may be opened for me to come to you."
- Colossians 4:3 "Pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message."
- 1 Thessalonians 3:10 "Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again."

For Knowledge and Insight for Believers

- Ephesians 1:18-19 "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."
- Philippians 1:9 "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight."
- Colossians 1:9 "Since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding."

For Progress and Growth for Believers

- 2 Corinthians 13:9 "Our prayer is for your perfection."
- 1 Thessalonians 3:13 "May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy."

For the Believers to Live Holy Lives

- 2 Corinthians 13:7 "Now we pray to God that . . . you will do what is right."
- Colossians 1:10 "We pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way."
- 2 Thessalonians 1:11 "We constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling."

For the Believers to Persevere

- Romans 12:12 "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."
- Colossians 4:2 "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful."
- Colossians 4:12 "Epaphras . . . is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm."

For the Believers to Be Encouraged

- Ephesians 1:16 "I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers."
- Ephesians 3:16, 19 "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power . . . [and] that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."
- Colossians 1:3 "We always thank God . . . when we pray for you."
- 1 Thessalonians 1:2 "We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers."

For the Spread of the Gospel

- Romans 10:1 "My heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved."
- Ephesians 6:19 "Pray also for me . . . that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel."
- 2 Thessalonians 3:1 "Pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored."
- Philemon 1:6 "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith."

For Others

- Philippians 1:4-5 "In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel."
- 1 Timothy 2:1 "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone."
- 2 Timothy 1:3 "Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers."
- Philemon 1:4 "I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers."

joyfully and generously. Paul held these churches up as examples of generosity:

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints (2 Corinthians 8:1-4 NRSV).

1:6 Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.^{NIV}

The verb tense indicates that Paul had been confident (that is, he had full assurance) from the first, and he was still confident to that very day, of God's continued work to transform the lives of the Philippian believers. *He* refers to God; the *good work* refers to God's salvation and continued perfecting of the believers. God's goal for believers is that they be "conformed to the likeness of his Son, that [Jesus] might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Romans 8:29 NIV).



NO "INCOMPLETES"

Do you sometimes feel as though you aren't making progress in your spiritual life? When God starts a project, he completes it! As with the Philippians, God will help you grow in grace until he has completed his work in your life. When you are discouraged, remember that God won't give up on you. He promises to finish the work he has begun. When you feel incomplete, unfinished, or distressed by your shortcomings, remember and be confident in God's promise and provision. Don't let your present condition rob you of the joy of knowing Christ or keep you from growing closer to him.

God who began a good work of redemption in us *will carry it on to completion* throughout our lifetime and then finish it when we meet him face-to-face. God's work *for* us began when Christ died on the cross in our place. His work *in* us began when we first believed. Now the Holy Spirit lives in us, enabling us to be more like Christ every day. God not only initiates our salvation, he guarantees its fulfillment (Ephesians 1:13-14). Paul was describing the process of Christian growth and maturity that began when we accepted Jesus and continues until *the day of Christ Jesus* (see also 1:10), that is, when Christ returns. Nothing in this life or after death can stop God's good work in us (Romans 8:28-39). Despite any persecution the church in Philippi might face, Paul was confident that God would continue his good work in them. Paul didn't know when the "day of Christ Jesus" would arrive, but he lived as though it could come at any moment.

Variations of the phrase "day of Christ Jesus" occur only six times in the New Testament; three of those times are in Philippians (see 1 Corinthians 1:8; 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:14; Philippians 1:6, 10; 2:16). The phrase emphasizes the future day when Christ will return for his church, complete believers' salvation, and give believers their rewards. The phrase "day of the Lord" (Amos 5:18-20; 1 Thessalonians 5:2) has more of an emphasis on judgment.



WHO'S IN CHARGE?

If your God is second fiddle to some higher power, then your God is too small. The God of the Bible is “sovereign,” an old word used to describe a king—and nobody has more power than a king.

