

*Paul's Epistle  
To  
The Philippians*



*Bible Study Series  
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**Author of the Epistle:**

Paul no doubt. He mentioned his name in verse 1:1. However, he was associated with Timothy. Not that Timothy was a co-author, because the style and wording is definitely Pauline, but he was in his company during that period of time when Paul wrote the epistle. Not only that, but Paul on purpose meant to remind the believers in Philippi that Timothy is a co-worker for the future, when Timothy is dispatched to them for further encouragement and/or ordaining elders and deacons, and at the same time acknowledging Timothy's valuable ministry and services.

**Time of the Epistle:**

Approximately 61 A.D. during Paul's imprisonment in Rome awaiting trial. As we recall, when Paul was in prison in Caesarea, Festus the governor wanted to send him to Jerusalem for trial. But Paul who was informed beforehand by his nephew about some 40 zeal Jews who bound themselves under oath neither to eat nor drink until they had killed him, refused and said his famous statement: "**I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried,.....no one can hand me to them, I appeal to Caesar.**" And so Festus had no alternative but to send him to Rome to be tried before Caesar. (Acts 25:10)

**Where was the Epistle written from?:**

Obviously from the prison in Rome as per what is mentioned above. This is one of four epistles which Paul wrote while he was imprisoned in Rome, and so they are called the Prison Epistles, and they are the epistles to: The Ephesians, The Colossians, The Philippians, and Philemon. We must mention here, that Paul though was supposed to be imprisoned, and the prisons in Rome at that time were so awful, yet he enjoyed some privileges such as renting his own lodging (house), unlimited visitors, unlimited writing materials and above all the freedom to preach, so much so that his fourth trip which was meant to be for trial before Caesar, is in fact his fourth missionary trip.

**Recipients of the Epistle:**

The newly converted Christians who lived in the city of Philippi and its vicinity

who were of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, like Jews and Pagans natives and aliens whether from conquered countries by the Romans or just coming for trading.

### **The city of Philippi:**

Philippi was established and named after Philip the 2<sup>nd</sup> who was the father of the well known Alexander the great.

When Philip the 2<sup>nd</sup> came into power over Macedonia which was the northern province of the land which we know now as Greece, Philippi was a small town famous about its numerous natural springs which with the gold mines around it, attracted him to settle there. And by the help of that gold, Philip the 2<sup>nd</sup> was able to buy his way to power and expansion, so much so that Macedonia which was as small as the State of Maryland, expanded to overtake the southern province which was called Achaia to the extent that during his son's reign, the two provinces were under one country which we know as Greece.

It was reported that Philip the 2<sup>nd</sup> once said: **"No fortress is impregnable to whose walls an ass laden with gold can be driven."**

As a matter of fact, had Alexander the great not conquered the east and forced the Greek language on its people, the gospel may have not been preached in Europe at all.

Philippi was the first city in Europe where Paul preached the gospel (the good news). For as we recall that Paul while in Troas (in Asia Minor) during his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary trip (50/51 – 53/54 A.D.), saw a vision at night, a man from Macedonia asking him to cross and help them (Acts 16:9). So off he went accompanied by Timothy, Silas (Sylvanus), and Luke. There as we read in Acts 16, Paul was able to preach the good news, and one of those who believed was a lady by the name of Lydia, a well to do Jewish proselyte who was a merchant of purple, who also insisted to host Paul and his companions at her house.

Every thing was going O.K. for the ministry except that Paul was annoyed at a slave girl who was possessed by an evil spirit who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. She kept following them every day and crying out saying: **"These men are bond-servants of the most high who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation."** Paul wishing not and determined not to spread the good news via evil spirits, rebuked the evil spirit and ordered it to come out of her. This annoyed her masters who realized that they have lost every hope in gaining from her any more. And they organized a big riot against Paul and Silas, which ended by putting both of them in jail. However this event as ugly and cruel as it may seem, ended up for the glory of God, since the jailer and his family believed in Jesus Christ our Lord that same night and were baptized in the name of our Lord. (And the tradition says that he became the first bishop of the city of Philippi).

Apparently, Paul visited Philippi twice after this first visit and that was during his third missionary trip, once at its beginning (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 8:1 – 5) and again near the end on his way back to Jerusalem (Acts 20:6).

During the Pauline time, Philippi was a leading city in the province of Macedonia, since it was a colony. And a colony at the time of the Roman Empire was usually a big city or district either originally inhabited or newly established by retired Praetorian Guards and army officers who as a reward for their loyalty and services to Caesar, were given such privileges to live there and govern themselves. So these colonies were part of the Roman Empire but self-governed by its own inhabitants who also were granted the Roman citizenship. These inhabitants were very proud of their colonies and in many ways made it their own little Rome.

This arrangement by Caesar/Rome served two purposes:

1- Caesar having that many colonies of loyal officers scattered all over the vast stretched Empire, secured him and his Empire.

2- At the same time, he rewarded his loyal officers.

Paul having the keen eye of a wise master builder, he always targeted such important strategic colonies to preach the gospel especially that they were all located on the Via Egnathia which was the main highway to and from Rome connecting it to the eastern provinces or countries occupied and ruled by the Roman Empire. And the Holy Scripture tells us about Ephesus, Colosse, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth, all colonies and all were served and ministered to by Paul.

### **Purpose of the Epistle:**

- 1- To express in writing his thanks for their gift (4:10-18).
- 2- To let them know why he sent Epaphroditus back, lest they think that his services to Paul have been unsatisfactory (2:25, 26).
- 3- To inform them about his circumstances at Rome (1:12-26).
- 4- To exhort them to unity (2:1, 2 & 4:2).
- 5- To warn them against false teachers (3:1 – 4:1).

### **Background to be considered:**

About five years after establishing the church in Philippi, it came to their knowledge that Paul is held as prisoner in Rome for the sake of his faith, So immediately, they collected some contributions and sent it to Paul in Rome by the hands of Epaphroditus instructing him to stay with Paul to minister to his needs (4:10). That was the third contribution, because, previously they generously supported him when he was in Thessalonica (4:15, 16), then they contributed abundantly for the needy saints in Jerusalem (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 1:4).

Unfortunately shortly after his arrival at Rome or perhaps on his way, Epaphroditus suffered a near-fatal illness (2:26-27), and so, Paul decided to

send him back (2:25, 26) to be taken care of by his country people, and he wrote this epistle and sent it with him.

**Verses to remember:**

- For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain (1:21).
- Who (Jesus Christ), although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped (2:6).
- But emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men (2:7).
- Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (2:8).
- And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith (3:9).

