

Following the Upward Call Through Philippians

Opening Comments

The letter to the congregation at Philippi is one of the most encouraging sections of the Bible. The saints in Philippi were, amazingly, behaving as saints are supposed to behave; the moral, relational, and doctrinal problems were minimal. The city itself was more of a Roman military town than others in the times of the New Testament writings. It was originally named after Alexander the Great's father, Philip of Macedon. It was also near the site of the comparatively recent battles for the control of the Roman Empire between Octavian (who won, and eventually changed his name to Augustus Caesar), Marc Antony, and the assassins of Julius Caesar — Brutus and Cassius. When the apostle Paul arrived, there was no synagogue of the Jews in the city, so he had to begin with what contacts developed; first there was Lydia, a Gentile seller of purple fabrics from Thyratira across the narrows over in Asia, then the Philippian jailer. Very soon Paul had to leave town, entrusting the new congregation to the capable and beloved physician who had just joined them, Luke. And what a magnificent job he did! The congregation was solid doctrinally, it was fully established organizationally, it was functioning evangelistically, and it was contributing to the forward movement of the gospel financially. Established in 51 AD, the church in Philippi was commended in this letter in 62 AD, and still commended in 96 AD by Jesus Himself. This is a legacy worth imitating!

- **From Paul and Timothy** - Timothy had been converted on Paul's first missionary journey in the city of Lystra. On Paul's second journey, he invited Timothy to come labor with him. Upon receiving Timothy's acquiescence, Paul had him circumcised (Timothy's mom was Jewish) so that Timothy would have access to the Jewish synagogues in future missionary endeavors. So Timothy, along with Silas and Luke, was in the first team that arrived in Philippi with the gospel. The apostle incorporates Timothy into his greeting. "Paul," he says, "and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons" (Philippians 1:1). There are no particular issues Paul has to deal with in this letter; it is an encouraging letter, and he simply notes that he and Timothy are slaves of Jesus by their own choice, not stressing his apostleship and authority.
- **Overseers and deacons** - The church in Philippi had developed, by God's grace, qualified men who could really do the work required of overseers (*bishops*, also known as elders, *older men*, and pastors, *shepherds*). There is no indication that the church at Corinth, for example, had developed elders to oversee and shepherd the flock, whereas Paul specifically greets the elders in Philippi. Similarly, he greets the special servants, *deacons*, who would be able to do all the things the elders needed them to do in order that the congregation might function effectively and carry out Jesus' work of seeking and saving the lost.
- **General greeting** - Paul opens with a greeting characteristic of his, and similar to the common greetings of others in the first century church: "Grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:2). There is a continuing need for the blessings from God to shower down upon individuals in particular and the churches in general. The saints are continually battling through personal weaknesses, and need what God supplies to cover their sins and to give them strength to power on in their spiritual battle against the forces of darkness. Likewise, they need the inner peace that Paul will show how to obtain in the closing portions of this epistle.

The 27 books of the New Testament writings were carefully selected by the Holy Spirit for preservation and distribution to the modern saints. While other letters bring out some of the great doctrinal truths and practical dealings with sin and righteousness, the letter to the church at Philippi is powerful and positive, providing enlightenment and encouragement to God's people today!

Paul's Plans

The memories would have flooded through the apostle Paul's mind. Forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go preach in Ephesus and the surrounding area, and pushed by circumstances to the extremities of the peninsula at Troas, he received a vision of a man from Macedonia saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9). Drawing from this vision the conclusion that God had called them Macedonia to preach the gospel, Paul and his traveling companions crossed over to Europe and started the work at Philippi. The apostle remembered the first meetings along the river: first the immersions of Lydia and her household, and then preaching and teaching day after day in the open air, trying to gain traction at the same time as an evil spirit working through a slave girl worked to block the progress of the gospel. He recalled the casting out of the evil spirit, and the chaos that ensued as the slave girl's owners were successful in getting Paul and Silas thrown into prison. He could still experience the memories of the earthquake that occurred while the two preachers were fastened in stocks, and that miracle that none of the suddenly freed prisoners escaped. Paul could picture meeting with the jailer, and the immersions of his household; he in his mind could see the consternation of the magistrates as they personally had to apologize to Paul and Silas who were Roman citizens. Visions of the last views of the city flitted across the pages of his mind as he recalled how they were asked to leave town, to move thence to Thessalonica, leaving the infant congregation in the hands of Dr. Luke.

- **Remembrance** - The salvation of each soul was important to the apostle. It was exciting for him to see how the spark that first started the congregation in Philippi was nurtured until it became a much larger flame, burgeoning into a sizeable congregation — bustling with life and the desire to keep the gospel rolling forward. "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you," he states, "always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all" (Philippians 1:3,4). What a blessing those saints, overseers, and deacons were! For Paul to be thankful for every remembrance is highly significant. The fact that his prayers were offered in joy greatly contrasts some of the prayers he would be praying for other congregations.
- **Appreciation for participation** - When Paul, on the same missionary journey in which he started the congregation in Philippi, ended up nearly broke in Corinth, it was Philippi which sent money to enable the apostle to preach full time. Time after time, this generous and committed congregation sent financial assistance to Paul to enable him to keep on doing the only thing with eternal value — spreading the gospel. The apostle was thankful in his prayers and remembrances, he says, "in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now" (Philippians 1:5). The financial backing of congregations like Philippi is extremely helpful to those out on the front lines, taking the saving gospel of Jesus Christ into a needy, but hostile and rebellious world.
- **God's working** - God, through His word and through His Holy Spirit, works inside each Christian, if the Christian is willing to work with God. The apostle had seen God's working in the brethren in Philippi, and had experienced their backing and generosity. "For I am confident of this very thing," he comments, "that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). God, through His divine Providence, is orchestrating the events around each of the willing Christians to conform them to the image of God.

The congregation at Philippi stood for more than 50 years as a shining example of what a local church should be. May we emulate and imitate their example that the gospel of Christ might go forward with power "until the day of Christ Jesus."

Appreciation of the Philippians

Paul wrote the epistle to the Philippian brethren while in prison (presumably in Rome). In jail he had ample opportunity to reflect on his interaction with the congregations he had started and worked with, and his memories of the church at Philippi were happy ones. "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you," he had stated. And he was willing to pray for the brethren in Philippi, saying that he was "always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you." "I am confident," he said, "that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." What a great group of Christians these were, and the apostle was confident that they would be perfected in Christ through the power of God. Conscious as he was that the return of Jesus was in a sense imminent, he knew that God's power would work in these brethren until they either passed from earth or Jesus would come again.