God's sovereign action is the Christian's belief that all of life, the good and the ugly, happens under the eyes and loving will of the universal ruler. Nothing happens that God does not know about. And while God does not approve of the evil people do, God controls even that and will judge it one day, as befits a righteous king.

Be confident today that your life is fully in the hands of the sovereign God, who doesn't miss anything and who loves you with the same boundlessness with which he rules all of creation.

1:7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart.^{NIV} Paul knew that his feeling of confidence in the Philippians was *right* and appropriate because of his personal relationship with them and knowledge of their sincere faith in Christ. The Greek word translated *to feel* (*phronein*) is used by Paul twenty-three times in this letter. This word means more than simply affection or an emotional reaction; it goes deeper, showing special concern based on others' best interests. These Philippian believers held a special place in Paul's heart (see also 1:8; 4:1).

The Greek structure of the sentence makes it possible to translate the last part “because you hold me in your heart” (as in NRSV) and could refer back to Paul's thankfulness for their support. In either translation, Paul and the Philippians had mutual affection: Paul in his constant prayers for them and concern for their faith; and the Philippians in their constant and generous support of Paul's ministry.

For all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.^{NRSV} Notice again Paul's emphasis on *all of you*. If there were any divisions in the church, Paul made it clear that all the believers shared *in God's grace* (see 1:2). As Paul sat imprisoned in Rome, he knew that the Philippians suffered as well because of their deep concern and love for him. Paul knew that the church was constantly praying on his behalf. As Paul received God's grace in his struggles, so the Philippians would share in that grace as they faced persecution for their faith. The Philippians also shared *in the defense and confirmation of the gospel* through their support of Paul's ministry across the world and during his imprisonment. The words “defense” and “confirmation” could refer to Paul's preaching ministry, as he continued to defend

(maintain and uphold the truth of) and confirm (establish the truth and validity of) the gospel message. Or the words could be looking forward to Paul's upcoming trial, where he would defend and confirm his faith in the gospel before the Roman court. In either case, the believers in Philippi shared with Paul through their prayers and support. Wherever Paul was, even in prison, he faithfully preached the Good News. Remember Paul's inspiring example when hindrances, small or large, slow down your work for God.



IN THE HEART

You've heard sermons on the duty to serve others selflessly. Now go one step further: put those people in your heart.

Doctors take an oath, a symbol of their duty to heal. Judges promise to render decisions "without fear or favor," a duty to fairness. Christians are to share the gospel and minister to people's needs, but in this case, duty alone isn't enough.

Do you have anyone in your heart? With that person, you don't calculate costs or punch a time clock. The energy you exert is borne on wings of love; the times you give are the happiest moments of your day.

Open your heart to another person today. Turn duty into love, a job into joy.

1:8 For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.^{NKJV} Paul, separated by his imprisonment from his dear friends in Philippi and uncertain of whether he would see them again during his life on earth, experienced intense longing for fellowship with them. He called God as his witness to the truth of his statement; Paul's *affection* for the Philippians was so strong that it was deeper than human emotion; it was the selfless affection of *Jesus Christ* himself.

The word "affection" is literally "inward parts" or "viscera," such as the inward parts of an animal sacrifice (heart, liver, kidneys). It conveys very strong internal feelings. How could Paul say that he loved the Philippians with the affection of Jesus Christ? Just as Jesus loved them, so Paul loved them. Although Christ is the originator of this love, it was expressed through Paul.

1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment.^{NKJV} While Paul's travels were hindered by his imprisonment, his prayers were not. And Paul prayed with joy for the Philippians (1:4). Here he explained what he prayed for them. He asked that their *love* for God and for one another *may abound* (that is, overflow). But Paul wasn't talking about gushing sentimental or emotional affection. He was

praying that their love would overflow, first in the *knowledge* of God and his ways. As each believer learned more and more about God and his ways, the entire congregation would experience a stronger fellowship and love for one another.