**Outline of the Epistle:**

- 1- Paul's greeting (1:1-11).
- 2- Paul's circumstances (1:12-26).
- 3- Paul's exhortations (1:27 – 2:18).
  - A- To stand firm amid persecution (1:27-30).
  - B- To be united in humility (2:1-4).
  - C- To remember the example of Christ (2:5-11).
  - D- To be light in a dark world (2:12-18).
- 4- Paul's companions (2:19-30).
  - A- Timothy (2:19-24).
  - B- Epaphroditus (2:25-30).
- 5- Paul's warnings (3:1 – 4:1).
  - A- Against legalism (3:1-16).
  - B- Against lawlessness (3:17 – 4:1).
- 6- Paul's admonition (4:2-9).
- 7- Paul's thankfulness (4:10-20).
- 8- Paul's farewell (4:21-23).

**1- Paul's greeting (1:1-11)**

**Paul and Timothy:**

In all his epistles except the ones to the Thessalonians and Philemon, Paul was always keen to show his apostolic credentials, and the reason he has the right to teach and give his opinions; but here he does not do that, because there was an

extraordinary bond of love between him and the Philippians, so much so that he accepted gifts from them and not from any of the other churches as we explained above. So here he is sending a letter to his friends, and they know who he is.

### **Servants of God:**

In case they forgot about his job, he simply tells them that he and Timothy are servants of God. But in the original Greek and also in the Arabic translation, the word is **“Slaves”**. This is more accurate and appropriate, since the slave is the possession of his master, and why not?! Paul and all the redeemed have been bought by a very dear price, the blood of Jesus Christ. Paul does not forget that, and he does not want the Philippians to forget it either. And what was true for the Philippians then, is also true for us now, and let no body think lightly about this fact. Not only that, but the slave can only belong to one master at one time, and I mean that unless he is sold to another master. But Paul’s master and our master, cannot and would not sell us to any other master (if there is any), because simply there is no body who can pay the same price paid for us by the precious blood of Christ. More than that Jesus Himself assured the Father in John 17:12 that **“Those whom You gave me, I have kept and none of them is lost except the son of perdition.”**

The slave is also obedient to his master; he cannot do but the will of his master; so Paul is planting this attitude in the minds of the Philippians that he is obedient to what the Lord tells him to do, and that he lives to do His will; so also they should and so also we should. We should always remember that while we are called slaves, yet He has freed us from the bondage of sin. So in actuality we are **“Free”**.

### **To all the saints:**

The word **“saint”** is misunderstood by so many Christians and by some denominations. The original Greek word means **“Holy”** and its synonym in Hebrew is **“consecrated”** or **“sanctified”** which was used all the time in the Old Testament and few times in the New Testament as in the examples which will follow soon. These two words in Hebrew mean **“set apart”**. For example in Lev. 21:6 it says “They (the priests) shall be holy unto their God” which means to be set apart for God. And in Lev. 27:30, 32 it says “The 10<sup>th</sup> shall be holy unto the Lord” which means that the 10<sup>th</sup> shall be set apart for the Lord. And in Exd. 19:6 it says that “the Jews are a Holy nation” which means that they are set apart for God. But alas, they rejected the corner stone, and so the present church is the holy nation of God now. Listen to what Peter says in his 1<sup>st</sup> epistle 2:9 addressing the newly converted Jews to Christianity **“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God”**. And in 1:15 he says **“But just as He who called you is Holy, so be holy in all you do.” Which means be set apart in all you do, which means set yourselves apart from the world in all what you do.**

So, from all the above, we can deduct that the word **“saint”** does not mean **“So Pious”**, that he or she is like God, because no one is good except God, as Jesus

Himself testified “**No one is good but one; that is , God**” (Mat. 19:17 & Luke 18:19).

### **In Christ:**

To be in Christ is to live continually in the atmosphere and the spirit of Christ, where everything speaks to us of Him, never separated from Him, always feeling His presence, His strength, His power surrounding us. This makes us special and set apart for Him.

### **Grace and peace:**

These two words are mentioned in the greeting of every epistle Paul wrote except the epistle to Hebrews (that is if we consider that Paul wrote it), and perhaps this is one of the reasons it is not considered his by the conventional scholars.

Grace was the normal day to day greeting for the Greeks when they meet each other, as peace for the Jews.

The basic ideas in grace were joy, pleasure, and beauty. In Christianity it describes the beauty of our new relationship with God after becoming His children.

The basic ideas in peace were total well being and everything that makes for a man's highest good. In Christianity it mainly describes the peace of reconciliation to God.

So this combination of grace and peace in Paul's epistles combines the Joy of knowing God as a father and the peace of being reconciled to Him; and both can only come through our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **I thank my God upon every remembrance of you:**

Paul must have had very good memories of the Philippians, that he thanks God for them. Nothing can bring joy to the heart more than moments of good memories of being with or hearing from or of the ones we love.

Let us see the aspects of Paul's joy:

- **The joy of prayer (1:4)** nothing is more joyful to the Christians more than bringing those whom we love to the mercy seat of God. So did Paul.
- **The joy that Christ is preached (1:18)** the loving zeal Christian always rejoices in thinking of the gospel being preached all over the world. So did Paul.
- **The joy of faith (1:25)** shouldn't we rejoice in the faith which guarantees us a free everlasting eternity in the presence of God? So did Paul.
- **The joy of seeing Christians in fellowship together (2:2)** nothing could bring joy to the heart than seeing the church as one family having such spiritual fellowship, and only in Christ this could happen. So did Paul.

- **The joy of suffering for Christ (2:17)** to suffer for Christ is a privilege, because it demonstrates where our loyalty lies. So did Paul.
- **The joy of news of the loved one (2:28)** Paul is asking the Philippians to open the door for Epaphroditus and receive him with joy. The open door is what our Lord teaches us. There is nothing more comfortable to a person in distress or need of help than to know that he will not be turned away, and that the door is always open for him.
- **The joy of the man in Christ (3:1 7 4:1)** We are happy when we are with the person we love. Isn't it beautiful to be with Jesus all eternity? Paul yearned for that "having a desire to part and be with Christ, which is far better" (1:23).
- **The joy of the man who has won one soul for Christ (4:1)** The Philippians are Paul's joy and crown for he was the means of bringing them to Christ. Evangelism is not a duty; it is a joy. Paul rejoiced in that.
- **The joy in a gift (4:10)** it is not the monetary value of the gift that matters, but it is knowing that someone cares and loves. Paul felt that and recorded it.

#### **Has begun, will complete:**

These two words used together, have a certain meaning and use which I did not know before. In the Greek culture, they were technical terms for the beginning and ending of a sacrifice. So, Paul talking to Greeks, he means something that relates to their culture. So here, he sees the life of every Christian as a sacrifice prepared to be offered to Jesus Christ. It is the same picture he drew to the Romans where he encourages them to offer their bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (Rom. 12:1).