- **Close fellowship** - The converts of the gospel of Christ in this Roman garrison town were primarily from the ranks of paganism. Lydia and her household were God-fearing Gentiles, but the jailer most likely was following the customs of the people of his standing in the community. There are many objections that such pagans have that have to be overcome, and the purveyors of such paganism are clever, using every hook and angle to draw people into the worship of their idols. These in Philippi, then, who had come in out of the darkness, were aware the types of argumentation necessary to persuade people of the truthfulness of Christ and the validity of the apostles' doctrine. "For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all," states Paul in earnest tones, "because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me" (Philippians 1:7). The apostle even regarded his prison time as participating in the grace of God, and noted that the Philippian brethren similarly were partakers of God's grace also.
- **Confirmation and defense** - Ultimately, the gospel is an appeal to man's logic. "Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, 'through your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they will be like wool.' " (Isaiah 1:18). As such, the truthfulness of Jesus' resurrection — upon which the whole gospel depends — has to be confirmed. If only the testimony of reliable witnesses were required, that's what God would have provided. If the added weight of Old Testament prophecies were all that were necessary, that's what God would have provided. But those two alone are not sufficient to persuade the thinkers among men; what were additionally required were the miracles to confirm the testimony of the witnesses. As Paul defended his apostleship and witness to the resurrection of the Christ to the church at Corinth, for example, he averred, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles" (II Corinthians 12:12). "And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom," he had noted in his first epistle to the Corinthians, "but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (I Corinthians 2:4,5). The brethren in Philippi had also participated in these types of demonstration for the confirmation of the gospel. This gospel also had to be defended against some intelligent adversaries. Commenting on vigorous opposition from Alexander the coppersmith, Paul recalled, "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me" (II Timothy 4:16). The apostle was grateful that the Philippian brethren had stood with him through his defenses of the gospel as well.

Paul had accepted the Philippian Christians into his heart, stating it in these terms: "You are in my heart." He loved those men and women!

God Is My Witness

Real Christian love is decision-based, not feeling-based. When Jesus looked at the earth with its lost masses and twisted generations, He wanted to torch it off. “I have come to cast fire upon the earth,” He animadverted, “and how I wish it were already kindled” (Luke 12:49). But He was not going to do that just yet because He knew there were lost souls who could be saved. His decision-based *agape* love dictated that He die for those who had sinned and alienated themselves from the Father. “God demonstrates His love toward us,” Paul stated, “in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). But the apostle used even more pointed language to describe our abject condition: “While we were *enemies*,” he noted, “we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Romans 5:10). That is LOVE!

- **Real affection** - God allows Christians to go through tribulations and testing that the dross of their characters might be removed in the refining fires, fires that are part of living on earth. This, said the apostle, occurs so that the result is “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5). Paul had gone through many of those fires, and had his opportunity to exhibit his true love for those who would eventually obey the gospel. Thus it was with the brethren in Philippi: “For God is my witness,” he affirms, “how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:8). The saints in Philippi, along with the overseers and deacons, knew this was a true statement on the apostle’s part, and many would have willingly returned that same affection.
- **Pass it on** - God earnestly desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. But the only way this is going to happen is for the saved to take the gospel of grace and mercy to the lost. However, the saved are not going to take the gospel to the lost unless they really love the lost. Likewise the saved are not going to make the efforts to preserve the other saved unless they really love the saved. “And this I pray,” avers the apostle, “that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment” (Philippians 1:9). Love is not disconnected from “real knowledge” and discernment. Saints know that there is a tremendous spiritual war going on for the soul of every living and breathing person who currently occupies planet earth, and love requires that significant efforts be made to rescue the perishing. But it is war involving knowledge, knowledge that the Bible is the word of God and knowledge that Jesus is raised from the dead. The earnest prayer of the apostle is that their love might “abound” still more and more in that knowledge. Similarly, discernment is a necessary component in waging this war and in strategizing to engage in the spiritual search and rescue operations. “Solid food,” said Hebrews’ writer, “is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to *discern* good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14). In the battles for the soul — the individual’s own and others’ — discernment of the difference between good and evil is a major component in effective warfare. It stands to reason that the apostle would be praying that the Philippians’ love would abound more and more in all real knowledge and discernment.

The love, appreciation, and concern that Paul has for the brethren in Philippi flows out of every word he is penning in this epistle. That love, appreciation, and concern is buttressed by his earnest prayers on their behalf. He was “always offering prayer” for them, expressing it in terms of “my every prayer for you all.” “God is my witness,” is his powerful statement, “I long for you,” and “this I pray.” His love, appreciation, and concern are worthy of imitation!

Approving the Excellent

A mind is a terrible thing to waste. What if that mind is pulled into the realm of darkness and destruction? What if that mind is enticed into the negative and nonproductive? The appeal that God makes to man across the darkened chasm created by man's sin is to his mind; the continued pleadings of the scripture to the saints are reasoned presentations to their minds. Satan likewise works on the minds of men and of believers. "And even if our gospel is veiled," wrote Paul to the Corinthian brethren, "it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (II Corinthians 4:3,4). The battle is for the mind, because it is through the mind that the heart of man is changed.

- **Things that are excellent** - The apostle Paul, then, was desiring that the brethren in Philippi "abound still more and more in real knowledge and discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent" (Philippians 1:9,10). The theme of *excellence* runs through this epistle, calling these precious saints to higher elevations. But to know what really is excellent is challenging; the man of flesh has no appreciation for the spiritual excellencies which are open to the minds of those who have been enlightened by the word of God and by His Spirit. It takes what the apostle calls "real knowledge and discernment" to know what those excellent things are, and also to be able to give the appropriate approval. Most of mankind, for example, has no real understanding or appreciation of the sacrifice of Christ or of His elevation to the ultimate High Priesthood. While many denominational people claim to understand and appreciate, they really do not. If they truly did approve of these excellent things, they would become true Christians instead of the pale counterfeits that they are.
- **Sincere and blameless** - When the apostle Paul gets on a roll, he really strings together awesome series of majestic and sweeping concepts. He starts this section by laying a foundation of love as the base for his points, then moves on to knowledge and discernment, and talks about approving the things that are excellent. All this, he says, is "in order [that the saints] be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:10). The opposite of sincere is fake. There are many who have their own agendas, who are attempting to use Christ and His church for their own personal purposes. While they often give the appearance of being sincere, over time their fruit will show to the discerning. A sincere saint has uncontaminated motives, and earnestly desires to know and understand God. "The goal of our instruction," stated the apostle in another place, "is love from a pure heart and good conscience and a sincere faith" (I Timothy 1:5). The insincere will surely perish. The goal, in terms of character, is for the followers of Christ to be blameless. Every motive, every action is to be for Jesus' purposes.
- **Jesus' coming** - Jesus is coming back, but no one knows that day. His own words were "be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42). He followed that point with some parables to let the saints know that they may have to endure for long periods of time from their perspective, as in the case of five foolish bridesmaids who did not have enough oil in their lamps for the long haul. If the saint begins to falter, if he loses his focus, he will fall into the trap of the slave who Jesus describes in these words: "But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time ...'" (Matthew 24:48). The sincere and blameless hold on until Jesus comes.

Christians are thus being exhorted to approve the things that are excellent; that frame of mind will result in the saint's being sincere and blameless until the day of Jesus' return!!

