Faith Foundations Study Guides

To Live is Christ
A Journey of Discovery in the Book of Philippians
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Welcome to the Faith Foundations study guide on Philippians! Whether you are just beginning your new life with Christ, or have been a Christian for many years, this study guide is for you. It is designed to help you discover, through personal study and group discussion, the incredible riches of God’s Word, and to help you grow in your walk with God by applying what you learn. This book is divided into 8 lessons, each of which contains the full NIV text of the Scripture passage, several study and discussion questions, and a verse-by-verse commentary. So, together with a Bible to look up cross-references, you have everything you need for your “journey of discovery” in Philippians.

**Why Small Groups?**

These materials can be used profitably in personal study or in an adult Sunday School class. But their value will be best realized when they are used in small groups, meeting either at church during the Sunday School hour or in homes during the week. There are several reasons for this.

First, no one has perfect insight into every passage of Scripture; we can all benefit from hearing the perspectives of other believers as we seek to understand and apply the Bible. A small group gathering, using the discussion questions included in this book, is an ideal way to stimulate a sharing of observations and ideas.

Second, a small group provides a community of fellow travelers who, along with us, are seeking to follow Christ in the midst of family responsibilities, job pressures, and personal struggles. In today’s fragmented and mobile society, the natural networks of neighborhoods and family no longer provide the support they once did. We need some way of making connections with others for mutual support, people with whom we can share our joys and sorrows—people who will listen, who will pray with us, who will offer a helping hand and a word of encouragement, and who will confront us in love when we’ve gotten off track.

Finally, a small group combines the benefits of Biblical insight and community support by keeping us accountable. If we only study the Scriptures alone, or listen to them taught in a large group, it’s easy to let them go “in one ear and out the other”. But when a small group of people are learning the same things at the same time, they can help one another to apply the things they are learning.

**How Are the Groups Organized?**

The groups should be composed of 6-14 people: if they are smaller, any absences can make it difficult to maintain the discussion; if they are larger, not everyone can participate. You can meet from two to four times a month; if the group meets less than twice a month, the members aren’t spending enough time together to build relationships. Some groups find that meeting three times a month during the school year, with a break during the summer, provides a good rhythm of involvement and time off.

You may choose to include a mix of married and single, older and younger members, or you may organize your groups by age or marital status. There are benefits to homogeneous groups in which the members are going through similar life experiences, but there are also benefits of a diverse group in which the younger members can benefit from the experience of the older.

Each group needs to have a recognized leader, preferably one selected and trained by the pastor or church leadership. This person’s role during the meeting is not primarily to teach (although preparation of the lesson is a must), but to guide the discussion and keep the group from getting bogged down on side issues. He or she does not need to be the host; in fact, it is preferable that group responsibilities, such as providing a home in which to meet and organizing refreshments, be shared among the members.

Finally, membership in the group should be based on three commitments: To prepare for each meeting by completing the lesson in advance, which takes from 1/2 to 2 hours (but come to the meeting even if you haven’t done the lesson); to place a high priority on regular attendance and come to the meetings except in case of emergency; and to keep confidential anything of a personal nature which is shared during the meetings (except when it is necessary to communicate concerns to the pastor).

**What Is the Group Meeting Like?**

Each group meeting should last from 1 1/2 to 2 hours, and provide time for discussion of the lesson, prayer, and fellowship. A problem in many groups is for the lesson to take up most of the time, with only a few minutes left over for prayer and fellowship. This must be avoided for the goal of building relationships to be achieved.

Here is a suggested schedule:

- 15 minutes: Gathering
- 30-45 minutes: Discussion of the lesson
- 20-30 minutes: Prayer
- 15-30 minutes: Refreshments

As for child care, experience has shown that in order to receive the maximum benefit from time spent in the meeting, all members of the group need to be free to focus on the discussion, rather than caring for children. Therefore, with the possible exception of infants under one year, parents should make arrangements for child care during the meetings. Some options include "trading" child care with parents whose group meets on a different night, having a baby sitter care for children in another room during the meeting, or providing child care for all the groups at the church.
Introduction to Philippians

Author

The author of this book is Paul the apostle, along with Timothy (1:1).

Place and Date of Writing

Although Paul states that he wrote the letter from prison (1:13), he does not specify the location of this imprisonment. He experienced several during his ministry (2 Cor. 11:23), and it is likely that not all are specifically mentioned in Acts or in Paul’s letters. Many interpreters take this to be Rome, where he was under house arrest for two years (Acts 28:16-31). The fact that he was able to preach freely during this time (Acts 28:30-31), as well as the references in this letter to “the whole palace guard” (1:13) and to “God’s people” among “Caesar’s household” (4:22) support this view, which would date Philippians around A.D. 61-62. However, this view does present some difficulties. For example, the distance between Rome and Philippi, several hundred miles, would make the number of trips that are implied by the frequent communications between Paul and the church at Philippi challenging. Other suggestions as to Paul’s location when writing the letter are Caesarea (see Acts 23:35) or Ephesus.

Recipients

This letter is addressed to “To all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons”. Philippi, named after king Philip II of Macedon, had been a Roman colony since 42 B.C., when Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Julius Caesar’s assassins, Brutus and Cassius, on a nearby battlefield. Its citizens had all the rights and privileges of Roman citizens, and the city was modeled after Rome, both architecturally and religiously.

Paul’s first visit to Philippi in A.D. 49 is recounted in Acts 16. At that time he was accompanied by Silas, Timothy, and also likely Luke. In response to a vision, they traveled to Philippi from Troas, via Samothrace and Neapolis. While in Philippi, they met Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth and a gentle follower of Judaism, who became the first convert to Christ in Europe. Following an incident in which Paul cast out a spirit from a fortune-teller, Paul and Silas were attacked by a mob, beaten, and thrown into prison. However, an earthquake loosened their chains, and the jailer, amazed by what had happened, was led to faith and baptized, along with his household. Following these events, Paul and his companions were released and asked to leave the city.

Occasion

The immediate occasion for the letter was Paul’s receipt of a financial gift from the church at Philippi, brought by Epaphroditus (4:18). Paul desired to acknowledge the gift, and also took the opportunity to send their messenger back to them, because they heard that he had become ill while caring for Paul’s needs, and were concerned about his welfare (2:25-30). At the same time, Paul wanted to encourage the Philippians by reporting his own situation; i.e., that the gospel continued to advance despite his imprisonment (1:12-18).

At the time of writing the letter, significant issues had developed in the church at Philippi which Paul needed to address. First, a dispute had arisen between two of the leading women in the church, Euodia and Syntyche (4:2), and there are references in the letter to the need for unity and humility, rather than selfish ambition or “grumbling and arguing” (2:14; see 1:27; 2:1-5).

Second, the Philippians were experiencing trials and opposition (1:28-30), as Paul’s repeated references to the positive value of suffering for Christ indicate (1:12-18; 2:17-18; 3:7-11; 4:11-13). This opposition, whether overt and hostile or subtle and seductive, came from various sources: from Roman authorities and citizens opposed to the gospel; from Judaizers who taught that Christians must follow the laws of Judaism, including circumcision (3:2-3); and from ungodly and worldly people who lived “as enemies of the cross of Christ” (3:18) and encouraged the believers at Philippi to do the same. But despite all this, Paul rejoices and encourages them to rejoice as well (1:4, 18, 25; 2:2, 17-18, 29; 3:1; 4:1, 4, 10).

Major Themes

G. Walter Hansen, in his commentary The Letter to the Philippians, identifies two main themes:

The Gospel of Christ. The core of the gospel is the humility, exaltation, and lordship of Jesus Christ (2:5-11), and this gospel is the foundation of Paul’s ministry (1:5, 7, 12, 16; 2:22; 4:3). Christians live according to the gospel by seeking “the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith” (3:9) and by seeking after Christ, our ultimate goal and prize (1:21; 3:7-14, 20-21)

The Community in Christ. The reference to the Philippians’ “partnership” with Paul (1:5), his identification of them as “brothers and sisters” (1:12; 3:1, 13, 17; 4:1; 8), their joint citizenship in heaven (3:20), and their sharing together in God’s grace (1:7), the Spirit (2:1), and Paul’s “troubles” (4:14-15) point to the centrality of the community in the life of the believer.
Unit 1 – Rejoicing in the Progress of the Gospel
Philippians 1:1-18

Text

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

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

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

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

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.

But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice.

Open

Have you ever had a seeming setback turn out to be for the best? What were the circumstances?

Discover

1. What was Paul’s attitude toward the Philippians? What was he confident of concerning them?

2. Why did he feel this way? (see 1:19; 2:25-30; 4:10-18)
3. From what we read later in this letter, did Paul have this attitude because the church at Philippi was free of problems? What might we infer were some internal issues? (see 2:1-4, 14-16).

What external pressures were they facing? (1:29-30; see 3:1-4, 18-19; also 4:6-7)

4. Why was Paul in jail?

5. How would you describe Paul’s attitude toward his circumstances? How can you explain this, given that he was writing from prison?

6. Who did Paul have a special opportunity to speak to about Christ in this situation? How might this serve to advance the gospel?

7. What was the effect of Paul’s imprisonment on the rest of the Christian community?

8. What was Paul’s primary concern in evaluating his circumstances?

Apply

☐ What are the criteria that you tend to use when evaluating your own circumstances? How is this similar, or dissimilar, to Paul’s attitude?  ☐ How might your attitude toward your circumstances be different if you viewed yourself as a “servant of Christ”, as Paul did?
v. 1  "Paul and Timothy . . ."  Timothy was a beloved and trusted companion of Paul (1 Cor. 4:17, 16:10; Phil. 2:22; 1 Thess. 3:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2-4), and would have been known to the Philippians from their prior visit (Acts 16:1-12). Although Paul writes this letter in the first person, he includes Timothy as a co-author, perhaps because Timothy was his amanuensis; i.e. his scribe, or perhaps because he wanted to emphasize that both of them were in agreement concerning its message.

"servants of Christ Jesus . . ."  Although in Paul's letters he frequently refers to himself as a servant, only here, and in Romans and Titus, does he identify himself as such in the introduction, and only here is it the sole self-designation. This emphasis anticipates the portrayal of Jesus as a humble servant who was obedient even to death (Phil. 2:6-8), a mindset that we as his disciples are to emulate, in our attitudes toward one another and also toward God (Phil. 2:3-5; see Mt. 20:25-28; Mk. 9:33-35, 10:42-45; Lk. 22:24-27; Jn. 13:1-16).