#### **The day of Jesus Christ:**

As a triumphant king returning from battle, He will be received by His subjects presenting Him with gifts as a token of their true love and loyalty. And the only gift which Jesus Christ desires from us is ourselves and our lives.

So, to sum up the meaning of this verse, is that from the moment we start out upon the Christian way, God's grace begins and completes its work to fit us to be the perfect offering to offer to Jesus Christ.

#### **You all are partakers with me of grace:**

"Partakers" implies that we are partners with Paul and subsequently with each other and every believer. So let us see what this partnership means:

- 1- **We are partners in grace:** We as Christians have shared the gift of God's grace, which has drawn us together since we all owe a common debt which is the goodness and grace of God.
- 2- **We are partners in the defense and confirmation of the gospel:** The Christian has to be ready to defend his beliefs and to give a reason for the

hope he believes in (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:15), and to build up and to strengthen others.

- 3- **We are partners in suffering for the gospel:** The Christian must find comfort in knowing that he does not suffer alone, but he is one of a great multitude of Christ's followers who in every age, in every generation and in every land have suffered for Christ rather than denying their redeemer. (Mark 10:29 & John 16:33).
- 4- **We are partners in and with Christ:** In all the conventional translations of the Holy Scripture, Paul in verse 8 says with the "**affection**" of Jesus Christ. But in the old authorized King James version, the verse reads with the "**intestines or guts**" of Jesus Christ. These words though strange, yet they meant something to the Greeks in Paul's time, because to them, the guts were the upper intestines, the heart, the liver, and lungs which they believed were the seat of emotions and affection. And since we do not believe that now, the words guts and/or intestines were replaced by the word which means the same and that is "**affection**". So, what Paul says here is "I yearn for you with the affection or compassion of Jesus Christ Himself". When we are one with Jesus, His love goes out through us to our fellow-men. The Christian is nothing less than a partner in the love of Christ.

**And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge:**

Love creates the desire for knowledge. For example, if we love a certain subject, we want to learn more and more about it. If we love some one, we want to know more and more about him or her. If we love Jesus we want to know more and more about Him and about the truth in Him, and we will desire to do what He wants from us, and to do what is right to please Him

**That you may approve the things that are excellent, and be sincere and without offense:**

So, the love of Jesus will enable us to know what is right and what is wrong; what is true and what is false, and to be sincere and causing no offense or stumbling to others.

Sincere means to be able to stand the test of sunshine, or without wax.

As for causing no offense or stumbling, there are many good Christians, but some may be (intentionally or not) critical to others. This may offend or repel others.

**To the glory and praise of God:**

And of course, God's purpose for us in all what we do is to bring praise to Him. Listen to what Jesus Himself says about that: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven." (Matt. 5:16).

## 2- Paul's circumstances (1:12-26)

### **What happened to me has actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel:**

As was mentioned before, this epistle is one of the four prison epistles which Paul wrote during his two year imprisonment in Rome waiting for his trial by Augustus Caesar.

### **So, at the time where every body ( or at least his enemies), thought that it is the end of his missionary work:**

It actually flourished, expanded and advanced. And the word which Paul used here for advancement or furtherance means cutting away the trees that would otherwise hinder the advancement of the army. This means removing any barrier in the way of advancement. So his bonds or chains were not at all any barrier or hindrance to his work. **Why?** Because it opened the door for him to show the Praetorian Guard why was he in chains, which was the beginning point of preaching the gospel.

**Now** a word about the Praetorian Guard is in order. It was the imperial guard of Rome, who became later the Emperor's body guard composed of 12,000 – 16,000 hand picked troops, who served a term of 12 – 16 years, which usually ended by being granted the Roman citizenship and the sum of what is equivalent to \$250.00. They were mostly concentrated in Rome in specially built and fortified camps.

On arrival to Rome as a prisoner, Paul was handed over to their commanding officer. As a prisoner, Paul in many of his epistles, referred to himself as being in bonds (Phil.1:7, 13, 14 & Col 4:3, 18), into the hands of the Romans (Acts 28:17), a prisoner of Jesus Christ and bonds of the gospel (Philemon 9, 13 & Eph. 3:1), or as ambassador in bonds (Eph. 6:20).

And Paul though was allowed certain privileges such as renting his own lodging, allowed to receive unlimited visitors, and unlimited supply of writing material, yet day and night he was chained by the wrist to the wrist of his guard. If we imagine that each guard's shift was 4 hours, then Paul would have seen four guards every day, multiply this by two years (730 days). This means that he saw 2920 guards. Of course some of them he may have seen repeatedly; but I would imagine that some of the guards who were not assigned originally to him, would have put a special request to serve a shift with him, so that they may listen to what he told the other guards and/or his visitors, and certainly his personality must have intrigued many. So, as we see, Paul's bonds were not a barrier at all for him to preach the gospel, not only to the common, but also to the elite troops of the praetorian. This was encouraging to the Philippian believers.

### **Some from envy and some also from goodwill:**

Paul's preaching was fruitful, for those who heard the word started to preach it; some full heartedly and some of envy. Actually the word Paul used meant "for political benefit" which carries within it self-seeking and selfish ambition. In other words these preachers were out to advance their own prestige. This of course would undermine Paul's work. However, so long as Jesus Christ was preached, to Paul it didn't matter who receives the credit, honor, or prestige. All what matters to him was Christ being preached.

### **For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance (salvation):**

The word that Paul used for deliverance can be used in several meanings, and the most prominent are: 1- Safety, 2- Salvation in heaven. 3- Health or general well being. At any rate, if we take all these meanings into consideration, I suppose what it means is that God in His wisdom had put him in this situation with all its problems to make for his happiness in this age and for his joy and peace in eternity.

### **Through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ:**

Here Paul relies on two supports:

- 1- **The prayer of his friends:** In a good number of his epistles, Paul asks his readers to pray for him. For example in Rom. 15:30 he writes "I beg you brethren.....that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me." And in 1<sup>st</sup> Thess. 5:25 he writes "Brethren, pray for us." And in Philemon 22 he writes "For I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.: Paul was never too big a man to remember that he needed the prayers of his friends. It is always strengthening and encouraging knowing that others pray for us and we for them.
- 2- **The Holy Spirit:** The Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of Jesus promise before His ascension, to be sent for our comfort, help and support. Paul firmly believed in that, and he felt the support of the Holy Spirit all the time.

### **According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness:**

Paul here used a very powerful word for expectation which means eager, concentrated and intense look which turns away from anything else, but fixes on the one object it desires. His hope was that he will never be shamed into silence for example by the seeming futility of his work or by the several afflictions he endured. His hopes and expectations were that his labors will be effective for all men and that there will be given to him boldness to speak.