Glory and Praise

When an individual is immersed into Christ Jesus, he is clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:26, 27). It follows, then, that he is thus clothed also with the righteousness of Christ. This is the *imputed righteousness* that some scholars speak of in talking about those who have been redeemed. “But now apart from the Law,” said the apostle Paul to the Roman congregation, “the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God” which comes through the system of thought called “the faith of Christ” (Romans 3:21,22). The sinner has no righteousness of his own which would recommend him for an eternity of fellowship with God; hence God has to provide it through Christ. God’s goal, however, is not that the former sinner remain in the same abject condition in which he was called through the gospel. “What benefit,” asked Paul of the saints at Rome, “were you then deriving of the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death” (Romans 6:21). The follower of Christ is to follow Christ — upward, and out of a life of sin and into a life of practicing righteousness.

- **Fruit of righteousness** - In writing to the Philippian brethren, the apostle has a list of building blocks for the saints. His desire first is that their love would abound, that this would result more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, that through these the brethren would be able to approve the things that are excellent, and that these necessary steps would be taken that the Christians would be able to be sincere and blameless, and hold that blamelessness until the day of Jesus’ return. But he, having stacked these building blocks in their correct order for the personal growth of the brethren, still has more to place on the stack. He further describes them as “having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:11). The “righteousness of God,” which is “reckoned” to the saint as a result of his being in Christ, is to result in what Paul and the Holy Spirit call “the fruit of righteousness.” Jesus was given His name — Yahweh our Savior — before His birth, one of those announcements being given by an angel to Joseph. The reason given for that name: “It is He,” pronounced the angel, “who will save His people *from* their sins” (Matthew 1:21). He was not going to save His people *in* their sins, but *from* their sins! The power of the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ is strong enough actually to produce a people who exhibit the fruit of that righteousness, who present themselves before the world as a righteous and blameless people, holy in thought, word, and action!
- **For God’s glory** - Is God glorified through a bunch of hypocrites? Is His name lifted up and truly exalted before a hostile and darkened world through those who claim the name of Christ but are in fact sloshing around in the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life? “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” was Paul’s statement (Romans 1:18). The Almighty’s and the All Wise’ clear desire is to produce a special people who would exhibit the character of Christ to an unbelieving world. As the apostle Peter put it, God has done these magnificent things through Christ, “that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust” (II Peter 1:4). Thus the saints, edified through the building blocks in the stack Paul revealed, are “filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God” (Philippians 1:11).

The musicians playing their trumpets, minstrels strumming their stringed instruments, the Levites singing God’s praises — all from the Old Testament — are not necessarily what glorifies God. What is really for His praise and glory is when the saints exhibit the fruit of righteousness, which is a much deeper character issue than simply being able to belt out a tune.

Greater Progress of the Gospel

It takes a special set of programming for the proclaimer of the gospel not to lose heart. Most of the seed that is sown falls on hard ground and never gets a start, and a high percentage of that which takes root is either rapidly blasted away by the events of the day or choked out by the challenges of life. “And the seed [sown] in the good soil,” said Jesus, “these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance” (Luke 8:15). These words need to be run carefully through the mind; the only type of people who are going to be good seed are those who have an honest and good heart, who can hold the word fast or tightly through all kinds of challenges and difficulties, and who can do their part to keep spreading the word and to keep on and to keep on and to keep on. There are, said Jesus, tares in the midst of the wheat, and bad fish as well as good fish in the net. The apostle Paul noted that even God would send a deluding influence through the church to separate the truth-seekers from the others, “in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth but took pleasure in wickedness” (II Thessalonians 2:12). Most people are heedless of the call, and among those who hear the call of the gospel, “many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14). So it takes a special set of programming for the proclaimer of the gospel not to lose heart. And the apostle Paul was perhaps the supreme example of one who had done his part to maintain a positive perspective in the midst of such massive and eternal losses.

- **Looking at circumstances** - Here’s the great apostle Paul, powerful and prolific preacher, great teacher and motivator, in jail in Rome. How does his special set of programming play out in these circumstances? “Now I want you to know, brethren” he encourages, “that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel” (Philippians 1:12). What a guy!!! He is able to peer through a pretty murky set of events and see “greater progress” for the gospel! His years of dealing with the disappointments with the extensive rejection of the gospel on the part of his fellow Jews, his undergoing the physical beatings and persecutions on behalf of his Lord, his seeing the problems in the local congregations, his watching numbers of brethren fall away, and yet finding the positives in all that, prepared him for the last years of his life in jail, as a “prisoner of Christ Jesus.” Though that mental discipline, and learning to trust the Lord, Paul thus sees the progress of the gospel in his imprisonment!
- **Positive multipliers** - God indeed causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose. “My imprisonment,” notes the apostle, “in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear” (Philippians 1:13,14). His unjust imprisonment turned out to be advertising for the gospel. And the brethren took courage, considering that since Paul in prison kept on talking about the Christ, they on the outside could evangelize as well.

Paul's positive perspective and his personal trust in the Lord greatly impacted the brethren. Instead of being all upset and saying, “Did you hear what the Romans did to Paul? He’s unjustly in prison; we just don’t have the freedom to preach like we used to,” they actually took courage and stepped up the distribution of the word of God. May we go and do likewise!!

Proclaiming Christ

“A plan in the heart of a man is like deep water,” said the wise Solomon, “but a man of understanding draws it out” (Proverbs 20:5). Men have their motives, some good and some not so good. But skilled purveyors of the word, like the apostle Paul, have the understanding necessary to see what is truly going on, to be able to draw out of the hearts of men what their plans are. The apostle was excited in knowing that his imprisonment had actually furthered the cause of the gospel. Some of the brethren, he noted, were able to increase their trust in the Lord and to speak the word of God with “far more courage” than they had prior to his imprisonment. Some of the brethren’s motives were good, and some were ... not so good.

- **Mixture of motives** - When a new movement gets started, as Christianity was during the time of Paul’s proclamation, there are a percentage of people who view it is a type of business opportunity; their goal is to get in on the “ground floor” so that they can reap later profits or garner later accolades. There are those who want high visibility, so that they can be the “biggest fish in the pond.” There are some that are competitive, who want to be first at any cost and are willing to use “trash talk” to intimidate or denigrate their perceived competition. Paul thusly writes, speaking of the preaching of the gospel: “Some, to be sure,” he asseverates, “are preaching Christ even from envy and strife” (Philippians 1:15). These, says he, “proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment” (Philippians 1:17). This gives a picture of what the situation *inside* the church is, and how intense is the battle for souls against the forces of evil and darkness. Others, praise God, preach Christ “from good will.” These “latter” ones “do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel” (Philippians 1:15,16). Here is the great apostle Paul, who laid down his life to establish these congregations among the Gentiles, hated among the Jews and increasingly persecuted by Roman authorities. What kind of help does he get from many inside the church of the Lord, then? Because he is so successful, the envious and ambitious just can’t resist taking their shots at him while he is essentially defenseless in the prison. Some are taking advantage of the fact that Paul could not be physically present and are creating all kinds of unnecessary strife. But some of the others understood Paul’s purpose in serving the Lord!
- **Defense of the gospel** - As the apostle made clear, he was “appointed for the defense of the gospel.” The word *defense* is a broad word including a lot more than just simple “defending” the truths of the word of God. The system of thought called *apologetics* is derived from this word, and it has to do with laying down the whole foundation to prove that the Bible is the word of God. It deals currently with the issues of evolution vs. creation, as well whether there are absolutes or “there are no absolutes.” The *defense* of the gospel would include the issues of what it means for Jesus to be “the Christ, the Son of God,” as well as immersion into Christ being a requirement for salvation. It would cover the discussion of systems of law as a basis for thought, as contrasted to the system of thought called “the faith of Christ.” It would encompass the entire set of points of controversy, ranging from God’s creation of the physical universe to the second coming of Christ.