"To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi . . ."  This does not imply a distinction among the Philippian believers, i.e. between those who were especially righteous, or "holy," and everyone else. Rather, it indicates that all of them, by virtue of being united with Christ through faith, were holy; that is, consecrated to God for his use, and having Christ's righteousness imputed, or credited, to them.

v. 2  "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."  Although a form of this greeting is common to all of Paul's letters, it is not a mere formality or stock phrase. Rather, it encapsulates the truth of the gospel which he preached: that through grace, i.e. God's unmerited and undeserved favor, all who trust in Christ will have peace with God, and will also have the peace of God in their hearts (see Rom. 5:1; 15:13; Phil. 4:6-9).

vv. 3-4  "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy . . ."  Paul is not under the impression that there are no problems in the church at Philippi: on the contrary, he notes that they are experiencing suffering and struggles (1:29-30). In addition, his appeals to them to be "like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind" (2:2) and to "do everything without grumbling or arguing" (2:14) implies the presence of conflicts in the church (see 4:2-3). Nevertheless, his predominant attitude when praying for them was one of joy and thanksgiving, rather than complaint or discouragement. Can we say the same?

v. 5  The Greek word translated “partnership” is koinōnia, which is rendered elsewhere in Philippians as “common sharing” (2:1) and “participation” (3:10). Here, it implies a mutual commitment to the gospel, which is expressed in their support of Paul's evangelistic labors (1:19; 2:25-30; 4:10-18), and which flowed from their shared identity as those who had experienced the new birth through faith in Christ. It connotes a relationship that is not merely ideological or functional, but warmly personal (1:3-4, 7-8).

The range of meaning for this term is seen in Paul's other letters, where it is variously translated as "contribution" (Rom. 15:26), “fellowship” (1 Cor. 1:9, 2 Cor. 6:14, 13:14; Gal. 2:9), “participation” (1 Cor. 10:16), “sharing” (2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13), and “partnership” (Philm. 6).

v. 6  The growth, health, and unity of the church as a whole, the “good work” primarily in view in this verse, is not ultimately the work of men but of God; see Christ's high priestly prayer (Jn. 17:1-26), in which he asks the Father to protect the church and to safeguard its purity and unity. But the verse can be applied to the work of salvation in the life of the individual as well, as our perseverance in the faith and our growth in Christlike character are fundamentally the work of God, but likewise also a work in which we cooperate and participate (Phil. 2:12-13; see 1 Cor. 1:8-9; Gal. 5:25).

v. 7  The Philippians were of one mind with Paul, a conviction which justified his confidence in the continuing work of God among them (v 6). The evidence of this is Paul's statement that whatever his circumstances, whether free or in prison, they continued to "share in God's grace" with him. This refers, not only to the fact that they had received the gracious gift of salvation just as Paul had, but that they continued to strive together with him for the gospel (1:27), and as a result were granted the privilege of suffering for Christ, just as he was (1:29-30; see Mt. 5:11-12; Acts 5:41).

v. 8  "God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus."  This phrase, "with the affection of Christ Jesus" provides insight into how we can maintain our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ, in spite of the fact that they are often unlovely, and despite the fact that we are still sinners, and thus our capacity for love is marred by our own selfishness and pride. The answer is that the love we are to feel and express toward one another is not our own. It is the love which Christ, who dwells in us in the person of his Spirit (Jn. 7:38-39; 14:16-17; Gal. 2:20), has for them. Therefore, it is not us loving them, but Christ loving them through us, as we yield to his Spirit. And he is capable of a love which is much deeper, much purer, and much more consistent than our own.
v. 9 Paul is not praying simply that they would love one another. Rather, he prays that their love would “abound more and more”; i.e. that it would continue to grow and deepen, without end or limit (see 1 Thess. 3:12, 4:9-10; 2 Thess. 1:3). Thus we can see that we never “arrive” in terms of our love for one another, or indeed in any area of the Christian life (see Phil. 3:12-14). Nor is our obligation to love ever fulfilled; it is a “continuing debt” that we owe to one another (Rom. 13:8). Therefore, we need continually to seek God’s grace to mature and persevere in this area.

The love which Paul extols has both individual and corporate aspects; i.e., it concerns both one-to-one relationships such as that between Euodia and Syntyche (4:2), and also a love for “all God’s people” (4:21-22; see 2:1-5).

Note that this love is not ignorant of reality, nor does it require that we gloss over our fellow Christians’ faults. On the contrary, it abounds “in knowledge and depth of insight”. Love is not in conflict with truth or understanding; rather, those things tend to deepen our love—but only if we take into account all of God’s revelation, which includes insight into others’ suffering and struggles, and also an awareness of our own susceptibility to sin and our need for forgiveness (Mt. 7:3-5; Lk. 6:41-42; 1 Cor. 10:12; Gal. 6:1; see Mt. 18:23-35).

vv. 10-11 “so that you may be able to discern what is best…” Not only does knowledge and insight help us to love, by nurturing compassion and an appreciation for our shared human frailty, but these traits also guide us in how best to express our love, giving us discernment into what is best in each situation and for each person. To be naively well-intentioned is not sufficient: if our love is to do more good than harm, we must act with wisdom and understanding.

“and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ…” Here, Paul looks forward to the day when Christ returns, and those whose lives are characterized by this kind of love will be found in Christ to be pure, blameless, and righteous (see 1 Cor. 1:30-31; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). Both the love itself and all that flows from it come “through Jesus Christ”, and therefore the credit does not belong to us (Rom. 3:27-28; 4:2; 1 Cor. 4:7; Eph. 2:8-9), but all the “glory and praise” belongs to God.

Note that although we are already viewed by God as holy and righteous, by virtue of our union with Christ through faith (see Heb. 10:10, 14), when he returns our transformation will be made complete. Then we will finally and eternally be in our experience what we now are positionally and legally; i.e., holy and righteous (see Phil. 3:12-14; Heb. 10:14; 1 Jn. 3:2-3).

v. 12 The Greek word mallon, translated as “actually”, can be an intensifier, i.e., “to a greater degree” (see NASB, “the greater progress of the gospel”), or it can indicate “instead of”. Here, it signifies that, contrary to what some might expect, Paul’s imprisonment has not only failed to hinder the work of the gospel, but has resulted in its greater progress, by giving him an opportunity to witness to influential leaders. This principle, that apparent setbacks can be a part of God’s plan and purposes, would be an encouragement to the Philippians, who were experiencing suffering and opposition (Phlp. 1:28-30).

Note that even when writing about his own difficult circumstances, Paul’s focus was not on how they affected him personally, but on how they affected the spread of the gospel.

v. 13 The “palace guard” to whom Paul refers were the most elite unit of the Roman military and the personal bodyguards of Caesar. Through his exposure to them, Paul is able to bear witness to the One who is Lord of Lords, whose authority is above even that of the emperor whom they protected (Rom. 14:11; 1 Cor. 8:5-6; Phlp. 2:10; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 9:15-16). Due to Paul’s arrest and imprisonment, they and “everyone else”; i.e. the royal officials, those who served in the palace, and even the members of Caesar’s own household (Phlp. 4:22), had come to know that he was not in prison for any crime, but only because of his allegiance to Jesus Christ.

v. 14 The result of Paul’s imprisonment was not to silence the Christian community; on the contrary, as they received news of Paul fearlessly testifying to Christ in spite of his chains, they were emboldened to do the same. His courage and commitment inspired them to be fearless in proclaiming Christ.

vv. 15-18 Paul is not ignorant of the reality of conflicts and mixed motives among God’s people, even in the matter of preaching the gospel. For some, the fundamental reason to proclaim Christ is love, for God and for other people. For others, base motives take priority; e.g., ambition, pride, a desire for notoriety or followers, even the desire to cause trouble for a minister who is seen as a “competitor”. What kind of trouble these people intended to cause for Paul is not clear. But what is clear is that for Paul, the key issue was whether they were preaching Christ in faithfulness to the truth of the gospel. If they were, then he was happy to celebrate what they were doing (if not their reasons for doing so). What mattered to Paul was not his own reputation, or standing, or leadership position. What mattered was that Christ was being proclaimed. Do we have the same attitude?
Text

19 for I know that through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. 29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Open

☐ What kind of a legacy would you like to leave when you eventually depart this life?

Discover

1. How would you describe your own attitude toward death? Has it changed over time?

2. In your own words, how would you describe Paul’s attitude toward death? (Phil. 1:21)

3. What knowledge enabled him to maintain that perspective? (see Phil. 3:7-8; Mt. 6:19-21; 16:25-26)
4. Are there other reasons why people sometimes see death as a preferable to life? What are they?

How do those reasons compare with Paul’s perspective?

5. How does your own attitude toward life, death and the future compare to Paul’s?

6. What did Paul anticipate concerning his own future? Can we expect something similar? Why or why not?

7. What should we conclude when we experience opposition or hardships which result from our faithfulness to Christ? (Phil. 1:28-30) Should we hope for a life free of struggles and suffering?

8. Why is it important for Christians to be unified? What are the consequences of disunity?

9. What does Paul imply is the major source of disunity and contention in a body of believers? What is the antidote? (Phil. 2:1-4) Are you doing this?

Apply

☐ What steps could you take to more closely align your perspectives with those of Paul, concerning life, death, and the future?

☐ Describe what genuine unity looks like in a church. How does this differ from disunity? How does it differ from false unity?
Paul now gives the reason for his declaration in v. 18 that he will “continue to rejoice”: it is because he is confident of his “deliverance”. Does he mean that he expects to be released from prison? In support of this interpretation are Paul’s statements that he will “continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith” (v. 25), and the fact that the Greek word used here, σωτηρία, can indicate physical safety (see Acts 7:25, “rescue”; Heb. 11:7, “save”; Lk. 1:71, “salvation”). However, this would seem to conflict with Paul’s statement that his deliverance will take place “whether by life or by death” (v. 20; see vv. 20-24). Also, although he does conclude, after some back-and-forth, that he is not to be martyred, his expectations of deliverance here precedes that conclusion.