**So now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death:**

And of course the result will be to the glory of God will it be in his life or in his death because in either he is God's. Listen to what he wrote to the Romans "For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore whether we live or die we are the Lord's." (Rom. 14:8).

Leaders are always judged by their followers. People judge Christianity by the behavior of Christians. By our conduct we may bring glory or shame to Christ; so let us behave in the manner that brings glory to Him Who redeemed us by a very precious price, His blood.

**For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain:**

As a prisoner sent from Caesarea to Caesar in Rome to decide whether he should live or die, Paul was not certain which way it will go. But it made no difference to him, for he says "to me, to live is Christ ". I would imagine that at this moment he was looking several years back to the incident of his encounter with the living God on the way to Damascus, and how he was born anew. At that moment he was granted eternal life which no body can take away from him even Caesar himself. So for Paul, Christ was the only motive to live; for Christ has given him the strength to live, for it was Christ's all-sufficient grace that was made perfect in his weaknesses (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 12:9). If Christ is not living, then there will be nothing to live for. That is how Christ to Paul was nothing but life itself. Wouldn't be great if every one of us feels and believes the same?

As for "to die is gain"; death for the believer is an immediate entry in the presence of the Lord. So why any body shouldn't count it gain? That is why to Paul life or death was the same. Shouldn't we feel the same? That is why he also says in verse 23 "I am hard pressed between the two." And the word which Paul uses here for hard pressed, describes a traveler walking on in a narrow rocky defile with a wall of rock on either side, and he has no choice but going straight ahead. This means here that Paul had no choice, and it is all in the hands of God. He can only go forward, and God does the rest.

**Having a desire to depart:**

The word Paul uses for depart offers three meanings:

- 1- Loosening the tent ropes and pins and moving on.
- 2- Loosening the mooring ropes, putting up the anchor and setting sail.
- 3- Solving problems.

All the above are very meaningful since death can mean all of them.

**Remain and continue:**

Both words in Greek have the same root word, with the difference that continue means remain or abide with the readiness to help. So Paul's desire to live, not because he loves life or afraid to die, but by living he can continue to help and serve.

**Rejoicing for me .....by my coming to you again:**

If he lives and be able to go back to them, they will be able to see in him what Christ can do for the person who puts all his trust in Him. This will bring abundant joy to them.

**4- Paul's exhortations (1:27 – 2:18)****A- To stand firm amid persecution (1:27-30)****Let your conversation be worthy of a citizen of the kingdom and of the gospel of Christ:**

The word Paul used for conversation means conduct. And actually it is translated conduct in most of the versions at hand. The reason the word conversation was used in the early translations of the bible was that in the seventeenth century, the conduct of a person was judged by not only his action but also mostly by his talk, hence came the word conversation. So as a whole this verse means "behave wholly in a way worthy of belonging to Christ.

Then comes the word citizen of the kingdom which is not mentioned in most of the versions, but it is worth discussion. We mentioned before that Paul in his imprisonment, preached naturally to the elite praetorian guard; we also mentioned that as a reward for their loyal services, they were given a sum of money and were granted the Roman citizenship which they were very proud of. Not only that, but they were also given the right to live in colonies which were in essence were cities (little Romes) planted through out the whole Roman Empire. Philippi was one of them, and we mentioned also Ephesus, Thessalonica, and Corinth. Actually most of the centers where Paul preached were colonies. So, these people were very proud of their citizenship (see Acts 22:25-28).

Here, Paul reminds them that their actual citizenship belongs to the kingdom of God, and if they are very proud of their earthly perishable citizenship, how more could it be with their new everlasting heavenly citizenship?

And the question now is how should they behave? Paul puts few guide lines:

- 1- Stand fast:** The Christian once he puts his hand on the plough, should not look backwards or retreat (Luke 9:62).

- 2- **One Spirit unit:** No divisions, quarrels, arguments, nor differences. Be one in everything they do
- 3- **Not terrified by adversaries:** The devil is roaring like a lion to devour us (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:8). We should fight till the end. If they behave in this manner, their adversaries will realize that Christ followers have something which they do not have and they may seek it. Of course, Paul knows that this is not easy either for him or for them, but he encourages them to do so. And he says the same to us today, for the battle is on. So let us fight it till the end for Christ's sake.

### **B- To be united by humility (2:1-4)**

There were some problems in the church of Philippi which brought it at the verge of breaking. The nature of these problems was not quite clear, but it can be guessed from Paul's urge for oneness or unity in verse 2, and lowliness in verse 3, and helpfulness in verse 4.

So, their problems were probably that they were lacking or at least not using these virtues.

So, in verse 1, Paul is addressing them saying: "If you really have any consolation in Christ, and if you really have any comfort of love, and if you have any fellowship in the Spirit, and if you have any affection or mercy, then complete my joy by:

#### **Having one mind:**

The usual cause of breaking a church is zeal! Yes zeal. The more the person is zeal, the more he is convinced that what he thinks or does, is for the good of the church. And he is sincere in that, and so he will be offended and upset, that what he feels right has been neglected or brushed off. So being still zeal, he tries to convince some members of his point of view. Then the problem arises if he succeeds to get some members on his side. Now there are two opposing forces or camps, and the church breaks down. What is the solution? Paul says "be of one mind". However in verses 3&4, Paul gives three great causes for disunity, and they are:

- a- Selfish ambition which is working for their advancement and not for God.
- b- Personal prestige which is the desire for empty glory, to be admired, to be respected, to be known by name, or to have a certain degree of fame. But the aim of the true Christian is to do good deeds not for men to glorify him, but to glorify His Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:16). The believer shines with a light, but the light is not his, it is the light of God shining through him.
- c- Concentration on self which means eliminating others, and ultimately pushing others down.

And all these three intermingle with each other, because when there is self ambition, a desire for personal prestige, and concentration on one's own business, then nothing else could result but disunity.

Now, how to avoid that? Paul puts few things to remember:

#1 We are all in Christ. And if we are in Christ then we are all on the same wave length. There should not be any static noise.

#2 The power of Christian love which will never seek anything but the good of others. The power that makes one like the unlikable. Such love does not permit disunity with others.

#3 The power of the Holy Spirit who binds man to God and to his fellow men. With the Holy Spirit there is no disunity.

#4 Compassion towards others, which Jesus taught us will keep us from disunity.

### **C- To remember the example of Christ (2:5-11)**

In this section, Paul is pleading with the Philippians to have in their hearts that humble selfless desire to serve, which was the very essence of the life of Christ. **Why?** And here comes the masterpiece of self- denial, humility, and obedience till the death on the cross. I strongly feel that these 3 verses (6, 7 & 8), should be recited by heart by every Christian, or written in a form of a creed, to remind us of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. It is written here in such a beautiful way which the apostolic creed could not vividly reflect. In these three verses, Paul tells the whole story of redemption, and brings to light the reality of manhood as well as the reality of the deity of Jesus Christ.