LONGING TO SEE

Have you ever longed to see a friend with whom you share fond memories? Paul had such a longing to see the Christians at Philippi. His love and affection for them was based not merely on past experiences, but also on the unity that comes when believers draw upon Christ's love. All Christians are part of God's family and thus share equally in the transforming power of his love. Do you feel a deep love for fellow Christians, friends and strangers alike? Let Christ's love motivate you to love other Christians and to express that love in your actions toward them.

Paul also prayed that the Philippians' love would overflow in *discernment* (also translated "depth of insight" or "perception"). The church in Philippi was experiencing several problems in its fellowship, such as pride and faultfinding (see 2:1-18 and 3:10-4:1). Before giving any admonition, Paul tactfully revealed that he was praying that the believers would have discernment in their words and actions. Certainly this would affect their relationships. Relationships must not be based on changeable emotions; spontaneity must be tempered by self-restraint and tactfulness. If there were a problem, it should be prayed about and then dealt with in loving discernment.

Often the best way to influence others is to pray for them. Paul's prayer for the Philippians was that they would be unified in love (see also Colossians 3:14). Their love was based, not on feelings, but on what Christ had done for them. As you grow in Christ's love, your heart and mind must grow together. Is your love and insight growing?

1:10 So that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.^{NIV} The Philippians should have both knowledge and discernment so that, in their Christian lives and in their dealings with one another, they would be able to *discern what is best*. They should have the ability to differentiate between right and wrong, good and bad, healthy and dangerous, vital and trivial; but they should also have the discernment to decide between acceptable and right, good and best, and important and urgent—in other words, to know what really matters. We ought to pray for moral discernment so we can maintain our Christian morals and values (see Hebrews 5:14). A lot of

Christians get involved in peripheral pursuits and neglect the most important priority: to know Christ and live for him (3:8).

Their ability to discern (that is, to test and approve) should cause them to focus on what really matters as a body of believers. Paul prayed that the Philippians would be *pure*. The Greek word is *eilikrineis*, used only here and in 2 Peter 3:1. The word derives from the Greek words for “sunlight” and “judgment.” The Philippians’ transformation should be so thorough that the resulting purity could pass the toughest scrutiny—the light of God’s judgment (see 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Paul also prayed that they would be *blameless*. The Greek word is *aproskopoi*, which also means “not causing others to stumble.” Believers ought to be blameless with God (keeping their relationship with him up-to-date and personal) and with people (that their behavior would not lead others into sin).

The *day of Christ* refers to the time when God will judge the world through Jesus Christ. We should live each day as though he could return at any moment—expectant, ready, and eager to be in his presence.

1:11 Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.^{NIV} Finally, Paul prayed that the believers would be *filled with the fruit of righteousness*, that “fruit” being all of the character traits flowing from a right relationship with God. “Righteousness” means a right relationship with God as a result of justification from sin. Paul expounds on this in 3:9, wherein he says that he does not want to have a righteousness of his own that comes from the law, but “that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.” Being made right with God through Christ enables us to live rightly before him. There is a parallel between what Paul prayed for the Philippians and what he himself pursued (as clarified in 3:7-15).

The phrase, “fruit (or harvest) of righteousness” is found in Isaiah 32:17 in the Old Testament, and in Hebrews 12:11 and James 3:18 in the New. It refers to the righteousness of God implanted in us, causing acts of practical righteousness to flow out of us. There is no other way for believers to gain this fruit than through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Only his life through us can help us live in ways that often go against our human nature. See Galatians 5:22-23 for a listing of this fruit of righteousness or “fruit of the Spirit.”

Such infilling and the results revealed as “fruit” in people’s lives are always *to the glory and praise of God*. Believers’ lives ought to glorify and praise God, for it is by his grace alone that

sinful human beings can obtain righteousness. See Ephesians 1:12-14 for more on how our lives bring praise to God.