Instead, it seems better to understand Paul as saying that he anticipates having the Spirit-supplied strength to remain faithful so that he will be vindicated as a true servant of Christ; in other words, that he will be delivered from the temptation to shrink back from fearlessly declaring the gospel (see Mt. 6:13; Eph. 6:19-20). This interpretation is consistent with the Old Testament passage he is alluding to, in which Job states, “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him . . . . Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance”, concluding, “I know I will be vindicated” (Job 13:15-16, 18). Paul’s expectation and confident hope is that he will escape the shame of having denied Christ or abandoning his calling.

Paul has confidence that no matter what the immediate future holds, whether life or death, Christ will be exalted in his body (v. 20). On the one hand, if he goes on living, he will continue laboring fruitfully and building up God’s people (vv. 22, 24-25). On the other, if he gives his life for sake of the gospel, his martyrdom will honor Christ, and he personally will be far better off, enjoying face-to-face fellowship with his Savior (v. 23; see 1 Cor. 13:12). Paul’s perspective is that the entire world, and all that it contains, is worth nothing compared to the rewards of knowing Christ (Phil. 3:7-8; see Mt. 16:25-26; Mk. 8:35-37; Lk. 9:24-25). And so if called upon to yield up his life in this world and enter into the life to come, he could only gain, or profit, by the exchange.

“Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!” This statement does not imply that God has given Paul the privilege of choosing his own future; rather, Paul is honestly sharing his personal feelings, i.e., that since both options lead to positive outcomes, he is hard pressed to prefer one over the other.

In contrast to the attitude of many, who view this life as something to be grasped as tightly as possible and held onto by almost any means necessary, Paul regarded his life in this world as having little value to himself personally, but instead as having worth primarily because it allowed him to serve and minister to others. Thus he held his life with an open hand, willing to have God use it, and also willing to yield it up to God whenever it might be required of him.

The phrase “Whatever happens . . . .” This phrase is a translation of a term which could be rendered “Only” (ESV, NASB) or “Above all” (NLT). The emphasis here is not on the various circumstances in which we may be called upon to maintain a godly way of life, but rather on making this our primary and overarching goal. The core, the touchstone of our lives is to be the gospel; that is what we are to live our lives everyday in reference to. Note that Paul specifically refers to this as the “gospel of Christ”, emphasizing that what we proclaim and practice is not merely good news in general, but good news specifically about who Christ is and what he has done for us.

“. . . stand firm in the one Spirit . . . .” The translators’ choice to capitalize “Spirit” here indicates that Paul is referring to God the Holy Spirit; see his use of a similar phrase later on, “stand firm in the Lord” (4:1). It is the power of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, who enables us to “stand firm” and to strive together for the sake of the gospel (see 1:19), rather than striving against one another (see 4:1-3). The use of “one” to describe the Holy Spirit emphasizes the unity, common identity, and shared purpose that we have in Him (see 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:18).
v. 1 Paul introduces the next extended sentence, vv. 2:1-4, with a "therefore" which links it to the previous paragraph, 1:27-30. Because the believers at Philippi face persecution, struggle and suffering, they must be unified; they must support, serve, and encourage one another in love.

Note that the "if" statements here do not indicate uncertainty or mere possibility; in the context they carry instead the sense of "since", or "if (as is the case) . . . ."

". . . if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ". The source of our encouragement is ultimately Christ and our union with Him; however, since each of us is united with Christ all of us can and should share that encouragement with one another (2 Cor. 1:3-4; see Rom. 15:5-6). Encouragement has both an aspect of comfort—i.e. lifting the spirits of one who is troubled or who has experienced suffering—and also of strengthening someone for future struggles.

". . . if any comfort from his love" The NIV translator added the word "his" here, making explicit the source of this comforting love. We experience the comforting love of Christ not only directly, through our union with him, but also as it flows to us in the words and actions of our fellow believers.

". . . if any common sharing in the Spirit" The focus here is not on each believer's individual experience of being indwelt with the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:17), but rather on our shared experience of being formed into one body by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:3-4).

v. 2 Unity in a fellowship of believers does not mean unanimity; it is not necessary or even desirable that we have the same beliefs, attitudes, or preferences on every topic. Being like-minded, rather, means sharing a common goal, with a commitment to seeking that goal in a spirit of love, with a demonstrated and genuinely felt respect for others and their perspectives. The result will be a process of decision-making that builds community rather than undermining it. This contrasts with using organizational or personal power to force through an agenda, or pursuing "success" in a manner that produces collateral damage in the form of strained and broken relationships.

v. 3-4 The root cause of disunity and conflict is often personal agendas and personal ambition. When every person is seeking to advance themselves and their interests, conflict is inevitable. The antidote is for each of us to act in humility, making the welfare of the community as a whole our priority, rather than seeking influence, prestige, praise, or achievements for ourselves.
Unit 3 – Emulate Christ’s Attitude
Philippians 2:5-11

Text

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

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

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

a6 Or in the form of
b7 Or the form

Open

☐ What comes to mind when you think of the term "servant"? Is it positive or negative? Why?

Discover

1. In your own words, describe the "mindset" that we are to have in our relationships with one another, as we emulate the attitude of Jesus (v. 1).

2. Is this an easy mindset to maintain, or a difficult one? Why?

3. What does it mean that Jesus is “in very nature” God? (v. 6; see Heb. 1:3; Jn. 1:1, 1:14; 10:30-33)
4. Paraphrase verse 6 in your own words. What is Jesus choosing to do or not do?

5. What does it mean that Jesus “made himself nothing”? (v. 7) Why did he do this?

6. What does the statement that Jesus was “found in appearance” as a man signify? Why does this matter? (v. 8; see Heb. 2:14-18; Jn. 1:1)

7. Was Jesus a victim? In other words, was his death on the cross due solely to the errors and malicious actions of men? (v. 8; see Jn. 10:18, Acts 2:23)

8. Why did God the Father exalt Jesus? How can we apply this principle to ourselves? (v. 9; see Jam. 4:10; see 1 Pet. 5:5-6)

9. When Jesus returns, who will acknowledge his Lordship and worship him? Who will not? (vv. 10-11)

Apply

☐ Would you say that you have the mindset of Jesus with respect to your relationships with other Christians? Why or why not? ☐ What is the prerequisite to being honored and lifted up when Christ returns?
v. 5 In this transitional verse, Paul connects his exhortation to the believers at Philippi, i.e., that they be "one in spirit and of one mind" (2:2) with the incarnation, crucifixion, and exaltation of Christ. Our Savior's obedience and voluntary sacrifice not only gave us the supreme example of selflessness and humility in service to others, but also made possible our union with him and with one another. And so the responsibility which each of us has, to look to the "interests of others", is rooted in our common identity as those who have been "united with Christ" and who are thus "sharing in the Spirit" (2:1).

v. 6 The phrase "being in very nature God" describes Christ in his pre-incarnate state; i.e. before he took on human nature and became a man, as verse seven describes. From eternity past, he was equal to God the Father, not merely in wisdom, knowledge, power, or authority, but in his fundamental being, his essence. In terms of his divine nature, what God was and is, so also Christ was and is. Nor was his divine nature altered or diminished in any way when he took on human nature in the incarnation. This essential identity between God the Father and God the Son is expressed by the author of Hebrews:

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Heb. 1:3).

Jesus likewise says of himself, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (Jn. 14:9; see also Isa. 9:6; Jn. 1:1, 14; 12:45; 2 Cor. 4:4; 6; Col. 1:15).

Having established the equality of God the Son with God the Father, Paul goes on to note Jesus' attitude toward his own divine nature: he "did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage" (NIV). This is one possible translation of the Greek term harpagmos; others render it as "a thing to be grasped" (ESV, NASB). Many interpreters, following the second translation, consider the verse to be referring to something which Jesus possessed as God, but voluntarily relinquished, or released his grasp of, in the incarnation, such as the glories of heaven or the privileges of his position as heavenly sovereign.

However, in the context, what is being referred to is not the power or prerogatives of deity, but deity itself: Jesus' "nature", his "equality with God". Therefore, it seems better to take the verse as referring, not to something incidental which he could either hold on to or let go of, but to something essential: his divine identity; that which he had always possessed and continued to possess, but which he did not view as something to be selfishly "exploited" (NRSV) or "used to his own advantage" (NIV). This attitude of selflessness and humility was expressed in his choice to make himself "nothing", "taking the very nature of a servant" and "being made in human likeness" (v. 7).

In making this decision, Jesus demonstrated the difference between God's perspective and man's, between the character of a humble and self sacrificing sovereign and the character of those who exploit their identity or position for selfish gain, even in the church (see Mt. 20:25-28; Mk. 10:42-45; Lk. 22:25-27; 2 Cor. 7:2; 11:20; 12:17-18; Jas. 2:6; 2 Pet. 2:3).
v. 7 The statement that Christ “made himself nothing” is rendered in many translations (e.g. CSB, ESV, NRSV) as “emptied himself”, based on the Greek verb Paul uses: kénō, “to make empty”. What does he mean by the use of this term? One interpretation, the “kenotic” theory, is that Jesus emptied himself of his equality with God, i.e., that he laid aside his divine nature, or one or more divine attributes. This view has significant weaknesses. First, the text states that Jesus emptied “himself”, not that he emptied himself “of” something. In other words, the object of the verb “emptied” is Jesus, not some attribute or characteristic of Jesus. Also, the verse states that Jesus accomplished this “emptying” by “taking the very nature of a servant”—i.e., by adding something rather than subtracting something. Finally, the suggestion that Jesus was less than God during his earthly ministry is contradicted by his own statements (Jn. 5:17-18; 8:56-59; 10:30-33). He is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

A better interpretation defines Jesus’ “emptiness” as the incarnation itself, i.e. as the act of taking on human nature and entering into the world as a servant (Lk. 2:24-27; Jn. 13:1-17). In so doing, he relinquished his position, his rights and prerogatives. He voluntarily became weak, and concealed his glory (Mt. 17:1-2; Lk. 9:28-29; Mk. 9:2-3) under a cloak of seeming insignificance. This is consistent with the use of the term kénō in 1 Cor. 1:17, where it is translated “emptied of . . . power”. As Paul states elsewhere, “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” (2 Cor. 8:9).