#### **In the form of God:**

Jesus Christ was , is, and always will be the essential natural unchangeable form of God. And the word Paul uses here describes that which a man is in his very innate essence, that which cannot be changed, that which he possesses, and in such a way that it cannot be taken from him. So, in essence, Paul is saying here that the unchangeable Divine innate, essence of Jesus Christ is the same no matter His outward look might alter, referring to him being in the flesh.

#### **Did not consider it robbery to be equal with God:**

He did not regard being in equality with God as something that is not His, so much so that He has to snatch it. This once again, stresses the essential unchangeable deity of Jesus Christ.

**He made Himself of no reputation (emptied Himself):**

The word used implies removal of everything from a container till it is completely empty which vividly describes the sacrifice of incarnation. He gave up everything voluntarily and willingly in order to become a man. He, Who is rich in everything, became poor for us.

**Taking the form of a bond servant:**

He truly and really became a man in every respect (except sin), not like the Greek gods who were said to have come down to earth sometimes and became men but kept their divine privileges.

**Being found in appearance (fashion) as a man:**

He Who is a Spirit came in the appearance of a man to be seen, recognized, and identified with. This is the mystery of true love, which we can never fully understand, although we can blessedly experience it.

**He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death:**

The great characteristics Of Jesus in His life on earth are **Humility, Obedience, and self-renunciation**. These also should be the hallmark of every Christian. Selfishness and self-seeking destroy our likeness to Christ, and our fellowship with each other. But the self-renunciation of Jesus Christ brought to Him the everlasting glory when every knee shall bow to Him. It is His amazing love to His own creation which made Him renounce everything, humbling Himself to the level of bond servant, and obeying to the point of the cursed death on a cross.

**Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord:**

Lord is an expression of superiority of a master not necessarily on slaves or a household, but a master on everything including life itself, or in another word master on everything He created. That is why all universes shall call Him Lord; which in itself implies complete obedience, complete love, and complete loyalty to Him. After all, the whole purpose of our existence is to glorify God.

**D- To be light in a dark world (2:12-18)**

**Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His own good pleasure:**

Though this verse seems vague and difficult and possibly contradicting Paul's teaching everywhere else that salvation is only by grace and not by works; yet nowhere else in the New Testament, it is more decisive and clear.

Does this mean that we have to **work** to receive salvation?

Certainly **Not**. The verse would have said “**work out for your own salvation.**”

I am sure every one of us is familiar with the expression “to work out” which means “to exercise”. They told me after my open heart surgery, to do some work out. This means to exercise to keep my heart in good shape and to be fit physically. This is exactly what Paul is telling the Philippians then, as he is telling us now, to exercise our salvation so that we may be quite fit on the day of the Lord; so when the Lord comes (**and surely He is coming**), He will find us ready to meet Him. Jesus Himself said so many parables about being ready when He comes, such as the five wise virgins, the servant who will be ready when his master comes back, the king who made the feast for his wedding and invited everyone, but one of them was not in the wedding garments (which means not ready), and so on.

Then, how can we be ready? The answer is by fear and trembling. And I think we mentioned before that the word “fear” is an Old Testament expression of reverence, as being in the presence of the president of the United States or the Queen of England, or simply our parents; we do not fear them but we revere them.

But Why should we revere God? Because it is He Who works in us as the verse states. Didn't the Holy Scripture say “you are the temple of God and His Spirit lives or abides in you?”(2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 6:16). So how can the Holy Spirit abide in us and we just do not give Him the due reverence?

**How about the work? Who does it?** The verse says “For God who works in you.” So God is the one who works. Notice here the verse does not say “For God Who **works out** in you” which means that God is the one who works our salvation, and we are the ones who exercise it.

And the expression “work out” is not something new of our present time, but it was an old Greek term used for exercising in preparation for the race. It also meant “complete to perfection”; which reminds us to do what God requires us to do up to perfection. We must remember that God does not accept half-way results. We must do it to the best of our abilities. At the same time we must not forget that He does not require of us more than we are capable of.

There is another interpretation to the phrase “work out your salvation”. Some say that it means to be obedient to God, and do not resist or reject His grace. Or in other words to respond to God's love and His desire to save us, by not neglecting His salvation which is based on what the Holy Scripture says in Heb. 2:3 “**How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?**”

As for salvation, we believe that:

- It is solely from God, completed and perfected by Him.
- There can be no salvation without God, and what God offers must be accepted by man.
- God never withhold salvation from man, it man who deprives himself from that salvation by rejection.

- It is free, help yourself to it while there is time, before the end comes, and then you will have no other chance.

**So that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain:**

In verses 16, 17 Paul paints two pictures from the Greek culture:

**1- The game of racing:**

The word labor used here means working very hard to the point of sweat and utter exhaustion, and it applies to the training endured before the race.

Paul is praying that his very hard work which was to the point of exhaustion and the training he has endured and the race he has run, may not come to nothing. And for him, the greatest prize in life is to know that through his labor, others had come to know, love, and serve Jesus Christ.

**The ritual of heathen sacrifice:**

One of the commonest kinds of heathen sacrifice was what was called **Libation**, which was a cup of wine poured out as an offering to the gods. For example every heathen meal began and ended by libation as a kind of grace before and after meal.

So Paul here is reminding the Philippians of their heathen rituals of sacrifice which was of course the highest thing they can offer to their gods; and says to them, even if I poured out (2<sup>nd</sup> Tim. 4:6) my life as a libation of sacrifice that you may know Jesus Christ, and believe in him, that will be my ultimate rejoice in life. And in verse 18, he says that this rejoice is not only for him, but for them as well, since through this pouring, they came to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and believing in Him, and through Him they were granted salvation and eternal life.

**4- Paul's companions (2:19-30)**

**A- Timothy (2:19-24)**

A Greek young man from a Jewish believer mother, Eunice (Acts 16:1, 2 & 2<sup>nd</sup> Tim. 1:5), and a Greek father (Acts 16:1). His mother was faithful in teaching him the Holy Scriptures since his childhood (2<sup>nd</sup> Tim. 3:14, 15).

Him, his mother, and his grandmother Lois, probably were converted to Christianity during Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> missionary visit to Lystra, their hometown (Acts 14:21).

On his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary trip, passing back by Lystra (Acts 16:1), Paul found in Timothy a grown up man of love and zeal to serve the Lord, So, he asked him to join them (Paul and Silas) in the work of God. But because he was Greek, Paul had to have him circumcised (Acts 16:1-3), so that he would not be a stumbling

block to the Jews, because as we notice, although Paul was called the apostle of Gentiles, yet the Holy Scripture tells us that in every city Paul passed by, he preached the good news of salvation in the synagogues first.