The brethren who loved Paul knew of his intellectual capability, his background in the Law of Moses, and his being inspired by the Holy Spirit. They therefore were desirous of seeing the cause for which Paul was imprisoned go forward, and go forward for the glory of God!

Paul's Positive Perspective

The apostle was straining forward with every ounce of his being. If modern saints were to stop and consider what type of attitude and toughness it took for Paul — after being tormented and tortured time and time again after preaching in the synagogues — to go into another synagogue and preach! He then adds, in his comments to the brethren in Corinth: “Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches” (II Corinthians 11:28). His whole being was tied up in his commitment to Christ, his care for each individual saint, and for the hope of each congregation. For brethren to be “trashing” Paul and to be preaching their message out of envy and strife rather than having pure motives would have been hard for him to handle emotionally. But the Spirit of Christ pervaded everything the apostle dealt with, and his dealing with such petty brethren stands as a great example of positive perspective for saints today.

- **Rejoicing** - Most of the brethren were preaching Christ out of good will, and it was relatively easy for Paul to have a great attitude about that. But those other people ... “What then?” queries the apostle. “Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I will rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice” (Philippians 1:18). What a great attitude! The apostle was able to see that even if Christ was preached in pretense, those who came in contact with that gospel as truth-seekers would obey that gospel and be able to see the truth through the pretense. “Yes,” he shouts, “and I will rejoice!”
- **Looking down the road** - Paul's imprisonment was talked about even among the praetorian guard. The envious and ambitious were bothered by Paul's successful impact on others even while in prison and sought to cause him distress. But he knew, by the Holy Spirit, that he was going to live through this imprisonment and come out the other side still victorious. “For I know,” he affirms, “that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death” (Philippians 1:19, 20). Circumstances were not going to dictate the apostle's attitude. He knows he is going to be delivered, but he is clear that, whether in life or in death, Christ is going to be exalted in his body! And, as he phrases it, the exaltation will not be hidden or in timidity, but “with all boldness.”
- **Power of prayers** - The apostle knew he would be delivered from this imprisonment. But he is willing to credit, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, his deliverance to two entities: 1) the prayers of the saints; and 2) the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. He knew that the “Providence” of God would work somehow to give him his “get out of jail free card.” But he also knew how important the prayers of the brethren were, and wanted them to have an awareness of the power of those prayers. In God's amazing spiritual economy, He set it up so that the prayers of the faithful impact the events occurring on this earth. Thus the combination of the prayers of the saints and the action of the Holy Spirit would result in Paul's eventual freedom from this particular jail sentence.

Paul's positive attitude was a direct result of his confidence in where he stood with God. In spite of the challenges he faced as a prisoner, and the poor performance of some of the brethren, he was able to rejoice that Christ was proclaimed. Modern saints need to learn from this, and recognize that it is of supreme importance that it is Christ who is proclaimed to the world!

Christ Shall Be Exalted

The apostles of Jesus Christ were the ones who, through special revelation from the Spirit, exposed the entire plan of God to the view of man. The people of the Old Testament did not know, even the prophets who wrote the Old Testament. As the apostle Peter noted, “The prophets made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.” They did not know, so they were asking. “It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which have now been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (I Peter 1:10-12). So it was that the apostles exposed the plan of God to the view of man. That plan was to exalt Christ, as Paul stated it in the Ephesian epistle, “the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth” (Ephesians 1:10).

- **Paul’s expectation** - Later in his life the apostle knew that he was going to die physically. As he explained to his child in the faith, Timothy, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come” (II Timothy 4:6). But as he writes to the Philippian brethren, he comments that “I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit.” Thus he states that this is “according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything” (Philippians 1:20). At some point in his near future, the apostle expects to be vindicated, and to walk out of that jail a free man, not put to shame.
- **Christ exalted** - If persecution and jail time could not shut Paul’s mouth, it was pretty clear that only physical death could quiet the voice of this great proclaimer of the faith of Christ. The continuation of the thought of his earnest expectation is “but with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.” It is an interesting, but not surprising, expression that the apostle uses, “with all boldness.” The apostle was not an advocate of just quietly letting your light shine, and having people so impressed that they would come to you. He was an advocate of *all boldness!* In this way, Christ would be exalted as the message of the gospel would go forth. The commission of Christ requires that saints “go” and “preach” (Mark 16:15). Paul in his actions and words showed how that commission was to be carried out in boldness. The result, then was that Christ would be exalted in his body. If he lived, Christ would be exalted in the spread of the gospel; if he died, Christ would be exalted in the manner by which he faced his earthly termination.
- **Win-win** - The Christian, of which the apostle Paul was a prime example, has the best possible win-win situation. As he himself puts it, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Properly understood, it just does not get any better than “to live is Christ.” He does not say here, “live in Christ”; rather, he says to live *is Christ*. This is the apex of sojourning on this earthly carpet, but it gets better, “To die is gain!” This is the maximum win-win, and it is available for each saint of God.

The challenge, then, is for each who makes a claim to godliness to exalt Christ. The proper mental habits must be developed, so that each action, each attitude, each thought, and each word bring glory to King Jesus. It is axiomatic that how a person lives, that’s how a person dies. “Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”

Hard Pressed

The whole world lies in the power of the evil one. But, praise God, Christians have been taken out of the domain of darkness and have been transferred into the kingdom of light. Jesus stated it this way: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, *has* eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24). In the book of Revelation, saints are described as “those who dwell in heaven” as contrasted to “who dwell on earth” (Revelation 13:6, 8). These truths are communicated so that brethren will understand that that their deaths really occurred in their immersions and that they really are eternally alive in Christ. “Through death,” then, Christ rendered “powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and [delivered] those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives” (Hebrews 2:14, 15). The dedicated Christian, as was the apostle Paul, has no fear of physical death.