This interpretation is further supported by parallels between this passage and Isaiah’s prophetic description of Christ as the Servant of the Lord ( Isa. 52:13-53:12), especially Isa. 53:12: “he poured out his life unto death”, indicating, again, that what Jesus “poured out”, or “emptied” was himself, his life (see Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6).

v. 8 The statement that Christ was “made in human likeness” (v. 7) and “found in appearance” as a man does not imply that he only appeared to be human or to have a physical human body, as the ancient heresy of docetism claimed. This false belief system is explicitly contradicted by the Scriptures (Heb. 2:17; 1 Jn. 4:1-2; 2 Jn. 1:7), and was rejected at the First Council of Nicea in A.D. 325. Rather, the word “found” emphasizes that his full humanity was something that could be observed and empirically verified (see Lk. 24:36-42; Jn. 20:24-27; 1 Jn. 1:1). Note that despite the wickedness of the men who betrayed him and put him to death, Jesus was not a helpless victim. Not only did all these things happen “by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23), but Christ’s humiliation was voluntary; he “humbled himself”. As he stated, concerning his own life: “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (Jn. 10:18). He did this in obedience to the command of God the Father (Jn. 10:18), just as he obeyed the Father’s will in all things (Jn. 8:55; 12:49; 14:31; 15:10; Lk. 22:42).

The extent of Jesus’ voluntary self-abasement is highlighted not only by the fact that he obeyed to the greatest extent possible; i.e. unto death, but that his death was one of shame and disgrace (Heb. 12:2; 13:3). He was not granted a noble or humane execution, but was crucified, an excruciatingly painful and demeaning manner of death; one which Rome inflicted only on violent criminals and non-citizens.

v. 9 “Therefore”; i.e., because of Christ’s obedience unto death, “God exalted him”. Note that although Christ humbled himself, he did not exalt himself; he did not lift himself up. That was the work of God the Father. The same is true of us: as James writes, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (Jam. 4:10; see 1 Pet. 5:5-6). Christ’s humiliation, suffering, and death were temporary; his resurrection, glory and reign are eternal. In the same way, as Paul writes, “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Cor. 4:17; see Rom. 8:18). The “name that is above every name”, which God the Father bestowed on Jesus, is “Lord” (v. 11; see Isa. 45:23-24; Rom. 14:11). In exalting Jesus, God the Father confirmed his eternal reign and dominion over all of creation (see Eph. 1:19-22).

vv. 10-11 “Every” knee will bow, and “every” tongue will acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, inclusive of men, angels and demons; i.e. those who in the cosmology of the ancient world abided on the earth, in the heavens, or under the earth (see Mt. 28:18). No rebellion, no defiance will remain when Christ is fully revealed; his absolute authority, power and right to rule will be universally recognized and acknowledged (Rev. 5:11-13). Note that this does not imply repentance, or the joyful acceptance of Jesus’ authority by every creature. On the contrary, those who have previously failed to submit to Christ will be full of shame and regret (Dan. 12:2). In Milton’s epic poem Paradise Lost, the character of Satan declares, “Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven”. But he is deluded: those who rebel against God will not reign, but will submit, although unwillingly.
12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky 16 as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. 17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. 18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

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

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

*15 Philippians 2:15 Deut. 32:5*
2. In the space below, summarize what these verses tell us about the different aspects of salvation: justification, sanctification, and glorification.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Justification</th>
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<th>Glorification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rom. 3:25-26</td>
<td>Romans 12:2</td>
<td>Philippians 3:21</td>
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<td>Romans 5:8</td>
<td>2 Corinthians 3:18</td>
<td>1 John 3:2</td>
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3. Based on your study above, which of these aspects of salvation is Paul referring to in verse 12, and what does he mean by “work out your salvation”? (see Col 2:6-7; 1 Tim. 6:11-12)

4. What part does God have in this process? (v. 13)

5. What does “grumbling and arguing” say about our heart attitude? (v. 14; see Num. 14:26-27; Ex. 16:7-8) Why is this dangerous? (1 Cor. 10:10-11)

6. What will be the result of obeying the command to avoid this? (vv. 15-16)

**Apply**

- [ ] Are you “working out” your salvation? How?
- [ ] Are you guilty of “grumbling and arguing”?
- [ ] Do you have a “Timothy” or “Epaphroditus” in your life? Are you filling this role for someone else?
v. 12 The glorious truths expressed in the preceding hymn of praise (vv. 6-11) are wonderful to contemplate, but merely reflecting on them is not sufficient. The incarnation, humility, obedience, death, and exaltation of Christ demand from each of us an active response. “Therefore,” Paul writes, “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”

This exhortation to “work out” our salvation may seem inconsistent with Paul’s insistence elsewhere that salvation is entirely a work of God, and not something that we can earn by our good works. For example, in his letter to Titus, he writes this:

“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:4-7)

Similarly,

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Eph. 2:8-9)

And finally, he writes in this very letter that “you will be saved—and that by God” (Phil. 1:28). Other references could be cited; see Rom. 4:2-5; Gal. 2:16; 2 Tim. 1:9.

How then should we understand this verse? The key is to realize that salvation has three distinct aspects—justification, sanctification, and glorification; past, present, and future. In the past, God justified us: he declared us righteous, or legally “not guilty”. He based this on the righteousness of Christ, which was imputed, or credited, to our account (2 Cor. 5:21), despite the fact that we were still sinners (Rom. 3:25-26; 5:8). Our only participation in this transaction was to respond in faith, and even our faith was a gift of God (Phil. 1:29; 2 Pet. 1:1). Likewise, in the future God will glorify us. The Lord Jesus Christ,

“. . . will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” (Phil. 3:21).

This will take place,

“in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (1 Cor. 15:52).

Both these aspects of salvation, past and future, are unilateral, or what theologians call monergistic; i.e., something which God alone accomplishes. Sanctification, however, has both a unilateral and a cooperative, or synergistic, aspect. In the past, God set us apart from the world and claimed us for his own holy purposes (1 Cor. 6:11). That is the unilateral aspect of sanctification. But we also cooperate with the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in us through obedience, becoming more like Christ in our thinking, our desires, and our conduct (Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:16, 25). And that is the aspect of salvation that Paul has in view here. Since God has justified us and set us apart as his own, now by the power of the Holy Spirit we are to live out, and bring to fruition, the reality of the change that has been accomplished in us by God’s power and will. This is consistent with one of Paul’s main themes, that we must strive for personal holiness in order to express who we truly are in Christ (Gal. 2:20; Col. 2:6-7; see 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Phil. 3:12-16; 1 Tim. 6:11-12; 4:15-16; also Heb. 12:1-3). This process, and this labor and struggle, will continue throughout our lives, until we are fully and completely transformed at the return of Christ (1 Jn. 3:2).

v. 13 So that there will be no confusion, even as Paul exhorts us to “work out” our salvation, he states that “it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” In other words, not only the ability to obey and to act, but even the will to do so, come from God. And so, even as we are exhorted to believe, to repent, to obey, and to act, salvation is nevertheless all of God, from beginning to end.

v. 14 “Do everything without grumbling or arguing . . . ” Grumbling and complaining, whether directed against leaders or circumstances, is so common and widespread, both in our culture and in our churches, that we tend to view it as something normal and acceptable. But God does not see it this way; on the contrary, he views grumbling as a direct attack on his sovereign rule, and the wisdom and goodness of his governance over our lives. Note that when the Israelites grumbled against their leaders, Moses and Aaron, God said, “How long will this wicked community grumble against me?” (Num. 14:26-27; see Ex. 16:7-8). Their example is a sobering warning to the church, as Paul makes explicit (1 Cor. 10:10-11):

“And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us . . . ”
Does this mean that we should just "put on a happy face" and pretend that our circumstances are less difficult than they are? Not at all. Such an attitude of glib, superficial optimism has just been ridiculed; see the character of Dr. Pangloss in Voltaire's novel Candide, or the condemned criminals singing "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life" in the movie Life of Brian. Rather, the prohibition against grumbling goes to our heart attitude in the midst of trials, including the trial of being governed by fallible people. Do we trust that we are loved by a wise and all-powerful God, and that even in the midst of injustice and suffering, he is in "all things" working for our good (Rom. 8:28; see Eph. 5:20)? Or do we doubt, or openly challenge, his wisdom and goodness? The latter attitude is what produces grumbling and arguing.

v. 15 If there were any doubt about the importance of the command to avoid "grumbling or arguing", Paul identifies the result, "so that you may become blameless and pure". Our speech, our attitudes, and our conduct in general are to exhibit a clear contrast with the world around us, "a warped and crooked generation," so that, against the darkness of our depraved culture, we will shine "like stars in the sky".

Note that the verb "become" does not imply that we are becoming something different. Rather, we are to become in our experience and practice what we already are in our fundamental identity; that is, "children of God without fault" (Jn. 1:12; Rom. 8:14, 19, 21; Gal. 3:26).

v. 16 Paul's hope, that he would be "able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain," may seem out of character. But his desire is not to boast in his own work or accomplishments; it is to boast in what Christ has done through him (see 1 Cor. 1:28-31; 4:7; 9:16; 13:3-4; 15:31; 2 Cor. 1:14; 11:30; 12:5; Gal. 6:14; Phil. 3:3). A subtle distinction, but an important one. And that should be our goal as well, as we look forward to "the day of Christ" (see 1 Cor. 1:8; Phil. 1:6, 10).

vv. 17-18 Paul's reference to being "poured out like a drink offering" is a metaphor. The reference is primarily to Old Testament sacrificial customs, in which wine or oil was poured out on the altar (e.g., Gen. 35:14; Num. 15:5; 10; 28:7; 2 Ki. 16:13). The reference could be to Paul's life of sacrificial service, or to his possible martyrdom, or both (see 2 Tim. 4:6). In either case, he wants the Philippians to know that he does not resent or regret this, but is glad and rejoices in it. And he urges them not to mourn, but to join him in rejoicing that he was privileged to suffer for the Lord in this way (see Acts 5:41; Col. 1:24).

vv. 19-30 In this section, Paul provides two examples of godly men who personify the Christlike characteristics he is exhorting the Philippians to emulate. He endorses their anticipated ministry among the Philippian believers and looks forward to his own hoped-for visit.

v. 19 Paul's intention to send Timothy to the Philippian church, as well as his own hope to visit them in the future, are grounded "in the Lord Jesus". In other words, Paul makes his plans in full awareness of the Lord's sovereignty over all events, and he gladly trusts in the Lord's will, however those events may unfold (see Rom. 14:8; Phil. 1:18, 27; 4:12).

v. 20 Timothy was deeply valued by Paul, who describes him as his "true son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2), and as "my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:17).

v. 21 Paul's statement that "everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" seems at odds with his praise of those who shared the gospel fearlessly, out of good will and love (Phil. 1:14-16; see 4:21-22). Who, then, is in view? We cannot be certain, but perhaps "everyone" is literary hyperbole, and he is referring to the significant number of those who preached out of "envy and rivalry" and "selfish ambition" (Phil. 1:15-17).

vv. 25-30 Paul now turns to Epaphroditus. In contrast to Timothy, whom Paul hopes to send "soon", he considers it necessary to send Epaphroditus right away, bearing this letter. Epaphroditus had previously been sent by the Philippian church to take care of Paul's financial and other needs (vv. 25, 30; Phil. 4:18), and the several titles Paul gives him—"brother", "co-worker", and "fellow soldier"—are an indication of the high esteem in which Paul holds him.