Apart from accompanying Paul in his travels, we should not forget his great work of correcting the heresies and false teaching and also establishing the governing systems in Ephesus and Corinth (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 4:17 & 1<sup>st</sup> Tim. 4:12).

On many occasions, Paul called him “son”; and he was well entrusted by Paul (Phil. 2:19, 20) as being as faithful and caring as he is. And having full confidence in his abilities, Paul sent him to few side missions (Acts 19:22; 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 4:17 & Phil. 2:19).

Paul mentioned him in several of his epistles such as 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians and Philemon.

He was imprisoned in Rome and then released; for the Holy Scripture tells us that Paul asked him to go to Rome (2<sup>nd</sup> Tim. 4:9, 21). Then he was released from prison (Heb. 13:23); and that is the last we hear of him in the Holy Scripture.

Timothy was by far the closest companion to Paul. He was with him in Philippi (Acts 16), and in Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17:1-14), and in Corinth and Ephesus (Acts 18:5 & 19:21, 22). He was also with him in prison in Rome (Phil. 1:1 and Col. 1:1), though we do not know if was actually a prisoner or just a frequent visitor to Paul.

He was also associated with Paul of the writing of no fewer than five of his epistles (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians). And in the epistle to the Romans, Timothy sent his greetings (Rom. 16:21).

He was also Paul’s personal messenger to some of the churches when Paul was unable to go, or if he wanted to know or give some news, advice, or continuing of ministry; for example, he was sent to Corinth (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 4:17 & 16:10,11), to Philippi (Phil. 2:19), and to Thessalonica (1<sup>st</sup> Thess. 3:6).

And in the end we know that he was imprisoned for the sake of Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:23).

It seems that Timothy was always quite willing to go anywhere Paul sends him, his sole desire was to serve Christ, and for that he was quite content with the second place as far as serving God is concerned.

## **B- Epaphroditus (2:25-30)**

Please refer to his story mentioned in the introduction under the heading “Background to be considered” on page 4.

Paul saw that it is not wise to keep him in Rome. He had no means to take care of him; simply because he himself was a prisoner and can hardly take care of himself. So he decided to send him back. But at the same time, Paul feared that his countrymen (the Philippians) may look low at Epaphroditus, thinking that he is

a quitter. So, in these six verses one can feel Paul's feeling towards Epaphroditus, and that he did not wish to let him down, writing such a tremendous testimony, that would wipe out any doubt about Epaphroditus' service and faithfulness.

So he describes him as **“his brother”**, **“his fellow worker”**, and **“his fellow soldier”**. Then he proceeds to say that he is your messenger, and the servant of my needs. And the word which Paul used for messenger is Apostolos, which puts Epaphroditus in line with and at the same rank as Paul and the rest of the apostles. Then he goes even further to ask them to receive such a man with great welcome and hold him in honor for he had risked his life for Christ. And the original Greek word used for “risked” literally means “gambled”.

So what Paul is saying here, is, that for the sake of Jesus Christ, Epaphroditus, has gambled with his life. Are we ready to risk our lives for Christ's sake?

## **5- Paul's warnings (3:1 – 4:1)** **A- Against Legalism (3:1-16)**

In verse 1, Paul starts with rejoice in the Lord. There may be some tribulations now, but this is an earthly temporary thing, and we should look for the everlasting joy with Christ our Lord. This is our joy now because we live on that hope. We can loose everything from possessions to loved ones, but we can never loose Christ. Even in the midst of pain and suffering, nothing can separate us from the joy of loving Christ (Rom. 8:38, 39). He says: I said that before, and I say it again. It is easy for me to say it, but it is necessary for you to hear it again. That is exactly what I feel when repeating something important I said before.

Paul is actually putting verse 1 as an introduction to what is coming, because there are dogs waiting to bite if they have not already bitten.

So what or who are these dogs?

These are the Judaizers, who are the converted Christians from Judaism, who taught that in order to be a Christian, one must be a Jew first or at least observe all Jewish laws and traditions including circumcision. Not only that, but they believed that everlasting life is **“earned”** by good deeds; which means that man must build up a credit balance in the sight of God, which means that he puts God in his debit by continuously carrying out these good deeds of the law. This is exactly the same as putting money in the bank, since when one deposits money in the bank, he indebts the bank, which still means that the bank is indebted to him for the amount of money he deposited.

So, in actuality the Jews were and still are putting God in the position of being indebted to them.

But now let us see what Paul always taught and what we believe in: **We are saved by grace alone**. Salvation is a free unconditioned gift of God to all men and to all nations and no one is excluded from it except the son of perdition.

We never earned it, nor did we ever deserve it, and we can only humbly and thankfully accept it.

Then in verse 3, he assures that we are the true circumcision, and not the Jews who lived only by the flesh.

Circumcision was the **Mark** of the covenant in the flesh which consecrated or set apart Abraham and his seeds for God (Gen. 17:11).

Now let us see how Paul describes these Judaizers in verse 2:

- 1- **Dogs:** The dog was the lowest thing that one can think of. It is unclean, and it defiles on contact. The Jews used this term to describe the non-Jews (Gentiles). So, now things turned the other way around, for Paul calls them “**dogs**” while he calls the Gentiles “**true circumcision**” who according to Gen.17:11 would be the consecrated or the people set apart for God.
- 2- **Evil workers:** To Paul, neglecting the free grace of God and teaching that righteousness is by practicing the law and tradition, is evil because it takes the believer away from God's grace.
- 3- **Mutilators:** Lev. 21:5 forbids self-mutilation such as castration and the like. So, Paul here considers circumcision as mutilation and should be forbidden, since the true circumcision is of the heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 2:29; Phil.3:3 & Col. 2:11). As a matter of fact, long before Paul's time, God talked about circumcision of the heart in Deut. 10:16 and 30:6. Isaiah also talked of unclean lips (uncircumcised lips) in Is. 6:5, and Jeremiah talked about uncircumcised ears in Jer. 6:10; and there are innumerable references to such things in Exod. 6:12, 30; Lev. 26:41, Jer. 4:4; Ezek. 44:7, 9 and Jer. 9:26.

Consequently he who promotes circumcision of the flesh is only a mutilator.

We as believers, our confidence is in the Spirit not in the flesh.

Then from verse 4 – 7, Paul proceeds to say that if anyone boasts in the flesh, it should be him; then he puts down all his pre-Christian credentials which he thought that it gave him the right to boast. That was then, but now after knowing Christ, everything that was considered gain for him, he counts it as loss for the excellence of knowing Christ our Lord.