HONOR CHRIST BY LIFE OR DEATH / 1:12-26

Paul explained to the Philippians that they shouldn't despair over his imprisonment because what had happened to him was helping to spread the gospel. Paul's example encouraged many believers to willingly take a stand for Christ and preach the Good News regardless of the consequences. Paul himself never stopped preaching, even in his confinement. The soldiers guarding Paul heard the gospel, and they learned that he was in prison not for being a criminal, but for being a Christian. Despite the differing circumstances of Paul's life, his goal never changed—the gospel of Christ was to be preached to as many people as possible. This, too, should be our goal. While we go about the busyness of daily living, we should remember that we are to tell others about Christ and represent him in every situation.

1:12 I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel.^{NRSV} Paul called the Philippians *beloved*, again emphasizing his fatherly love for them, and he turned his attention to a concern expressed by the Philippian church through Epaphroditus. The Philippians were certainly concerned for Paul's well-being (expressed by their financial gift), but they were also concerned that Paul's imprisonment had slowed down the spread of the gospel. By the time of this writing, Paul had been in prison about two years. Paul even may have questioned God's reason for his lengthy imprisonment, for it effectively put him out of commission for further traveling and preaching. But Paul had come to understand, and he wanted the Philippians to *know* beyond any doubt, that *what has happened* (that is, Paul's imprisonment) *has actually helped to spread the gospel*. Although one of Christianity's most tireless missionaries had been imprisoned, God's work could not be slowed down. In fact, God was using Paul's imprisonment to actually help spread the gospel to Europe. "Helped to spread" is also translated "furtherance" and comes from the Greek word meaning "to cut the way before." The picture is of pioneers cutting through uncharted territory. Paul's arrest and subsequent lengthy imprisonment had resulted in the gospel moving in new directions. Paul went on to explain this in the following verses.

1:13 So that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ.^{NRSV} Paul's long arrest had allowed him to share the gospel

with the very soldiers who guarded him. As a result, *the whole imperial guard* (the Praetorian guard, elite troops housed in the emperor's palace) and *everyone else* (others in the palace, other believers, those who came to visit Paul, those in power, and members of the Jewish community—see Acts 28:17-23) knew that Paul was in prison only because of his belief in Christ and teaching of the gospel, not for being a criminal. Paul's example, fervent love for Christ, and manner of life, even in prison, had allowed others to see the gospel in a whole new light. The custom of the time was for a prisoner to be guarded by a soldier who would be replaced every four hours. These soldiers certainly heard Paul's words to those who visited, as well as his message spoken to them personally. Paul was confident that the message of the gospel was infiltrating the Roman army and the palace itself (see comments on 4:22).



PIONEERS

Missionaries of the past who boarded ships to go to foreign lands did not expect to see their homeland shores again. Their good-byes were final, in terms of earth time. Some early missionaries (from Europe to the New World) actually sold themselves into slavery in order to preach to slaves. There was no turning back for them.

Pioneering requires a high sacrifice. Paul's passion was for others to discover the Good News of eternal life through Jesus Christ. No matter what.

Pressing through frontiers of spiritual darkness still requires pioneers today—people who will reach neglected people or new people groups. Pray for missionaries, support them, join them.

How did Paul end up in chains in a Roman prison? While he was visiting Jerusalem, some Jews caused a riot and had him arrested. Eventually, Paul appealed to Caesar to hear his case (Acts 21:15–25:12). Paul was then escorted by soldiers to Rome, where he was placed under house arrest while awaiting trial—not a trial for breaking civil law, but for proclaiming the Good News of Christ. At that time, the Roman authorities did not consider this to be a serious charge. A few years later, however, Rome would take a different view of Christianity and make every effort to stamp it out of existence. Paul's house arrest allowed him some degree of freedom. He could have visitors, continue to preach, and write letters such as this one. A brief record of Paul's time in Rome is found in Acts 28:11-31. The Jews certainly hoped that Paul's arrest would silence his teaching; the Romans hoped the arrest would keep the peace (Paul's teaching sometimes infuriated

his audiences to the point of rioting). However, locking up Paul only served to spread the gospel through new preachers to new audiences.