The reasons for the urgency of Epaphroditus' return were relational: he longed to be reunited with his church family; he wished to reassure them of his full recovery from illness; and Paul also wanted to relieve any concern they might have over their emissary's condition.

We will draw two lessons from these verses. First, it is entirely normal for Christians to feel strongly about their brothers and sisters in Christ, whom they love: Paul uses words like "longs for", "distressed", "sorrow", "glad", and "great joy" without apology or embarrassment. And second, even though we give God all the glory for the work that he performs through his servants, we nevertheless should honor them for their service, suffering, and sacrifice (vv. 29-30); doing so does not present any conflict, theological or otherwise.
Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

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

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

1. What does it mean to "rejoice in the Lord"? (v. 1) What does it not mean?

2. What do these passages tell us about rejoicing?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Romans 12:15</th>
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<tr>
<td>Philippians 1:18</td>
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<td>Philippians 4:4</td>
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<td>Colossians 1:24</td>
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<td>1 Peter 1:3-6</td>
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3. Who are the people that Paul warns the Philippians to “watch out for”? What were they seeking to do? (v. 2; read Acts 15:1-5; Gal. 2:1-16; 4:17; 6:12-13)

4. What does Paul mean by, “for it is we who are the circumcision” (v. 3)? See Rom. 2:29; Col. 2:11-13

5. What is the point of Paul listing out his ethnic and religious “qualifications”? (vv. 4-7)

6. In what sense were all of these things a “loss”? (v. 7)

7. What are some differences between a righteousness “of my own” and one “that comes from God” (v. 9)?

8. What does it mean to know Christ? (v. 10)

Apply

☐ When do you find it easy to rejoice? When do you find it difficult? How does this compare to the New Testament pattern?

☐ What kind of righteousness are you seeking to have?

☐ Do you consider the things that this world values to be “garbage”? Have you suffered the loss of any of them for Christ?
v. 1 The statement that "it is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again," is a literary formula, found in other ancient writings, that is used to transition from one topic to another. Here, Paul employs it to indicate that although he realizes he is about to repeat himself, he is not at all reluctant to do so, because what follows is a message that cannot be stated too often or too emphatically.

What are the "same things" that Paul is referring to? The first is the command to "rejoice in the Lord", which echoes prior references to joy in this letter (Phil. 1:4, 18, 25; 2:2, 17-18, 29). This is consistent with Paul's example during his earlier sojourn in Philippi, when he and Silas demonstrated joy in the midst of persecution (Acts 16:12-40; 20:6; see 16:25). However, the plural of "things" and the immediate transition to a warning against those who "put confidence in the flesh" (v. 4), indicates that more is in view here; namely, the centrality and sufficiency of Christ. He is the one in whom we are to rejoice, and he is the one in whom we must place our confidence, rather than trusting in law-keeping or the observance of religious rituals. Thus, Paul is not exhorting them merely to rejoice, but to rejoice specifically "in the Lord"; i.e. in who Christ is and in what Christ has done and will do for them.

v. 2 The Philippians' joy and trust in Christ is threatened, not only by opposition from civil authorities who see Christianity as a threat to the social order (see Acts 16:19-24), but more insidiously, by followers of Judaism who oppose the good news of salvation through faith alone. These are "Judaizers", false teachers who seek to require the followers of Christ to observe the requirements of the Mosaic Law, including circumcision (vv. 3, 6). Fundamentally, what they are preaching is a "righteousness...that comes from the law", rather than one "which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith." (v. 9).

We do not know whether such persons were active in Philippi, or whether this is a general warning against those who were going about and seeking to undermine the gospel (see Acts 15:1-5; Gal. 2:1-16; 4:17; 6:12-13). In either case, their influence was spiritually deadly, and they had to be strongly condemned. The vitriolic nature of Paul's attack may seem harsh, but we need to understand, not only that he considers these false teachers to be a mortal threat, but that he is turning their own words back on them: they referred to those who did not follow the Mosaic Law as "dogs" (i.e., filthy, impure creatures) and "evildoers". His point is that their criticisms of Christians actually describe their own conduct (see v. 19).

His criticism is similar to that of Christ against the Pharisees, who were careful to observe the most minute aspects of the Law, but who were morally corrupt (Mt. 23:1-36; Lk. 11:37-52; compare Mt. 23:25 with Phil. 3:19).

Note that when Paul refers to these people as "mutilators of the flesh", he is not condemning circumcision per se, but rather circumcision as an empty ritual and a replacement for saving faith. But physical circumcision has no intrinsic value or significance: as Paul writes elsewhere, "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation." (Gal. 6:15; see Rom. 2:28-29; 1 Cor. 7:19; Gal 5:6; Col. 2:11).

v. 3 Paul takes his argument a step further: in fact, it is not the Judaizers who are truly circumcised, but all those who have trusted in Christ. For, as he writes in Romans, "circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code" (Rom. 2:28). What matters, then, is not the excision of a piece of flesh, but the removal of our sinful "self ruled by the flesh" when we are "circumcised by Christ" through faith, a "circumcision not performed by human hands" (Col. 2:11). Those who have experienced this transformation "put no confidence in the flesh"; i.e. they do not trust in their ethnic or national identity to make them acceptable to God, nor in any external ritual. Their confidence is in Christ alone.

vv. 4-6 Here, Paul makes clear that the motive for his teaching—i.e., that the signs of the Old Covenant, such as circumcision, have no continuing validity in the present age—is not the absence of those signifiers in his own life. On the contrary, if he wished to trust in those things, he would have ample grounds to do so. By every criteria his opponents are appealing to, he excels them. He was not only circumcised, but it was done "on the eighth day", as the Law required (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3). His lineage was that of a pure Israelite: specifically, he was of the tribe of Benjamin, which had a noble history as the tribe of Saul, the first king of Israel (1 Sam. 9:1-2). He was a "Hebrew of Hebrews", raised to value and personify all that was distinctive about his Jewish heritage, in the midst of a pagan Greek culture. With respect to the Mosaic Law, he had chosen to align himself with the most exacting and strictly observant sect of Judaism, the Pharisees. And he was so zealous for the law and the traditions of Judaism (see Gal. 1:13-14) that he not only taught it and practiced it; he actively persecuted those who departed from a Pharisaic interpretation of its teachings, brutally persecuting the church (Acts 8:1-3; 22:3-5; 1 Tim. 1:13).
What should we make of Paul’s claim, following the recital of his ethnic credentials and achievements, that he was, “as for righteousness based on the law, faultless”? In the heat of the dispute, has he allowed his rhetoric to get away from him? Is he claiming to have achieved a state of sinless perfection prior to his conversion? Not at all. Paul is well aware of his sinfulness and his need for forgiveness, referring to himself as “the worst of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15-16). What he is saying is that a “righteousness based on the law”; that is, an external righteousness that consists of complying with a list of commandments, is not sufficient. No matter how zealous we may be, no matter how self-disciplined or sincere, adherence to a set of laws or moral principles cannot eradicate the sin that lives in our heart. On the contrary, the law only serves to expose and aggravate that sin, as Paul himself knew (see Rom. 3:20; 7:7-13).

The wealthy ruler who asked Jesus, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” exemplified this truth. When Jesus told him to follow the commandments, he replied, “All these I have kept since I was a boy.” And yet, when Jesus instructed him to sell his possessions and give them to the poor, he was not able to do so; his law-keeping had not eliminated the greed and the lust for wealth that reigned in his heart (Mt. 18:18-23; see Mk. 10:17-22; Lk. 18:18-23).

“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ”. This is a crucial point. Paul is not saying that his personal qualities and accomplishments were not quite enough to make him acceptable to God, and that he needed faith in Christ to make up what was lacking. He is saying that those things were actually a hindrance to being reconciled to God, a “loss”. Why? Because he was trusting in them, believing that by them he would attain righteousness. But that was a dead-end road, leading nowhere. For as he writes elsewhere, “by the works of the law no one will be justified.” (Gal. 2:16).

Paul now extends his argument to bring “everything” into the category of things which are a loss, compared with the inestimable value of knowing Christ. And not only loss, but “garbage”, using a term that in other ancient literature refers to manure or even human excrement. Far from being appealing, the things of this world are revolting, disgusting, even loathsome, if compared with the treasure of having a relationship with the Lord of the universe, and experiencing his love and transforming power. To know Christ is therefore worth the potential or actual loss of “all things”, including health, reputation, freedom, security, possessions, or relationships (Mt. 10:39; 13:44-46; 16:24-27; Lk. 12:13-21; 14:26; 17:33; Jn. 12:25).