- **Interesting choice** - “For to me,” avers Paul, “to live is Christ!” How positive is that! But then he adds, “And to die is gain!” His perspective, and the correct one, is that it is better to pass from earthly existence than try to hang around here. “But if I am to live on in the flesh,” he comments, “this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose” (Philippians 1:22). If he dies physically, he will cease from his labor, and be absent from the body but at home with the Lord; he will enter the Paradise of which he had some excessively great visions. But if he stays on, he knows he will continue to bear much fruit for Christ.
- **Both directions** - Mentally and spiritually, the apostle was in a positive situation. Either way — physical death or physical life — he was a winner. “But I am hard-pressed from both directions,” he remarks, “having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake” (Philippians 1:23,34). Most saints, being a little less mature than Paul, if given a choice to live or to die, would choose to live. But the apostle was “hard-pressed”; he would rather die, but he knew that the Lord was not done using him to evangelize the lost and strengthen the brethren. There were certain character qualities that Paul had, and certain things he could do, that fitted him for the work that the Father had laid out for him. God “had set me apart,” he noted in writing to the Galatian brethren, “even from my mother’s womb, and called me through His grace ... to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles” (Galatians 1:15,16). It was clear that Paul was not being called home until his earthly work was done.
- **Convinced** - The apostle was such a willing servant. He could, in his own words, *choose* to be removed from the earth, or to continue on in the labors. Like Jesus before Him, he chose to have the Lord’s will rather than his be done; the lost of the world and the churches of the first century still needed Paul’s influence. “And convinced of this,” he adverts, “I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith” (Philippians 1:25).

Twice the apostle had said, “I know” in connection with his deliverance from prison and his continuing to preach the gospel. That he was ‘hard-pressed’ to make that decision indicates how glorious and awesome even Paradise is. Modern disciples of Christ can take courage from the information Paul gives in this letter. As those also “who have been called by His grace,” they can know that for them, “To live is Christ, and to die is gain.” If they pass from this life, they are big winners; if they continue on, it is for fruitful labor!

Paul's Anticipated Visit

The apostle Paul truly loved the brethren with whom he worked. "Love," said he in another place, "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (I Corinthians 13:7). Love never falls down in doing its job; it keeps working when all else has been shunted aside. Love powered our Lord Jesus Christ through the events leading up to and including the cross. This love which comes from God, said the apostle, "has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5). Thus Paul could go through all the tribulations and vicissitudes connected with teaching and preaching the gospel to the lost and edifying the saints because he was empowered with this love. He loved the people in the congregation at Philippi as he was in the process of starting it, and he did not quit loving them just because he moved on to another location.

- **The saints' progress** - The apostle Paul, having had visions of Paradise, was really pulled in that direction. But, because he loved the brethren, he chose to stay on and continue to work on earth. "I know," says he, "that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith ..." (Philippians 1:25). The growth of individual Christians and congregations is not automatic. It is clear that the labors of Paul were an integral part in the process of helping the saints' progress in the faith of Christ until the Lord saw fit to call him home. Not only did the saints need to make progress in their faith, but labor was needed to help them develop the joy that comes with a full understanding of God's will as revealed in the pages of the New Testament. This perspective on joy is something modern saints need to mull over in their minds.
- **The faith** - The term *the faith* shows up in various ways in a consistent manner throughout the New Testament writings. It is clear that there is only one faith that God will recognize as that which will justify the individual. Furthermore, it is a system of thought called "the faith of Christ" as contrasted to "the law of Moses," and the discussion of its tenets and effects is the major theme of the books of the New Testament. There is therefore a lot of meaning packed into the phrase "your progress and joy in the faith."
- **Their proud confidence** - Most of the brethren were looking to Paul to provide continued leadership. The positive and faithful way he conducted himself in prison encouraged the Christians on the outside so that they had "far more courage to speak the word of God without fear." This assurance that the disciples of Christ drew from Paul's example he calls "proud confidence in me." Having stated that he knew he was going to remain on earth to do his part to develop progress and joy in the faith, he adds, "so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you" (Philippians 1:26). This "proud confidence" in Paul was going to result in the strongest possibility of his being able to come to the brethren in Philippi once he was released from prison in Rome.

Their confidence would *abound* in the apostle's coming to them. Major strings were going to have to be pulled by God to get Paul out of prison in Rome, and then to orchestrate his eventual coming to Philippi. Paul loved these brethren, and, furthermore, most of them loved him! Properly understood, all real joy is found in deepening relationships with other people, especially between Christians. For these brethren to have a reunion this side of glory would be the fulfillment of the *abundance in Christ Jesus* which Paul indicated would happen at some future point. This, of course, would result in much anticipation of the apostle's eventual visit.

Worthy Conduct

The National Football League recently suspended indefinitely a player who beat up his fiancé in an elevator, probably because the footage of the event was widely distributed. One of the points in the issue, although the event was politically charged due to other agendas on the American cultural landscape, was that the player represented both his team and the National Football League in his personal conduct, and because that conduct was detrimental to the League, they were suspending him. The Christian likewise needs to recognize that he represents his local congregation as well as the name of Christ. The Lord Jesus is therefore justified in setting forth His expectations for the members of His team because ultimately it is His name on the line.

- **Walking worthy** - The apostle Paul, as an authorized spokesman for Jesus Christ, exhorts the brethren in Philippi. "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ," he pleads (Philippians 1:27). The barriers to the saint's walking in a manner that would positively represent Christ all stem from personal selfishness. There are certain things that he might want to do which would not befit one who claims the name of Christ, but because he wants to do them, driven by some desire of the flesh, he would be willing to have the name of Christ "trashed." Or, there might be certain things he should do or be doing, but because of sloth or a yearning to do something else, he does not do them, and once again the name of Jesus is denigrated. The call of God is to move past the personal, and to bring the conduct up to Christ's standard. *Worthy* is the watchword.
- **Standing firm** - Paul's repeated desire is to see the brethren in Philippi. He knows that he will be delivered from prison and will have the opportunity to continue to preach to the lost and strengthen the saints. But it is not as clear whether he will come to Philippi, or when. "Whether I come and see you," says he, "or remain absent," his desire is that "I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." The spread of the gospel and conservation of the saints requires teamwork, and a willingness to stand together against the forces of darkness. The idea of "one mind" indicates that there is no room for personal agendas; the only agenda and the only mind should be that of Christ.
- **The faith** - Repeatedly, the scripture talks of "one faith" or "the faith." Here the apostle speaks of "the faith of the gospel," meaning the system of thought which comes to man through the gospel of Christ. The goal of God, then, is that "we all attain to the unity of the faith" (Ephesians 4:13). There are, therefore, not a multiplicity of faiths, nor an individual "my faith" that is contradistinguished from others. While the details of that faith are carried out differently in Christians, it is to be the same faith. That faith ultimately focuses on Christ in glory, and transforms the individual saint into that image of the glorified Christ in his inner man. This "measure of the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ" results in true unity of the Spirit. "The glory," said Jesus in His prayer address to the Father before He crossed the Kidron, "which You have given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one" (John 17:22).

Teamwork within the local body of Christ is absolutely essential in the forward progress of the gospel. God did not intend for the Christian to be a standalone unit, except when beginning a new work, enduring persecution, or facing the final phases of passage from this earth. The gospel rides on the combined prayers of the saints and their working together. Thus the apostle appeals, "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

No Reason for Alarm

The angels, clearly created beings, were around before the foundation of the world. But evil was found in the covering cherub, who would be known as Satan, and rebellion occurred in heaven itself as some of the angels joined with the prince of darkness. "Angels who did not keep their own domain but abandoned their proper abode," commented Jude, brother of James, elder of the church in Jerusalem, "He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day" (Jude 1:6). This rebellion then spread to earth as the devil coerced mankind to join with him and the demons as enemies of God. The great adversary, then, opposed Jesus when He set foot on this planet, and continues to foment opposition against the Lord's church and against the gospel.