A NICE REFLECTION

Being imprisoned would cause many people to become bitter or to give up, but Paul saw it as one more opportunity to spread the Good News of Christ. He realized that his current circumstances weren't as important as what he did with them. Turning a bad situation into a good one, Paul reached out to the Roman soldiers who made up the palace guard and encouraged those Christians who were afraid of persecution. We may not be in prison, but we still have plenty of opportunities to be discouraged—times of indecision, financial burdens, family conflict, church conflict, or the loss of our jobs. How we act in such situations will reflect what we believe. Like Paul, look for ways to demonstrate your faith, even in bad situations. Whether or not the situation improves, your faith will grow stronger.

1:14 **And most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.**^{NRSV}

Not only was the gospel being spread by Paul through his contacts in prison, but his efforts were being multiplied outside the prison. Paul's faith, confidence, and patience in spite of his imprisonment helped his fellow believers become more *confident in the Lord*. Whatever the reason for their lack of confidence before—whether they had been afraid to speak up, whether they left all the mission work to Paul because they lacked his boldness, or whether they wondered if faith in God was worth the price—they saw Paul's faith and it strengthened their own. They began to tell the gospel *with greater boldness and without fear*. With more and more believers gaining boldness in telling the gospel of Jesus Christ, more and more people heard the message and had the opportunity to accept it. This gave Paul great joy. He passed this good news on to his friends in Philippi, that they might know how God was working through his difficult situation.

1:15 **It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.**^{NIV}

Paul had been made aware that some of the brothers and sisters who had been newly emboldened to speak about Christ were doing so *out of envy and rivalry*. But others were preaching Christ *out of goodwill*—that is, with pure motives. They wanted to help others to faith and they wanted to glorify God.



ON THE FRONT LINES

On Omaha Beach, June 6, 1944, when regiments of men were pinned down in fear, desperate for confidence, a brigadier general who could have sent written orders took charge by roaming the beaches like a coach along the sidelines. His language was coarse but his courage was unmistakable. He moved the beach-head uphill, turning a disaster into victory.

Paul's battle was spiritual, and he carried no rank except "servant of Jesus Christ." But his bold leadership inspired many others to share the gospel. His courage dissolved others' fear. See, his life told them, *it can be done!*

How can you become less inhibited about witnessing for Christ? First, watch those who do it. Second, do it yourself. And third, lead others in doing it. Your confidence will sit still as long as you do and grow as fast as you step out from behind your cover.

This comment by Paul provides an interesting look into people's motives. All of those who preached Christ were sincere believers—they had the right doctrine and they acted upon it by sharing it with others. While the end result might be the same (people hearing the Good News), some actually had wrong motives in their preaching. Their motives stemmed from *envy and rivalry*. Now that the great missionary Paul had been virtually silenced in prison, some of these brothers were hoping to make a name for themselves in the vacuum that Paul left. Perhaps they hoped for great notoriety, trying to turn people's eyes away from Paul and toward themselves. These people had no personal love for Paul. They even hoped that their planting churches and gaining converts would upset Paul and make his imprisonment even more frustrating.



CHRISTIAN COMPETITION

These Christian preachers were driven by envy and rivalry. They saw the authoritative position Paul enjoyed, and that painful awareness drove them to desire the same advantage. They were striving to equal or excel Paul's position. Christian leaders today can fall for this same temptation: to gain leverage over another or to compete for status or position. God gives us what we really need, so Christian leaders must learn to be content with what God has given (see 4:11). Our eternal life in Christ is our greatest asset, so we should not compete against or strive with others.

1:16 The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.^{NIV} Those who preached Christ "out of

goodwill” (1:15) did so *in love*, spreading the Good News of Christ with pure motives. They knew Paul was in prison, not because of any criminal act, but simply for his *defense of the gospel* (see also 1:7). Paul had landed in prison because of his devotion to Christ and his zeal to spread the gospel. Yet his fellow believers in Rome, some of whom may have been his spiritual children, fearlessly picked up where he left off, continuing and expanding his ministry.