The error of the Judaizers was not that they had chosen the wrong set of rules, or laws, to adhere to, or that they had failed to keep those laws perfectly. Their error was more fundamental, and illustrates the great divide between Christianity and all other religions. They were seeking a righteousness of their “own”, i.e. one that they could (at least theoretically) attain by their own works: by their own sacrifice, personal discipline, and effort (see Rom. 9:31-10:3). But that kind of righteousness will always fall short of God’s standard of perfect holiness. The Judaizers had failed to understand that even in Old Testament times, righteousness was a matter of receiving a gift and a promise; it had always been a matter of faith, rather than works, as the example of the patriarch Abraham demonstrates (Gal. 3:7-9, 15-18; Rom. 4:1-25). As Paul writes in Galatians:

“We . . . know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.” (Gal. 2:15-16; see 3:10-11)

How do we obtain true righteousness? Sinful people that we are, how can we be justified before God? Only by being “found in him”; that is, by being spiritually joined with Christ through faith, so that his righteousness is credited to us and becomes ours (1 Cor. 1:30; 6:17; Col. 2:12-13). At the same time, Christ took our sin as his own, so that he could make atonement for it on the cross (Rom. 4:25; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24).

We often think of a relationship with Christ in terms of the comfort, strength, and encouragement that we gain from our fellowship with him. And of course those things are wonderfully true; they are a foretaste of heaven, part of the “power of his resurrection” (see Gal. 2:20). But for Paul, it also meant “participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death”. Knowing Christ means sharing in his struggles and suffering as we experience in our own lives the world’s opposition to, and even hatred of, our Savior (Mt. 10:22, 24-25; 24:9; Jn. 15:18-19; Phil. 1:29-30).

By rejecting this world’s claim on our hearts and minds, and relinquishing our claim to all the things this world offers, and even our own lives (Lk. 14:26), we become “like him in his death”, whether or not we are called to actual martyrdom (see Rom. 6:6; Col. 2:20). But this “death” is only temporary; we submit to it because of our certain hope of “resurrection from the dead” and eternal life in Christ.
Text

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

15 All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Open

☐ What is your national heritage? Where do your ancestors come from?

Discover

1. What do the following verses teach us about our progress and perseverance in the faith?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Philippians 1:6</th>
<th>1 Corinthians 1:8</th>
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<td>2 Corinthians 1:21-22</td>
<td>Ephesians 1:13-14</td>
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2. Therefore, should we simply wait for God to change us? What do these verses say?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Philippians 2:12-13</th>
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<tr>
<td>2 Peter 1:10</td>
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3. In your own words, summarize what the answers to the preceding questions tell us about the Christian life.
4. How does Paul describe his approach to the Christian life? (vv. 12-14)

5. What is the “prize” Paul is seeking? (v. 14)

   - 1 Corinthians 9:25
   - 2 Timothy 4:8
   - James 1:12
   - 1 Peter 5:4

6. In your own words, what would it look like to follow Paul’s example? Would this be a change from what you are doing now? (v. 17; see 1 Cor. 9:24-27)

7. Why is it important to have godly models, and to follow their example? (vv. 17-18)

8. What do you think it means to be a “citizen” of heaven? (v. 20) Give an example.

9. How will our bodies be transformed when Christ returns? (v. 21; see 1 Cor. 15:42-54).

Apply

☐ Are there aspects of your past, whether successes or failures, that you need to “forget” in order to fully seek after Christ now?  ☐ Whose example of faith and Christian life are you observing and following? Is anyone following yours? Should they?
v. 12 This verse illustrates the "already and not yet" tension of the Christian life. Paul sometimes refers to the changes that Christ makes in us, and even to our resurrection, in the past tense, as if they were already accomplished (Rom. 8:30; Col. 2:10-12; 3:1; see Heb. 10:14). This is because, having begun, these transformations are certain to be completed; their progress and culmination depend on the power and will of God, which cannot be thwarted (Job 42:2). Thus, Paul writes that he is "confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Phil. 1:6)

Some, notably at Corinth, misunderstood this, thinking that the "day of Christ Jesus" had already come, and that they were already reigning with him (see 2 Tim. 2:12). The theological term for this mistaken belief is "over-realized eschatology". Paul's response was ironic: "How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you!" (1 Cor. 4:8). But on the contrary, as Paul writes here, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." Although our final victory is certain because of the promises and power of God, we must continue to labor, and strive, and obey throughout our lives in order to obtain our objective of coming to know Christ fully, as we will when he returns (1 Cor. 13:12).

And so, despite the certainty of God’s promises, Paul did not simply sit on his hands and let the future take care of itself. And neither can we. As he writes earlier in this letter, each of us must "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose." (Phil. 2:12-13; see 2 Pet. 1:10). And this we will do, by the power he supplies, if we are truly His (1 Jn. 2:19).

vv. 13-14 Paul repeats his point for emphasis: "I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it." He has not attained a state of perfect holiness, nor that perfectly clear vision of Christ, unclouded by sin, that is its counterpart (1 Jn. 3:2). These are yet future. But rather than simply wait for them to happen, he is "straining toward what is ahead," continuing to "press on toward the goal." (compare 1 Cor. 9:24-27; 2 Tim. 4:7; Heb. 12:1). The "prize" for which he strives is everything that God has promised to those who love Christ (see 1 Cor. 2:9; Jam. 1:12; 2:5). Note that this heavenward "call" of God is not merely a polite invitation, but a command and an enabling; it is a summons which contains within itself the ability and the certainty of a positive response (Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Cor. 1:8-9, 22-24; Heb. 9:15).

v. 15 Although Paul rejects the idea that one can attain sinless perfection in this life, that is, prior to the spiritual and physical transformation that Christ will accomplish in us at his return (1 Cor. 15:43-53; Phil. 3:20-21), he nevertheless recognizes that there is such a thing as relative spiritual maturity and immaturity, and he elsewhere chides those who have failed to progress as they should, who are "still worldly—mere infants in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1-2; see 1 Cor. 14:20; Eph. 4:14; Heb. 5:12-14).

Note that the Greek word rendered as "mature" (τελειός; see 1 Cor. 2:6; Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:28; 4:12; Jam. 1:4) has the same root as the verb "to make perfect" (τελείοι), rendered in 3:12 as "have already obtained all this". And so Paul is using essentially the same term to describe what he is not, and what he is. He is not perfect; he has not yet achieved his ultimate goal. But at the same time, he is mature in Christ, and he urges us to follow his example. For comparison, this verb can express reaching a goal (Lk. 13:32) or finishing a task (Jn. 4:34; 5:36; 17:4; Acts 20:24), while the author of Hebrews employs it to describe a spiritual perfection that cannot be attained through the Law, but only through faith in Christ (Heb. 7:19; 9:9; 10:1, 14; 11:40).

The "things" about which we should have the same view as Paul could have several referents, but in the context he is exhorting his readers to share his attitude of ardent seeking after Christ, and the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, rather than seeking a false self-righteousness through law-keeping. That is what is essential. It is not necessary to agree on everything; "if on some point you think differently", God will make clear to you how to approach the issue. How that clarity will come he does not specify here, but in Romans, he indicates that peace and mutual edification should be our guide (Rom. 14:19; see Rom. 14:1-22).

vv. 16-17 As we continue in our spiritual journey, we must take care lest we regress, falling prey to false teachings (see 1 Cor. 15:1-2; Gal. 3:1-4; 1 Thess. 3:5) or being detoured from seeking Christ by pointless disputes about minor issues (see 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:23; Tit. 3:9-10). We do this, not only by reading, studying, and applying the Word of God as individuals, but also by looking to others who are more mature in the faith and following their model. This is one of the reasons that we need to be in fellowship with other believers. No, they will not be perfect. But although Paul acknowledges his imperfection, he still urges the Philippian believers to follow his example, as well as the example of those among them whose lives demonstrate the same attitudes (see 1 Cor. 4:15-17; 11:1; Heb. 6:12; 13:7).
v. 18 The “for” introducing this verse links it to vv. 15-17, explaining why it is so important that we have, and follow, godly examples; why it is so critical that we watch them and emulate their conduct. It is because we are surrounded by many “influencers” who wish to encourage us in the opposite direction; who desire that we join them in seeking the things of this world rather than seeking Christ. And they may have all the best intentions in the world. They don’t view themselves as villains or bad people. In fact, even many of those who oppose Christ believe that they are serving God in doing so (Jn. 16:2; Acts 26:9). But whether they intend it or not, they are living as “enemies of the cross of Christ”, because they are seeking “first” those things other than “his kingdom and his righteousness” (Mt. 6:33). And there is no middle ground when it comes to Christ; we are either with him, or we are with the world and against him (see Mt. 6:24; 12:30; Lk. 11:23; 16:13; 2 Cor. 2:15-16).

Is it the Judaizers specifically who are in view here? Certainly they are included as examples of such persons, but Paul’s reference is likely broader than that, encompassing all those who, whether overtly opposed to Christ or not, are living ungodly lives. Note that although they are “enemies”, and Paul is unspiring in his criticisms of their conduct, he nevertheless weeps for them. He realizes that he, and all of us, were at one time God’s enemies (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21). And so, although he strongly opposes them, he also has compassion for them, knowing that our real enemy is the one who has taken them captive to do his will (see 2 Tim. 2:24-26).

v. 19 Paul concludes his description of the “enemies of the cross of Christ” with four descriptive clauses. Their “destiny”, the end result of everything they are doing, is eternal destruction (2 Thess. 1:9). Their “god”, that which claims their ultimate loyalty and obedience, is their “stomach”. This term is used metaphorically to refer to physical appetites and desires; thus, they are motivated by sensuality, by sexual immorality, by comfort, pleasure, good food and fine clothing. “Their glory is in their shame” they revel and even boast in the very things of which they should be ashamed; we can think of many examples of this in our popular media and culture today. Finally, “Their mind is set on earthly things”. This world is all they have, and so they say, nihilistically, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we may die.” (Isa. 22:13). But God will respond to them, as he did to the rich man in the parable, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” (Lk. 12:19-20).

v. 20 In contrast to the “enemies of the cross of Christ” Paul has just described, who are focused entirely on their lives in this world, “our citizenship is in heaven”. And this fact completely alters our perspective. Our focus is on the things which pertain to the world to come, and especially our Savior Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:17-18; Col. 3:1-4; Heb. 3:1; 11:10; 12:1-2; 13:14), while “Their mind is set on earthly things” (v. 19).

This heavenly citizenship which we possess is not only a future, but also a present reality. We are expatriate citizens of another “nation”, i.e., heaven, to which we owe our ultimate allegiance and obedience, and whose rights and privileges we enjoy, even as we are temporarily obligated to submit to the laws of the “country” in which we live (Eph. 2:19; Rom. 13:5; 1 Pet. 2:13-14). The Philippians would have understood this dynamic: since Philippi was a Roman colony, many of its people would have been citizens of Rome, even though they resided in eastern Macedonia.