- **Opponents** - Gravity and resistance are part of nature, and have to be factored into the calculations of every move. Similarly, in the spiritual realm, there is a downward force emanating from Satan, and resistance on the part of fleshly man to every positive spiritual move. Saints should not be surprised or taken off guard by such resistance and hostility; it is part of the spiritual landscape. The apostle thusly appeals to the brethren in Philippi to stand "firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." While focusing on their forward movement, the saints are also being taught how to handle resistance, "in no way alarmed by your opponents," adverts the apostle Paul, "which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God" (Philippians 1:28). The key to handling the onslaught from the forces of darkness is to view things from the throne of God. Opposition to the gospel is to be seen as a marker that labels the perpetrators as on their way to destruction, and as another signal of encouragement indicating that the saint is on the right path. The view from the throne is the correct one, and God is the One who will destroy the opposers of the gospel, and reward the faithful saints with the salvation or resurrection of their bodies at Jesus' second coming.
- **Granted** - The All Powerful God did not have to save anyone; it was simply out of His great mercy that He set in motion a means by which all could be saved who would obey the gospel of Christ. The faithful followers of Christ are grateful that the grace of God has come to them through message of Christ, and are appreciative of the circumstances which the immortal, invisible God orchestrated to bring them in contact with the unadulterated preaching of Christ. "For to you it has been granted, for Christ's sake," asseverates the apostle, "not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29). The perspective which would have the Christian fall on his face and thank the Father for His great mercy and grace would have that same Christian fall on His face and thank the Father for the opportunity of suffering for the cause of the gospel!
- **Experience** - Paul had wonderful and intimate fellowship with Christ and, through Christ, with the Father. He wanted the brethren in Philippi to be able to have that same wonderful and intimate fellowship, "experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me" (Philippians 1:30). Christ suffered at the hands of Satan-formented opposition, Paul suffered at the hands of the same type of opposition, and faithful saints will suffer similarly. "And indeed," stated the apostle in his second recorded epistle to Timothy, "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (II Timothy 3:12).

The saint should not be surprised nor alarmed at opposition and persecution. "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you," said Jesus (John 15:19). When those things come for the sake of the gospel, the brother or sister in Christ just needs to remember that they are a sign of destruction at the hand of God for the opponents, and a sign of the ultimate salvation of the saint.

If There Is Any

Jesus had commented that a house divided against itself cannot stand. Hence His earnest prayer west of the Kidron was that those in the upcoming church would all be one, even as He and the Father were one that the world would believe that the Father had sent Him. The devil, the author of confusion, has as his goal the destruction of any such unity through strife, through enmities and hatreds, through the little perversities of the fleshly mind which destroy the proper mindset of the brethren, and which disrupt the momentum the saints had gained in working together. Therefore the apostle Paul had really exhorted the brethren in Philippi “with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” As he works into the next section of the epistle, he continues on that theme, again encouraging the brethren to “make my joy complete by being of the same mind” (Philippians 2:2). But this he prefaces with a series of propositions as to why they should make his joy complete.

- **Encouragement in Christ** - “If there is any encouragement in Christ ...” is the apostle’s initial probe (Philippians 2:1). Of course, there is major encouragement in Christ! “In Christ” is where all the eternal blessings are. The Father “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ” (Romans 8:1). “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come (II Corinthians 5:17). These are just a few introductory comments on what it means to be in Christ. Properly understood and processed, these blessings continually encourage the faithful saint.
- **Consolation of love** - The apostle adds another conditional to the list: “if there is any consolation of love ...” The idea expressed here is that there is someone near, who hears, and who loves unconditionally, so that the beneficiary is comfortable, relaxed, and encouraged. Ultimately, this is the love God has for each of His children, demonstrated in the sacrifice of Christ. The answer to this conditional is a “yes!”
- **Fellowship of the Spirit** - Another is added: “if there is any fellowship of the Spirit ...” The mind set on the flesh is hostile to God; it is death (Romans 8:5-8). But those who have their minds set on the Spirit have wonderful and deep fellowship with others who have their minds set on the Spirit. They fight the same battles in putting to death their own flesh, they share in the victories of the gospel and the salvation of precious eternal souls, and they focus on Jesus in glory in spite of the efforts of the god of this world to blind their eyes to that light. The answer to this one is another resounding “yes!”
- **Affection and compassion** - Paul superadds, “if any affection and compassion ...” The gospel calls people out of the domain of darkness and transfers them to the kingdom of God’s beloved Son, wherein they come together with those who have similarly been called into the fellowship of God’s marvelous light. By working and sharing together in the local congregations of the saints, they develop true affection for one another, as they are bonded together with spiritual bonds which are far stronger than mere fleshly or familial bonds. They develop true compassion as they share the struggles of fighting their way through the vicissitudes of mortal life, as they work together to combat the forces of darkness, and pray together for the salvation of the lost and conservation of the saved. Once again, the answer to this *if* is “yes!”

The Holy Spirit and the apostle Paul are excellent communicators. Here a series of powerful and weighty propositions have been stacked on top of one another, and then used to drive the point home that the brethren are to make Paul’s joy complete.

Make My Joy Complete

Overall, the apostle Paul was pleased with the congregation at Philippi. They responded well to the foundation the apostle and Dr. Luke had laid down, and were moving forward with the gospel with right attitudes and sound doctrine. What an amazing group of Christians these were! But Paul does not want them to slack off or back away from what they had been doing, but really to excel still more, as he phrased it to the Thessalonian brethren (I Thessalonians 4:1,10). Hence, his serious and earnest request comes, with the tone set by a series of weighty "ifs," "make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose" (Philippians 2:2).

- **Of the same mind** - The scripture exhorts the saints to have the same mind or same perspective about spiritual things. Ultimately, that same mind is to be "the mind of Christ." A good picture from the Old Testament writings comes from the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, where the remnant of Israel rekindled their interest in the scrolls handed down from the times of Moses onward. "And all the people gathered as one man," stated Nehemiah, "at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel" (Nehemiah 8:1). They "gathered as one man"; this graphically illustrates being of the same mind.
- **Maintaining the same love** - Love, properly understood, is true concern primarily about another person's eternity. The Lord loves all mankind, and as much as He has done to provide for the physical side of man, He is much more concerned about their spiritual needs than their physical needs. "For God so loved the world," are the words of the most familiar verse in the Bible, "that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The words of this verse, spoken by Jesus Himself, focus on the love of God expressed in terms of rescuing lost man from perishing in the fires of an eternal hell. The brethren in Philippi had this same love, but they were to maintain it.
- **United in spirit** - Paul uses the word "spirit" here to denote a general atmosphere or attitude which was to pervade the brethren's activities in a positive way. There was to be a sense of glorifying God in all activities, a continuing effort to make certain that the Lord Jesus would get proper credit in everything. All personal agendas were to be set aside, as well as "taking offense" of some at other's real or imagined slights. By focusing as a unit on the big picture, none of the small issues would actually ever become issues.
- **Intent on one purpose** - The goal of the local church is to help people get to heaven. Because of the amount of obstacles that have to be overcome, coming from a multiplicity of directions, this is no small task; the word *labor* keeps showing up in the inspired record in dealing with the brethren and the lost. As someone once said, "The main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing!" One of Satan's goals is to distract the church, have them focus on all sorts of temporal or irrelevant issues, and neglect the purpose of the church in getting the people headed toward their heavenly home.