FOR A PURPOSE

Paul could have become depressed, discouraged, or disillusioned. He could have wallowed in self-pity and despair. Instead, he regarded his imprisonment as being appointed or destined. He considered, “I am put here to fulfill God’s greater purpose.” God had used Paul’s imprisonment in Rome to bring the gospel to the Roman emperor. Do you have difficulty accepting your station in life? Do you resent where God has placed you? Although education and focused effort may enable us to take a new role or get a new job, often God puts us in a place to serve. Whether it is an actual prison or a place that feels like one, God wants you to serve him faithfully and joyfully.

1:17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.

^{NIV} Those who were preaching Christ “out of envy and rivalry” (1:15) were doing so because of their own *selfish ambition*, making their motives less than pure. These preachers were not so much interested in their message as they were in their reputation. Apparently their doctrine was sound—these were not false teachers—Paul never tolerated any kind of false teaching (see 2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:6-9). The error was in motive, not in content. These self-seeking opportunists hoped that Paul would be angered at the notoriety of new and powerful preachers who took his place while he was in prison. Little did these men understand Paul’s sincere love for God and his single-minded focus on spreading the gospel.

1:18-19 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

^{NIV} Paul had an amazingly selfless attitude. He knew that some were preaching to build their own reputations, taking advantage of Paul’s imprisonment to try to make a name for themselves. Regardless of the motives of these preachers, Paul rejoiced that *whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached*. Some Christians serve for the wrong reasons. Paul wouldn’t condone, nor does God excuse, their motives, but

we should be glad if God uses their message, regardless of their motives. Paul had no concern for his own reputation or success; he had dedicated his life to glorifying God. He understood that God was being glorified even as he sat in chains; thus, Paul could rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.^{NIV} Paul had been able to rejoice during his two years

in prison, could rejoice that good results could come from preachers with bad motives, and would *continue to rejoice* no matter how long he would remain in prison or how long he would live. Paul knew that all that had happened (resulting in his imprisonment, see also 1:12) would end in his *deliverance*.

That is the way it is in the church. It never lives by its deeds, not even by its deeds of love. Rather it lives by what it cannot see and yet believes. It sees affliction and believes deliverance.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer



DELIVERANCE

Paul, the prisoner, expected to be delivered, but not by a daring raid. In fact, the means of his escape are downright curious: prayer and the help of the Holy Spirit. What kind of talk is this?

Prayer—his own, no doubt, and the prayers of many Christians. Paul counts them as part of his life's treasure.

The help of the Holy Spirit—the calm assurance that God is present and potent.

Paul knew that he might never escape detention; his shackles might never be loosened. So what? He was delivered.

Today, try prayer, and whatever your circumstances, accept the help of the Holy Spirit, the key to real freedom.

What kind of deliverance did Paul envision? While most scholars agree that Paul was quoting from Job 13:16, “Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance” (NIV), they disagree on what Paul meant. Some scholars argue that Paul was referring to his upcoming trial, believing that he would be acquitted and freed (which did happen). However, this is unlikely because of Paul’s words in the next verse that reveal his uncertainty about the outcome of his trial. Others believe that, like Job, Paul was focusing on his relationship with God—that whether he lived or died, his stand for Christ would be vindicated. Still others think Paul was referring to his apostleship in the face of the envious preachers. As Job sought to prove his integrity, so Paul was seeking to vindicate his standing, despite his chains. A final option, and most likely,

is that Paul was referring to his ultimate deliverance in salvation. That is, whether or not he would be delivered by the Roman court, he would be delivered from God's judgment.

Paul's confidence came from two sources: human and divine. Paul knew that the Philippians' constant prayers had sustained him. As Paul consistently prayed for the churches (1:4-5), so he petitioned their prayers on his behalf (Romans 15:30; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Colossians 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2). In addition, Paul depended upon *the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ*. The word "help" (*epichoregias*) carries the meaning of "support." The "Spirit of Jesus Christ" refers to the Holy Spirit, who makes Christ's presence real in true believers. The prayers of the church and the support of the Holy Spirit sustained Paul through a difficult trial and, in the end, no matter what the outcome, Paul would ultimately be "delivered."