Note that Paul does not state merely that we “expect”, or “anticipate”, or even “look forward to” Christ’s return, but that we “eagerly await” him (see Rom. 8:19; 23; 1 Cor. 1:7; Gal. 5:5; 2 Tim. 4:8; Tit. 2:11-14).

v. 21 One of the things we look forward to, in contrast to those whose vision of the future extends only as far as their death, is the resurrection of the body. Two elements are in view here: continuity and discontinuity.

First, continuity. Our bodies will be transformed, not replaced or discarded like an empty shell. They will be “redeemed” (Rom. 8:23), not replaced. We will not become disembodied spirits. The bodies we presently possess will be radically changed, but they will still be our bodies; there will be continuity between our present and future selves. Paul likens this to the relationship between a seed and a full-grown plant (1 Cor. 15:36-38, 42-44).

And this analogy is as far as we can go. To describe more deeply how the connection between our present and future selves is maintained is more than God has revealed, and likely more than we could comprehend (Eph. 3:20-21). But to skeptically reject this truth because we cannot fully understand it would be foolish (1 Cor. 15:35-36). What we do know is that our transformed bodies will be “like his glorious body”; that is, according to 1 Cor. 15:42-54, they will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, immortal, and also spiritual; i.e. animated by the Spirit of God.

We will be raised bodily just as Christ was raised bodily (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14), and all of this will be accomplished by “the power that enables him to bring everything under his control”, a power that is beyond compare: sovereign, redemptive, and limitless (Eph. 1:18-23). Hallelujah!
Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

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

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

Open

☐ If you could only listen to one recording artist or band for one year, who would it be? Or, what recording artist or band would you be most happy never to hear again?

Discover

1. What is Paul asking Euodia and Syntyche to do? Why do you think he decided to get involved in their dispute?

2. How can we rejoice “always”, even when our lives are painful or difficult? (v. 4)

3. What does it meant to rejoice “in the Lord”? (v. 4)

4. What is the connection between rejoicing and gentleness? (v. 5)
5. What should we do when we find ourselves becoming worried or anxious? (v. 6)

6. In your own words, what will be the result? (v. 7) Have you found this to be the case in your experience?

7. In the space below, give one example for each of these characteristics: something that is . . .

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<tr>
<th>True</th>
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8. How could you make it a practice to “think about such things”? Give some examples.

9. What words would you use to characterize the things you usually tend to think about?

10. Paul gives several exhortations or commands in this short section. Can you identify them all?

Apply

☐ Which of the exhortations or commands that Paul gives in this passage is the most challenging to you? Why?

☐ Do you find this passage to be encouraging? Why or why not?
Drawing the letter to a conclusion, Paul calls the Philippians to stand firm in the faith, to come together in unity, to rejoice and trust in God, to dwell on what is good, and to practice what he has taught them. These attitudes and behaviors flow naturally from the themes of the letter; i.e., thankfulness in the midst of suffering, confidence in the love of our humble and risen Savior, reliance upon the sufficiency of Christ’s righteousness, joy in the surpassing value of knowing Him, and glad expectation in the hope of his return.

v. 1 Once again (see 2:25-30), we see that Paul is not embarrassed to express his deep and abiding love for his Philippian friends; he does not consider it injurious to his dignity to openly and freely declare his feelings for them. And this is characteristic of Paul. Although he praises temperance and self-control as Christian virtues (Gal. 5:23; 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8; 2:2; 2:5), he is unrestrained in his expressions of love for his fellow believers, especially those with whom he has a close personal relationship (see 1 Cor. 4:17; 2 Cor. 2:4; 6:11-13; 7:2-3; 1 Thess. 2:8). And so here, in addition to referring to them affectionately as “brothers and sisters”, he calls them “you whom I love and long for,” “my joy and crown”, and “dear friends”.

Paul’s encouragement to them to stand firm in the Lord “in this way” could refer back to his previous directive to follow his example, as one who is ardently seeking Christ above all else (3:7-17). Or it could look forward, to his instructions in vv. 3-9.

v. 2 There are no other references in the Bible to the women Paul addresses here, Euodia and Syntyche. Nor do we know the nature of their disagreement, although it is unlikely to have been a fundamental theological issue, or we would expect Paul to have weighed in. But he declines to take sides, and instead urges them to be reconciled; i.e., to “be of the same mind in the Lord” (see 2:2; 2:5). Since he calls them out by name, this was likely not a minor spat, but a conflict that was having a destructive effect on the fellowship as a whole, leading people to take sides, and resulting in divisions and factions.

v. 3 We cannot identify the “true companion” Paul addresses, but the fact that he calls on her or him to act as mediator underscores the importance of resolving the dispute. Note that Euodia and Syntyche are not unbelievers or merely lukewarm Christians; Paul states that they have “contended at my side in the cause of the gospel”, along with others. But strong, active personalities sometimes generate strong disagreements, as Paul himself knew (see Acts 15:36-41).

v. 4 “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” Paul does not merely express a hope that his readers will be able to rejoice; on the contrary, he issues a command: “Rejoice!” And he repeats the command, in order to underscore that it is both an imperative and something critical to their spiritual health, as individuals and as a community. And so failing to rejoice is both a choice and a sin.

We often think of joy as a response to happy circumstances, and therefore as something which unhappy circumstances can prevent. But that is not the case. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, not the fruit of a pleasant life (Gal. 5:22). There is always something to rejoice over. If we have been blessed in some way, then we can and should rejoice over the blessing, because all good things come from the hand of God (Jam. 1:17). For example, Paul rejoices over the Philippians’ partnership with him in the work of the gospel (1:3-5; 4:10). He anticipates rejoicing at their love and unity (2:1-2). He urges them to rejoice at being reunited with Epaphroditus (2:29-30). He rejoices that Christ is preached (1:18).

But even when there is nothing in our immediate circumstances to gladden our hearts, we can still rejoice if we focus on the things above, as Paul exhorts us to do (3:1-4). We can rejoice in the knowledge that God loves us, that he sent his Son to give his life for our salvation, and that he will, in a relatively brief time, bring us into eternal fellowship with himself (2 Cor. 4:16-18; 1 Pet. 1:3-6). We can rejoice that our names are written in heaven (Lk. 10:20).

We can rejoice in the knowledge that God is in control of world events and the events of our lives, and that he is working all things “for the good of those who love him” (Rom. 8:28). If we are persecuted, we can rejoice that this is a sign of our coming reward (Lk. 6:23; Col. 1:24; 1 Pet. 4:12-13).

And so when we fail to rejoice, it is not because we have nothing to rejoice over. It is because we have allowed disappointing or painful life events to override our faith in God’s promises; faith in his goodness, wisdom, love, and power. This may seem harsh to those who are experience significant suffering. But it is necessary. Because only when we see joy as our birthright in Christ, something which even the worst of this world cannot deny us; only when we accept responsibility for taking hold of that joy, can we step out of the shadow of this world’s darkness (Jn. 1:5; 8:12; 12:46; 2 Cor. 4:6) and into the light of the joy that belongs to us—as those who are redeemed in Christ, forgiven of our sins and made holy and blameless in him, and who have been given an inheritance “that can never perish, spoil or fade” (1 Pet. 3:4).
v. 5  Following the exhortation to rejoice, Paul encourages his readers to "Let your gentleness be evident to all." What is the relationship between joy and gentleness? Think about times when you have treated others harshly. Often it is because you were feeling angry or overwhelmed by trying circumstances, or because you were responding to being treated unfairly or disrespectfully; i.e., when life, or other people were treating you harshly. But when we are focused, not on the darkness of this world, but on the grace of God operating in the world, and on the promise of the world to come; when we are focused, not on the hatreds of this world, but on the love of our Lord, who will soon return ("The Lord is near"), then we are able to respond to these things, not with harshness meeting harshness, but instead with joy and gentleness. We don’t need to stubbornly insist on our rights; we don’t need to angrily defend ourselves from slander, turning the accusation back on the accuser, we don’t need to meet fire with fire. We can put our trust in God to defend and vindicate us (Ps. 135:14), and we can state the truth peacefully: with love and patience, and without an intention to wound or damage. Such gentleness is a sign of true humility, as demonstrated by our Savior (Mt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1), and is an essential quality of a mature Christian or spiritual leader (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12; 1 Tim. 3:2-3; 6:11; Tit. 3:1-2; 1 Pet. 3:15).

v. 6-7  How can we overcome the natural tendency to be anxious in the face of uncertain or threatening circumstances? By praying about the things that concern us. Prayer reminds us that we are under the care of a sovereign God who loves us, and who controls all the events of our lives (Rom. 8:28). But talking to God about the things that worry us is not sufficient. We must pray "with thanksgiving"; that is, focusing primarily, not on what we fear, but on all the ways in which God has blessed us. This helps us maintain our perspective. And this we are to do "in every situation", not excluding "anything". There is no area of human concern about which we should not pray. And yet, perversely, it is often those matters which stimulate within us the deepest and most irrational fears that we are the most reluctant to bring to God.

v. 8-9  In these verses, Paul links thought to action. Our success in following his example, as faithful and joyful disciples of Jesus Christ, will depend greatly on what fills our mind; what we dwell on, meditate on, and consider. As Paul writes in Romans, a continual "rewriting of your mind" (Rom. 12:2) is needed to support transformation into the likeness of Christ. The alternative is to think as the world does, and to therefore be conformed to it, not only in thought, but in attitude and conduct as well. This is not a simple matter, for we are constantly inundated with messages that promote the world’s values, whether subtly or overtly.

This propaganda comes in the form of television shows, movies, news broadcasts, newspapers, books, popular music, podcasts—the list goes on and on. Should we attempt then to somehow shut it all out, to read only the Bible, and to listen only to hymns? No, even if that were possible, a radical retreat from the world is not what we are called to; we are to be "in" the world but not "of" it (see Jn. 17:13-19). Instead, we must be selective and skeptical in our consumption of media, holding everything up to examination in the light of God’s Word. We must actively and thoughtfully engage with the world, rather than passively and naively accepting it.