Teamwork in the body of Christ is critical in pleasing Christ and accomplishing his purpose. The concepts of unity of spirit, mind, and action are themes that run throughout the gospel accounts, the book of Acts, the epistles, and Revelation. The saint would do well to remember the words of the Lord Jesus: "He who is not with Me is against Me; and He who does not gather with Me scatters" (Matthew 12:30)!!

Attitude from Within

Anyone who has ever worked with people knows the importance of proper and positive attitudes. James, elder in the Lord's church in Jerusalem, knew the necessity of the correct focus in his writing to the church at large. "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist," he commented, knowingly, "there is disorder and every evil thing" (James 3:16). The great adversary, Satan, loves to do his part in creating this disorder because it hinders the body of Christ from getting the job done — the job of seeking and saving the lost. Christ, on the other hand, the great Architect and Builder of the true temple of God, is very interested in harmony and teamwork. The apostle Paul, authorized spokesman for Christ, and with the full authority of this apostleship, was doing his part in this epistle to the Philippian brethren to bring about the proper teamwork and edifying attitudes.

- **No selfishness** - On a personal basis, the warfare inside the individual boils down to *self vs. Christ*. Selfishness is the enemy of the progress of the gospel, and is the jackhammer which destroys the foundations of teamwork. "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit," exhorts the apostle, "but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself" (Philippians 2:3). What selfishness does is abort the mission before take off. By definition, selfishness has a different mission or goal than what the team or the body of Christ is to accomplish. When it is coupled with what the apostle called "empty conceit," which has to do with an individual's having an inflated opinion of himself, the stated mission truly becomes "mission impossible." Eliminating selfishness and empty conceit requires that the saint honestly look inside himself in the sight of God, and go to work on himself to make the necessary corrections. This is part of the "humility of mind" that Paul mentions. The key, then, in regarding "one another as more important" is recognizing the value of each individual soul, coupled with an acknowledgement that God places each Christian in the body just as He desires. With this in mind, each disciple of Christ will be able to find his function, and the other members will be encouraging in that process.
- **Not looking out for personal interests** - The warfare in laying "aside the old *self* with its evil practices" is so intense and pervasive that Paul has to come back and re-emphasize his point. "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests," he states, "but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4). When the team members all make strong efforts to think ahead — to process what is going to make the next team member's work easier or make him more effective — great things happen.
- **Attitude of Christ** - The great and truly shining example of conduct is Christ Himself. Hence the apostle can appeal to the brethren to take a deeper look at the way Jesus handled Himself in accomplishing His mission, and therefore to make application to themselves. "Have this attitude in yourselves," says he, "which was also Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). One noteworthy point is that attitudes are controllable by the individual Christian. The proper attitude was *in* Jesus; saints are thusly exhorted to develop the same attitude *in* themselves. Attitudes are also therefore not determined by external circumstances. Having the correct perspective on this point is critical in the saint's developing the Christ-like attitude orientation. The positive outlook must be generated from within.

If external circumstances dictated Jesus' attitude, He would have been far less than the Savior of mankind; it was for the joy set before Him that He endured the cross. Hence it is that the word of God repeatedly calls on Christians to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others, and to offer such sacrifice joyfully. "We know love by this," says the apostle John, "that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16).

Christ's Attitude

The great attributes of God and His accomplishments are generally so magnificent and on such a large scale that they are missed by the mind of man. They are missed because man in general refuses to have the God of the Bible receive the honor and thanksgiving due Him. "For since the creation of the world," said Paul to the brethren in Rome, "His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). But because they chose to be blind, God gave them over to the worship of the creature rather than the Creator. But He was not content that man should remain in that condition, so He sent Christ into the world, demonstrating to the "lost sheep" of this planet that He truly loves each one of them and desires each's eternal redemption.

- **The eternal Christ** - "In the beginning was the Word," the apostle John propounded, "and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1, 2). This "Word," then, "became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). All of God, in this way, was in the body of Jesus Christ, as Paul expressed it, "For it was the Father's good pleasure for *all the fullness* to dwell in Him (Colossians 1:19). Jesus thus was co-equal with the Father from all eternity, but was willing to take human form. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus," is Paul's train of thought here, "who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself ..." (Philippians 2:5-7). Jesus was not reaching and grasping to be God; He was and is! But for the sake of man, he "emptied Himself."
- **The incarnation** - As amazing as the creation of the universe is, it shrinks in comparison to the awesomeness of God in His taking human form. Jesus is described as having "emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). In being conceived as a single living cell in the womb of Mary, being born as a normal baby, and growing into full manhood, He divested Himself of any character advantage over the rest of mortal men. Whereas as the great God in the heavens He could not be tempted, in emptying Himself and taking the form of a bond-servant He put Himself in the position where He could be tempted and could have sinned. "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses," stated Hebrews' author, "but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:16). He could have sinned, but He didn't; He can show His followers how to have the same victory as overcomers!
- **His death** - Ultimately, Jesus, in human form, died physically. But His death was not keeling over from a heart attack, or even a drawn out death due to some chronic disease. "And being found in appearance as a man," is Paul's exposition, "He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). As brutal a death as is crucifixion, Jesus' was even worse because the beatings He took before the cross, and because of the separation from the Father He experienced in bearing the sins of all mankind upon Him. What humility!!

The goal of the apostle Paul's instruction here is to get the brethren to be imitators of Christ in attitude and in action. Although He is the highest of the high, He was willing to subject Himself to the lowest level of degradation in order to communicate to any observant and thoughtful people His love for them. There is no reason, therefore, for any saint to elevate himself to being some sort of "untouchable"; rather Christians are to meet the masses of humanity where those masses are, and exhibit of the love of Christ to them as well.

Christ's Reward

God recognizes the intensity of the spiritual battle. It was He, of course, who had to put up with the rebellious Satan's appearing before Him in the line with the rest of angels in the days of Job. It was He who had to watch the fall of Adam, and to be sorry that He made man on the earth in the days of the Flood. It was He who had to observe the decline of Israel into idolatry, and to steel Himself when the Babylonians came to destroy the temple in Jerusalem because of Judah's following after false gods. Ultimately He had to turn His back on His own Son in order for the Son to pay the price for the sins of mankind. He is aware of the intensity of the spiritual battle, and He is more than willing to reward those who stand firm with Him against the forces of darkness.