1:20 It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death.^{NRSV}

The Greek word *apokaradokia*, translated "eager expectation," pictures a person straining his neck to see what is ahead. In Romans 8:19, Paul used the same word as he described looking forward to the revelation of God's children, as God had planned from the beginning of creation. Hope and expectation are linked together. Paul looked forward to the final fulfillment. He was not concerned about the verdict of his trial, but for the testimony he would leave. Paul hoped and expected to *not be put to shame in any way*. He was not worried about his own humiliation, but he prayed for courage to present the gospel. When standing trial, Paul wanted to speak God's truth courageously and not be timid or ashamed. The word "boldness" means with "sufficient courage" (NIV). Paul wanted to have openness and fearlessness when he spoke out for Christ. *Whether by life or by death*, he wanted only to exalt Christ. "Exalt" means to raise in status, to give dignity and honor. Paul did not say, "I will exalt Christ"; instead, he said, "Christ will be exalted." Paul did not rely on his own boldness, but rather on the help of the Holy Spirit to produce that exaltation of Christ through Paul. Paul wanted his witness to heighten the effect of God's power and plan. Early Christians would remember the death of Stephen (a death Paul himself witnessed), the first martyr for the faith, who died bravely, and whose death glorified Christ and resulted in an incredible spread of the gospel (Acts 7:1-8:1).

Perish all things, so that
Christ be magnified.

Lord Shaftesbury

This was not Paul's final imprisonment in Rome, but he didn't know that. Awaiting trial, Paul knew that he could either be released or executed; however, he trusted Christ to work it out for his deliverance. If the verdict were to go against him, Christ would be glorified in Paul's martyrdom. If Paul was to be released, he would welcome the opportunity to continue serving the Lord. As it turned out, Paul was released from this imprisonment but arrested again two or three years later. Only faith in Christ could sustain Paul in such adversity.

1:21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.^{NKJV} To those who don't believe in God, life on earth is all there is, and so it is natural for them to strive for this world's values—money, popularity, power, pleasure, and prestige. For Paul, however, to live meant to develop eternal values and to tell others about Christ, who alone could help them see life from an eternal perspective. *For to me* indicates Paul's firm resolve and unshaken faith. Paul used the present tense when he said *to live is Christ*, thus emphasizing the process of living. For Paul, the essence of life was Christ and having a vital spiritual union with him. Everything Paul desired or attempted was inspired by his devotion for Christ. The meaning is not quite the same as Colossians 1:27: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (NIV), or Galatians 2:20: "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (NIV). Paul wrote not so much of the indwelling Christ here as of Christ being the motive and goal for living and doing worthwhile work for the benefit of others.

Paul's whole purpose in life was to speak out boldly for Christ and to become more like him. Those who wished to "stir up trouble" for Paul (1:17 NIV) might have thought that his anticipation of death would bring shame and fear. Instead, Paul knew that both his living and dying were the decision of God's sovereign will. *To die* would not be a tragedy but, instead, a realization of Paul's hope and expectation (1:20). On one hand, death would be a release from the toils and troubles of this life; on the other, death was the gateway to Christ's presence. To live would continue Paul's ministry of spreading the gospel; to die would be *gain* because Paul's martyrdom would glorify Christ and bring him face-to-face with the Savior. Paul's faithful and fearless witness even unto death would enhance the reputation of the gospel. Christ would be magnified as much as in Paul's death as he had been in Paul's life. In addition, Paul could confidently say that dying would be even better than living because he would be with God whom he had served and loved (1 John 3:2-3).

1:22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!^{NIV} Paul

poured out his heart to his friends in Philippi. If the verdict should go for Paul and he should be released, that would mean more *fruitful labor*—further missionary travels, more churches planted, more converts, the strengthening of fellow believers, more opportunities to serve Christ. (Paul used this expression elsewhere; see Romans 15:18; 2 Corinthians 10:11; Philippians 2:30.) Certainly that would be a happy result; yet the opposite might happen—he could be sentenced to death. Yet that would not be bad, for Paul states that death would be preferred to life if more glory could be given to Christ. Paul was not saying, “What a burden; if I am alive I must do my toilsome work.” Instead, he seems to be saying, “Being alive is a gift; I’m responsible to use it. Fruitful labor is a must.”