But before leaving this section, I would like to comment on being circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day which was according to God's instructions to Abraham in Gen. 17:12, then repeated in Lev. 12:3 as a permanent law. The idea here was that these instructions were given to Abraham concerning his son of the covenant “Isaac” and his seed who was circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day; but his son of the flesh “Ishmael” from Hagar the slave was circumcised when he was 13 years old, and his seed took that after him. So, when Paul says that he was circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, he sorts himself out as being of the seed of the son of the covenant. Yet the circumcision did not benefit him for righteousness or eternal life. He laid aside all human achievements and counted them as rubbish that he might experience the free grace of Jesus Christ

Then in verses 9, 10, and 11, Paul says that he gave up trying self-righteousness which is through the law, and found it empty and futile leading to nowhere, but he found the true righteousness in Jesus Christ, not by the law, but by faith, not by flesh but by Spirit, the thing which led him to intimately know, understand, and experience His fellowship and the power of His resurrection which is the guarantee of immortality and of the life to come (Rom.8:11; 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 15:14), and which proves that death is not the end of life, but there is a future eternal life for those who believe. Not only that, but he was led to understand Jesus' sufferings and had the privilege of sharing it.

And in case the Philippians get the impression that he reached his goal, he tells them “**No**” in the following five verses. I imagine him looking back on his way to Damascus and his great encounter with the Lord, and the personal commission he was given; and he looks at himself now; did he achieve what the Lord had got hold of him for? Then he realizes that the commission is for life; there is no stop or relaxation, and there is nothing called “I have done enough”. That is why he says I forget all the achievements of the past and look forward to what can be done, hoping that I can reach the goal for which Christ has reached me.

It is a continuous race, the Christian has to run it, so that he may reach the goal for which Christ has commissioned him (reached him).

That is what Paul meant by the word “not that I have already perfected”.

In the days of the early church, a martyr is said to be perfected by the sword, and the day of his death is said to be the day of his perfection; meaning that he has completed to perfection what God commissioned him to do.

### **B- Against lawlessness (3:17 – 4:1)**

He starts here by telling them to follow his example because he is following Christ's. A good number of people think that Paul is bragging here; but he is not. The Philippians have not seen Christ in person, but they have seen Paul, so logically they should follow the example of whom they saw which means Paul; and that is what he is telling them that if you follow my example, then you are following Christ, not because I am good, but because of what I have received personally from Him.

There was some sort of misconduct in the church of Philippi, its nature and source are not quite known. It could have been the teaching of the Judaizers mentioned above, or some Gnostic teaching which was very predominant in that area, or some personal misconduct such as adultery (as was the case in Corinth as we read in 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 5), drunkenness, stealing, cheating or coveting. Whatever it was, Paul is advising them to listen to what he said and follow his example. These people come to the church in a seemingly lamb clothing, but they are like wolves among lambs, once the opportunity comes, they strike. They are

enemies of the cross of Christ. And the word “**cross**” here does not mean the wooden one, but it means what Christ suffered on the cross for our sake. They are enemies of that noble work which Christ perfected on the cross.

Let us have a quick look at some of the teaching at that time:

- 1- One sect of the Gnostics believed that matter is evil and spirit is good. So, man who is a matter is evil, and God who is a Spirit is good; and since the body is evil anyway, then it does not matter if he does all the above mentioned list of evil doings
- 2- Another sect believed that man cannot be perfected unless he experiences the entire list of evil things mentioned above. So, sin to them was nothing less than a duty or process of perfection.
- 3- Some others distorted the image of Christian liberty. They taught that since we are not under the law, but under grace, then one can do whatever he likes. Does this sound familiar? I have heard that with my own ears when I was working in Houston; a husband of one of the nurses told me that the grace of God is wide enough to cover all sins, and he is not worried at all about he does; he was defending homosexuality.

The bottom line is that these offenders no matter who or what they are, they are enemies of Christ; and they are destined for eternal destruction.

#### **Why shouldn't we follow their example?**

Because as Christ followers, we are not of this world; and here in verse 19, Paul reminds us of that as he says “**For our citizenship is in heaven**”, The thing which the Philippians should very well understand, since as we mentioned at the beginning that Philippi was a colony, and its inhabitants were very proud of their Roman citizenship, which was granted to them after serving in the Imperial Praetorian guard for 16 years. So, in a sense, he is telling them that if the Roman citizenship means everything in life to you, how much more will be your eternal heavenly citizenship which we eagerly wait for?

#### **Are we going to meet Him in our present frail, diseased, decayed, and sinful body?**

**No**, we will be changed, “**For this corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality**” (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 15:53), so that we may be suitable to meet Him.

And in 4:1, Paul says, if you really are looking forward to that day to meet him, then stand fast in the Lord. And he addresses them as beloved and longed-for brethren, his joy and his crown. And why not? He had great love for them, and they have certainly proved to be loved.

## 6- Paul's Admonition (4:2-9)

### **Be of one mind:**

Without unity nothing could be achieved in the church or anywhere else. If two fellow workers in the same department oppose each other, the business will be disrupted. The same will happen in the church; and that is what happened in the church of Philippi. Euodia and Syntyche obviously did that. Both may have been very zealous for the work of God; yet each one had her own mind, and so they did not agree; so the progress in the church work was disrupted. Paul, being a wise master builder, put his finger on the problem and reminded them to be of one mind. We cannot be followers of Christ and each one goes his own way. We are different members of one body. We cannot give allegiance to Christ while we are divided. We will be destroying, not building up. No one can be at peace with God and at variance with his fellowmen. Note also that Paul has mobilized the whole church to look into that matter and correct it.

**A word here is due** about the status of women in Greece. Greece was two separate countries at the time of Paul; the one in the north was called Macedonia while the southern one was called Achaia. They were not only separate boundary wise, but they were also different in their customs; so at the time where the respectable woman in Achaia was restricted to her own apartment in her house, who can never join the male members of the family, not even having the right to sit to eat dinner with them, supposed to see little, hear little and ask little, and can never be seen in the street alone. Yet that was not so in Macedonia. The Macedonian woman would own her own business, hold her own household, walk in the street with no restriction, and free to speak her own mind. The Holy Scripture points to us these two diversities, for example in Macedonia in the city of Philippi, Paul met with the women by the riverside and preached the gospel; and Lydia who was a merchant of purple was liberal enough to persuade Paul and his companions (Timothy, Silas, and Luke) to stay in her house (Acts 16:13, 14). On the other hand in Achaia in the city of Corinth, women had to be content with a very subordinate place, to the extent that though they were permitted to the church (which as I think never heard of before), they were not allowed to talk or even ask questions in the church (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 14:34, 35), but at least the freedom in Christianity gave them the chance to go to church.