One important means of developing the ability to distinguish false from true is to become so familiar, so saturated with what is good, and right, and virtuous that we can quickly recognize departures from that standard. Thus Paul’s exhortation:

"... whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

As we fill our minds with the Scriptures and with “psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit” (Eph. 5:19), but also with art, music, writing, and performances that embrace what is true—about God, about people, and about His creation—then we will not only see more clearly the falsity of the world’s counterfeits, but we will be less attracted to them as well: their discrepancies from the truth will be more and more jarring and discordant.

v. 9  But as exalted as our sense of truth and virtue may be, knowledge is not enough. We cannot be content to remain armchair philosophers; we must put our knowledge into practice. And so the things that we have "learned or received or heard" —i.e. what we have been taught—as well as what we have "seen" and observed in the lives of godly men and women (in this case Paul), we must "put it into practice" in our daily lives.
Unit 8 – More Than Enough
Philippians 4:10-23

Text

10 I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength. 14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. 17 Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. 21 Greet all God’s people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. 22 All God’s people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Open

☐ How have you recently experienced people showing concern for your welfare?

Discover

1. Describe Paul’s attitude toward the gift he had received from the Philippians. What was his response, and why did he respond in that way?

2. How was Paul’s attitude different when he was in need, versus when he had plenty? What was the reason for this?

☐ 23 Some manuscripts do not have Amen.
3. When he mentions having been “in need”, what is he referring to? (v. 12; see 1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 11:27)

4. Paul mentions being content when “living in plenty” (v. 12). Did he need God’s power to do that? Why or why not? (see Eccl. 5:10)

5. Would it be possible for us to have the same attitude toward our circumstances as Paul did? How?

6. Why do you think Paul recounts the history of the support he had received from the Philippians (vv. 15-16)?

7. What was his primary concern in desiring support from them? (v. 17)

8. How does Paul’s references to the gifts as an “offering” and a “sacrifice” (v. 18) change our understanding of their significance?

9. How would you interpret the promise in verse 19? Does it mean that we will never lack anything we need?

Apply

☐ How does your attitude toward your circumstances compare to that of Paul? ☐ How does this passage affect your attitude toward financially supporting missionaries or Christian workers, or toward being supported financially?
Paul begins this final portion of the letter, in which he acknowledges the Philippians’ monetary gift, not with an expression of thanks per se, but with an expression of joy. Note that he rejoices “in the Lord” although he knows that the gift came from the Philippian church, he also understands that God is the ultimate source of all the good things we receive (Jn. 3:27; 1 Tim. 6:17; Jam. 1:16-17). In the same way, when we give to others, we should rejoice that God has enabled us to do so, and that he has granted us the privilege of participating in His work (Rom. 12:6-8; 2 Cor. 8:1-4; 9:10-15). To give cheerfully in this way pleases God (2 Cor. 9:7). Thus, both the giver and the receiver can rejoice together, and both give thanks to God. The cause of Paul’s joy was not that he now had additional financial resources (v. 11); rather, he rejoiced in what the gift signified about his relationship with his Philippian brothers and sisters: he rejoiced “greatly” that “at last you renewed your concern for me”. Many missionaries and Christian workers who depend on others for financial support would echo this sentiment. And to make clear that he is not rebuking them or implying that they had not been concerned previously, he adds, “Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.” In other words, he knows that their care and concern for him were there all along, but rejoices that now at last they were able to demonstrate it. Why they were not able to do so previously we do not know. Perhaps they lacked resources, or perhaps Paul’s geographical separation from them, or his circumstances as a prisoner, had made it logistically impossible.

Paul clarifies the reason for his joy: “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” This may seem a bit ungrateful, as if Paul were diminishing the value of the gift by saying, “thanks for the money you sent, but I didn’t really need it”. But we have to understand what he is doing here. Paul is stating that his contentment and peace are not dependent on any human source of support, nor are they even dependent on having his physical needs fully met. His joy and contentment are independent of his circumstances, a state of mind that did not come easily to him but had to be “learned” through trial and suffering. At the same time, he is asserting that his relationship with the Philippians is a relationship of equals, and thus true friends, rather than one of dependency between a beggar and a benefactor. This should challenge us to examine our own attitudes, whether we are the ones giving or receiving.

The circumstances in which Paul had learned to be content included both poverty and abundance. In terms of poverty, he knew what it was to be “in need”; that is, lacking in even the basics of adequate food, clothing, and shelter. To the Corinthians, he writes, “I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.” (2 Cor. 11:27; see 1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 6:5). And he continued to suffer in this way: writing later to Timothy, he requested, “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas” and asked “Do your best to get here before winter” (2 Tim. 4:13, 21), indicating that he lacked warm clothing in prison.

If Paul had stopped here, we would be encouraged to learn that physical deprivation need not rob us of our joy. But he goes on to state that he had learned to be content when “well fed”. This seems curious. Why would he need to “learn” to be content in such circumstances? Wouldn’t anyone be perfectly happy to be “living in plenty”? But of course that is not the case. All we have to do is look around us to see that even the wealthiest are seldom content with what they have, but are always striving to obtain more, and fearful of losing what they have. As Solomon wrote, “Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.” (Eccl. 5:10). But Paul had learned not to allow relative prosperity to turn his heart and focus toward material things; he knew that those can not ultimately satisfy, and that they are destined to perish. And so at both ends of the spectrum, whether in need or having plenty, Paul was “content”; i.e. not thinking that he would be happier, more fulfilled, more productive, or more at peace if only he had more. How was he able to do this? By placing his trust and confidence in Christ. By looking to Christ, Paul was able to stand apart from his circumstances, whatever they were—whether comfortable and secure, or painful and perilous—and refuse to let them define his attitude. Again, this state of mind did not come naturally to Paul. And he knew that it was not due to his superior intellect, or education, or philosophical maturity, or deeply spiritual nature. He recognized that the power to do this came from Christ, the one “who gives me strength”.

“Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.” In spite of all this, Paul does not want to give the impression that he cares little for their gift. Indeed he does, but not merely, or primarily, because it met his need. Rather, because it reinforced the fact that the Philippians were partners with him in the work of the gospel, and that they were sharing in every aspect of his ministry.
v. 15 This verse contains a factual recital of the Philippian’s history of financially supporting Paul’s ministry. But it also speaks to the relational and spiritual implications of their ongoing partnership in the gospel. The specific time referred to here is mentioned in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:9), where he writes that, “... when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed.”

And so the financial gift from the church at Philippi which verse 15 refers to was to support him during his ministry at Corinth. Paul’s reference to “the matter of giving and receiving” is a term that was used to describe financial transactions or other kinds of exchanges; here, it encompasses all that was shared between Paul and his friends at Corinth: i.e., not only money and practical support, but also love (4:1), concern (2:20; 4:10), joy (1:4, 25; 2:2; 29; 4:1), co-labor in the cause of the gospel (4:3), and even life itself (2:17; see 2:27, 30). And so they were partners together in much more than a financial sense.

The result of their partnership would not be forgotten; just as Paul recalls it here, so also God will remember it (4:18-19; see Acts 10:31; Heb. 6:10).

v. 16 Paul reinforces the point that the financial support of the Philippians was deeply meaningful to him by recounting another such instance: “for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need”. This would have been prior to his ministry in Corinth, as Thessalonica was a Macedonian city.

In Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonian church, he mentions that he “worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone” (1 Thess. 2:9); the gifts from the church at Philippi would have augmented what he earned by his own labor.

v. 17 Having recounted their previous gifts, Paul reiterates that his concern is not the funds themselves, as if he were a businessman tallying up the day’s receipts. It is not his own needs that he is concerned about (see 4:11); on the contrary, what he desires is that “more be credited to your account”. As his partners, the greater their investment, the greater the return. Paul does not specify the nature of the “credit” or the “account” that he is referring to, but his focus on the day of Christ (1:6, 10), closely linked with a reference to their partnership (1:5), as well as to their ongoing “progress and joy in the faith” (1:25) implies both a present harvest of joy and holiness, and a reward at the return of Christ (see 2:14-16; 3:14, 20-21; 4:19).

v. 18 The funds Paul had received were not merely sufficient, but abundant; he assures them that he has “more than enough” and is “amply supplied”. However, this was not only a financial transaction, but more significantly, a spiritual one. Their gift was an “offering” and an “acceptable sacrifice” that was “pleasing to God”. These words greatly elevate the significance of their gift, revealing that in the eyes of God, it was on a par with the offerings made by the patriarchs, the priests, and the people of God in the Old Testament (Gen. 8:21; Ex. 29:15-18; Lev. 8:28; 17:6; Num. 15:1-7). Their sacrificial gift also pointed to the greater sacrifice of Christ on the cross, just as those of the Old Testament had prefigured it (Eph. 5:2).

vv. 19-20 As the letter comes to a close, Paul wants to assure his friends that God will provide for their needs. In the immediate context, their physical needs are in view, although that does not exclude the possibility, and even the likelihood, that they would experience times of suffering, just as Paul had (vv. 11-12; see 1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 11:27). God does not promise that we will never experience a lack of any kind; only that when he deems the time to be right, he will provide what we need (see Ps. 145:13-19; 1 Tim. 6:17).

But in the overall context of the letter, Paul’s perspective is not limited to this world, but is focused on the world to come (see 1:6; 2:14-16; 3:13-14, 20-21; 4:4). And so he is also assuring them that God’s provision will include all that they will ever need from a spiritual point of view (see Jn. 6:35; 2 Cor. 9:6-11). God is able to do this because of the inexhaustible “riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” (see 2 Cor. 9:8; Eph. 1:7, 18; 2:7; 3:8, 16). These riches are not limited to the things of this world, but include the blessings of the world to come. Thus, He is able to do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Eph. 3:20).

vv. 21-23 These verses remind us that the bonds which we share with one another as followers of Christ are not limited by time or distance, social status or ethnicity. Those with whom Paul was in fellowship during the time he wrote the letter, including “those who belong to Caesar’s household”, were of one body with “all God’s people in Christ Jesus” in Philippi. And in the same way, we who follow Christ today, more than twenty centuries later and in every nation around the globe, are not only of one body with one another, but with all of those saints as well. And there will come a time when that is not only a truth we acknowledge, but a blessed reality that we experience, joyfully and eternally. Amen.
Acknowledgments

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