A LIFE-AND-DEATH SITUATION

Some people hold tightly to this life. Afraid to lose or let go, they in effect become slaves to their mortality. In contrast, those who do not fear death, seeing it as merely the door to eternal life, are free to live with purpose, meaning, and commitment to a cause. Because Paul was ready to die, he was ready to live. He belonged to Christ and was confident of his eternal destination, so he could donate his life on earth to living for Christ. Where is your hope—is it in this life or in the next? Until you are ready to die, you won’t be ready to live.

Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! reveals Paul’s inner dilemma. He did not have a “choice” to make, for the decision was in God’s hands. Yet if the decision were up to him, he wouldn’t know what to choose. How many of us are so dedicated to God that if the choice were given, we would choose to be in God’s presence?

1:23 For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.^{NKJV} If Paul had to choose between these two options, he would be unable to do so. The two choices were equally compelling: (1) the desire to die and be with Christ himself and (2) the desire to stay alive and so continue his fellowship with and service to the believers. While Paul lived in intimate communion with Christ during his (Paul’s) service on earth, being *with Christ* in heaven would be even closer and more intimate than any human could imagine. These words reveal Paul’s understanding of death—believers not waiting in purgatory or in a “soul-sleep,” but being immediately present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:2-8). Paul had no question that death would be *far better* because in death he would reach

his ultimate goal (to be with Christ) and finally have eternal fellowship in God's presence.

Although the choice wasn't Paul's to make, he knew in his heart that it would be *far better* to depart and be with Christ because death would remove him from the trials of the world and bring him face-to-face with his Savior. There is absolute certainty in Paul's words. He had seen Jesus on the road to Damascus upon his conversion. After a life of faithful service, Paul knew that he would go to heaven to live forever with Christ.

1:24 But it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.^{NIV}

Paul was prepared and ready to die at any moment for his faith, and he actually looked forward to death because of the certainty of heaven. But he knew that his personal desires had to be subordinated to God's will. Paul felt that his ministry on earth was not yet complete and that he needed to *remain in the body* to help the churches grow and solidify. Paul placed his fellow believers' needs above his own desires.



MAKING THE MOST

Paul knew that heaven would be better than this life, and he looked forward to it. Yet in obedience to Christ, Paul would work and serve as Christ saw fit. We must avoid two errors: (1) to work and lose sight of our ultimate home with Christ and (2) to desire only to be with Christ and neglect the work he has called us to do. So we must work hard now, live at our peak, serve and love those around us, help the church grow, heal someone's wounds, write a good poem, clean up our yard, do our best at school, but we always know there's a better day coming!

Always with one eye toward heaven, Paul made the most of each day. So should we.

1:25 Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith.^{NRSV}

This verse seems to reveal a new confidence. At times, Paul felt that death was certain (1:20; 2:17). At times, he was convinced that God still had work for him to do. In this verse, Paul expressed confidence that this imprisonment, at least, would not end in his death. Paul would remain alive, would return to Philippi (Philemon 22), and would work among them for their *progress and joy in faith*. The "progress" Paul envisioned involved a deepening of the Philippians' joy and a strengthening and stretching of their faith. Perhaps Paul wrote these words thinking that if he was released, their joy would know no bounds (1:26) and their faith would certainly be strengthened.

1:26 So that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.^{NIV} Paul's return would reassure the Philippians as they saw God answering their prayers for Paul's safety (1:19). The word used for "joy" in this verse is different from the many other usages in this letter (even from the word in 1:25). Here it means "exulting in Jesus Christ," boasting in Jesus Christ as the grounds or basis for overflowing joy. Paul's safe return would cause the congregation that loved him so much to exult in Christ Jesus because of answered prayer.

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