### **Rejoice in the Lord always:**

Happiness depends not on material things or places, but on persons. If we are with the right person, nothing else would matter. So also, in the presence of Christ, nothing else would matter: *"No tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril"* (Rom. 8:35), *"nor death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, other creation, shall be able to separate us from the love of Lord and God Jesus Christ"* (Rom. 8:38, 39), and the joy of his presence with us.

### **Let your gentleness be known to all men:**

Because its original Greek word is not translatable to English, the word “gentleness” was translated differently in each version that existed. For example it was translated as patience, softness, patient mind, modesty, forbearance, forbearing spirit or meet halfway. But in the Greek language it means the point at which one cannot apply the letter of the law because it will be unjust. And Paul said something of that effect in 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 3:6, he said “For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”. And the best example to that is the story of the woman who was caught in adultery; according to the letter of the law, she should be stoned, but see what Jesus did; He told her that He does not condemn her, and to go in peace and sin no more. Does this mean that Jesus broke the law? Certainly not; He is just giving an example of applying mercy when possible and when necessary to correct a person or a situation. And of course in our present time, sometimes we come across a judge who does not apply the letter of the law because of a certain unusual situation or the like

In Christianity, there is always a place for all the meanings of the word “gentleness” mentioned above.

The way I translate it is “to be wise and considerate”.

### **The Lord is at hand:**

Why would Paul write this phrase after rejoice and gentleness? He reminds us that the Lord is coming; and since we live on this hope, let us rejoice and extend gentleness and consideration to others as He has already extended it to us.

### **Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God:**

In the early Christian time, to be Christian was very dangerous, so much so that they had to meet for prayer underground in catacombs and every Christian took his life in his hand.

Paul says do not worry, we can take everything to God in prayer; there is nothing too great for God’s power, and there is nothing too small for His fatherly care. Have the faith of a little child, for the little child feels safe and nothing worries him so long as his father or mother is around him, but take away his parents, and he will cry and keep crying till he sees them again. Why is that? It is because he feels secure in their presence. The same with us, we should feel secure with our heavenly Father. Don’t we call Him Father? So, whatever happens to us, we must run directly to Him, and ask for help and guidance. After all He said ask and you shall receive (Mat. 7:7 & Luke 11:9).

We can take our present, past, and future with all its dirt and shame, with our fears and concerns to His presence. We can even pray for others and He is faithful and merciful to respond with all what is good for us no matter how it seems to us.

But our prayers should be accompanied by thanksgiving. Shouldn't we show some gratitude at least for the privilege of being able to call on Him for help? Shouldn't we be thankful for His unconditional love for us? Shouldn't we be thankful for His wisdom in dealing with our troubles? Shouldn't we be thankful for His power which snatches us out of the darkest pit where we lost hope of being saved?

Then look at the result in verse 7: The peace of God which surpasses all comprehension guards upon our hearts; and that is the key of taking everything to Him.

**Whatever.....Meditate on these things:**

Meditate means set your mind on. So Paul here is urging us to set our mind on whatever is Godly: the things which are true, honest, honorable, nobly serious, has dignity and holiness, just, pure, calls for love, good report, graciousness, and every virtue to excellence. All these and more, we have to set our minds on. And in case we (now) or the Philippians (then) think that Paul is just enumerating things that no man can do, he proceeds to say that these are the things you heard and received from me and also saw me doing, set your minds on it and imitate me, and the God of peace will be with you.

### **7- Paul's Thankfulness (4:10-20)**

Now, Paul is near the end of his epistle, and he wants to thank the Philippians for their gift which they sent by the hand of Epaphroditus as we mentioned in the very beginning; but at the same time he wanted to remind them of the virtue of content and satisfaction. So he says that it was not that he was dissatisfied with what he has, but because he learned and experienced the gift of content. After all contentment is not in what one has, but in how little he wants; and if you want to make anyone happy, do not add to his possessions, but take away from his desires. And Socrates once said: "He who is content is the wealthiest."

But we must remember that man even Paul cannot do that by his own power for in verse 13, Paul says: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (in other versions it says "who infuses His strength into me")

The man who walks with Christ and lives in Him, can cope with anything.

**Back to the gift:** This was not the first gift that the Philippians sent Paul, but there were others before that.

You remember at the very beginning that Paul and Silas were imprisoned for one night, and were released the next morning, and were told or asked to leave the city. Not long after that, they went to Thessalonica and preached the gospel there, but the unbeliever Jews became envious, and took some evil men from the market place and gathered a mob and stirred riot against them. So, they had to

flee by night to Berea where they also preached the gospel, but the Jews from Thessalonica followed them there and stirred riot against them, and Paul had to leave to Athens by sea (Acts 16:22 – 17:15). So, after fleeing from Philippi, the Philippians sent him gifts once and again as mentioned in verse 16. And while he was in Corinth, they also sent him gifts (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 11:9). And it was not only that they sent him gifts, but they also did to the saints in Jerusalem, and the Holy Scripture tells us that Paul have accompanied others to carry the gift to them (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 16:1-5)

There was a bond between Paul and the Philippians that did not exist toward any other church so much so that he never accepted any gift from any other church, the thing which displeased the Corinthians (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 11:7-12)

Then in verses 14-19, he tells them that yet he is glad that they sent him gifts, though out of their kindness and love, yet it stands greatly to their credit in the sight of God. So, in another sense, he turns that gift into an acceptable sacrifice pleasing to God as having sweet smelling aroma quoting Gen. 8:21 & Lev. 1:9, 13, 17. It is not that he didn't appreciate their loving gifts, but they were also dear and pleasing to God.

A man who gives becomes richer by opening up all the riches of God for himself.

## **8- Paul's farewell (4:20-23)**

In this section, Paul sends his greetings and the greetings of his companions to all the saints in Christ.

### **Special greetings from Caesar's household:**

We must not be mistaken here, because Caesar's household does not mean his family. This term was used then as we use the term "civil service" now. This would consist of the palace officials, secretaries, people in charge of the palace revenues, and those who are responsible for day today administration of the Empire. So it is really interesting to note that Christianity, though in its baby phase in Rome, has penetrated to the heart of the Roman government. And though it was yet another 300 years before Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, but already the ultimate triumph of Christ were to be seen.

### **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all:**

This what we call in today's language "benediction", or a prayer for special blessing.

The Philippians loved Paul so much, and he loved them as equal. They sent him gifts, but his gift to them was this blessing, and what greater gift can be given than praying to others!

**References:**

- 1- Life Application Study Bible.
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- 3- Arabic commentary.
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- 5- The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians by Charles R. Erdman.
- 6- The letter to the Philippians by William Barclay.
- 7- The New International Commentary on the New Testament.  
The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians by Jac J. Muller.
- 8- Drake's Annotated Reference Bible.
- 9- New Testament commentary by William Hendriksen.
- 10- The Holy Bible (of course).

*May God bless you all*