- **Highly exalted** - Christ underwent the most abject of sufferings in order to do His part to win the war over the devil. He endured the ignominy of rejection and mocking; He persevered through the anguish of the cross' pain; but He ended up being crushed when His heart broke at His separation from the Father. This humility — this being willing to do whatever was honorably necessary to accomplish the Father's will — resulted in His being honored by the Father because of the power and importance of what He did to destroy Satan. "Therefore," says Paul, "also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name..." (Philippians 2:9). The result is that Jesus has the highest of all honor and the most elevated name possible.
- **Lordship** - Not only has Jesus been bestowed with the highest of names, but in conjunction has been granted lordship over all "that at the name of Jesus," the apostle informs his readership, "every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10, 11). The Lord Jesus Christ, in subjugating Himself to being the lowest of the low in order to reach any and every man, was rewarded. The book of Revelation pictures the angels of God, the cherubim, and the elders surrounding the throne, saying, "Worthy is *the Lamb that was slain* to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (Revelation 5:12). He was bestowed the honor, but He was also worthy to receive it.
- **Bow down** - Jesus died for all; it is fitting therefore that all should bow down before Him. The picture the Bible paints is that most of earth's residents will refuse to yield themselves to the Lordship of Christ. Hence, when the Day of Judgment is in full swing, those multitudes who refused to bow before Him on earth will be forced to bow before Him on that day. But those precious ones, who came to understand the faith revealed in the scripture and who voluntarily bowed before Him during their earthly sojourns in full submission, will joyfully continue to do so before the judgment throne.

Just as Jesus has been highly exalted because of His sacrifice and earnest desire to please the Father, those who will imitate Christ in sacrificing themselves and desiring to please the Father will also be exalted. "He who overcomes," said the Lord Jesus Himself, "I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21). It is worth it, as the apostle Paul exhorts the Philippian brethren, to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

Your Salvation

Jesus' part in our salvation is so immense as to be incomprehensible. The price He paid on earth was great, but what He did to accomplish His resurrection and ascension was even greater. Without Jesus' power to save from His exalted position on the throne, His death on the cross would have been in vain. There is major significance, then, in His words uttered while He was still on earth: "No one has taken [My life] away from Me," said He, "but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again" (John 10:18). He died on the cross; He raised Himself from the dead; He ascended to glory; and He continues His powerful work from that lofty position at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

- **Work out your salvation** - But the Lord Jesus expects that, since He is working, that His spiritual children should be laboring also. "So then, my beloved," the apostle Paul introduces his next thought, "just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Our salvation is a covenant relationship — a contract — with God through Christ. Just as His side of the contract required much effort on His part, so our side requires much on our part. The Philippian brethren, to their credit as contrasted to many of those early congregations, had always obeyed the apostle's instructions when he was present; the exordium is for them to excel in that obedience while he is absent. But their end of that contract was going to require intense and prolonged work; they were going to have to go through sufferings and privations for the gospel to continue to go forward, and they needed to be faithful until death. These brethren would also need to be conscious that they were carrying these things out in the sight of the Lord; they would need to exhibit the proper respect in an attitude of fear and trembling before the awesome and mighty God.
- **God's working within** - But the loving God is extremely interested in the success of the disciples of Jesus. He is willing, therefore, to give the saints the type of assistance they need in overcoming the obstacles they face in the good fight of their faith. "It is God who is at work in you," observes Paul, "both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). What an uplifting promise: God is at work in you! This is so encouraging to the Christian who is fighting his way through his own personal inner battles as well as waging external warfare on behalf of Christ his King. Sometimes in the midst of the carnage, it seems as if there is no progress; this promise makes the exciting point that there has been progress because God has been at work within. The Almighty is in the process of strengthening the will of the saint that he may gain mastery over self and that he may be the master over challenging people and situations. The Father is also energizing the Christian so that he can continue to power forward through the intense labor of seeking and saving the lost as well as the challenges of conserving the saints.

The intensity of the battle for the souls of men cannot be overemphasized. One way to measure that intensity is to consider that it cost God the death of His only begotten Son to effect the general rescue of mankind. The individual must also be active in his salvation; he must believe and obey the gospel. But just because the saint has been immersed into Christ does not mean the battle is over. He must continue to work out his salvation, while God works within!

Willing and Working

Sooner or later it is a battle of the wills. It is the will of God vs. the will of Satan. It is man's free will; which will he choose? For man, what seems to be a big choice or a big decision is actually the accumulation of all those little decisions that were made at each step along the way. Hence it is that the battle of the wills is going to be played out day by day in the mind of each person so long as he inhabits this earth. And where the will gets tested is when it comes time to do the work. Many a good intention and firm determination shipwreck on the coral reef of the individual's having to engage in the intense and extended labor necessary to bring about the desired goal. May God help the Christian!

- **Strengthening the will** - The record of mankind's being able to have a strong will to do what is right is abjectly poor. The saint, then, still dripping wet with the waters of immersion, on the inside is a new creation, but on the outside is going to need a tremendous amount of reprogramming to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. The loving Father in heaven is intensely interested in the saint's success, and is willing to give the appropriate assistance for the disciple's growth. The apostle Paul thusly points out that "it is God who is at work in you." God is there, and He is not idle! The awesome power that created the universe, the mega-power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at the right hand of power, is at work in each Christian. And one of the ways in which this power is at work is to strengthen the will of the saint. The follower of Christ needs a tremendous amount of will power to fight the good fight of faith to the finish, to finish his personal spiritual marathon triumphantly. These are simple statements, but they must not be taken lightly. The will to win — to keep fighting on through the dark moments, when all seems lost and hopeless — is a very prized quality, and great thanks needs to be given to the great God who works to produce that will power in His children.
- **Power to work** - Another name for the indwelling Spirit is "times of refreshing" coming from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19). When the saint is involved in the work of the Lord, his stamina can be pressed almost to the breaking point, and he needs that extra which the Spirit of God provides. A sample of such saints shows up in Paul's closing comments to the church in Rome: "Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa," encouraged the apostle, "workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord" (Romans 16:12). The work of the Lord is physically challenging; there are travel and transportation issues in simply getting to the lost to share the word of the Lord with them, or similarly in meeting the needs of the weaker Christians. In addition, the work of the Lord is emotionally challenging; a lot of seed has to be sown, and, since only a percentage of it falls on good soil, there are many emotional challenges over the fact that most reject the word of truth and secure their own place in the eternal fires of hell. There are also emotional challenges connected with concern for the saints' staying faithful. "Who is weak without my being weak?" queried the apostle Paul. "Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" (II Corinthians 11:29). That intense concern can be emotionally draining as well. Hence, the disciple of Christ needs the power the Lord provides so that he can continue to do the work.

What encouragement these words from the apostle Paul bring: "It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure!!"

Lights in the World

God anticipates that each Christian will be a living representative of His goodness and grace. While it is true that the world in general and each adult in particular has rebelled against Him, God still loves those made in His image and desires their reconciliation to Him. The message of reconciliation will not be thundered from on high, however, but will be tendered through His representatives whose feet tread this earth, as the apostle Paul stated: God “reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:18). The carriers of this message, then, must exhibit the care and concern of God for each lost person, and must radiate His attitudes to attract those lost people.

- **No whining** - As Jesus was finishing up the institution of the Lord’s Supper, and preparing to make His way to the garden of Gethsemane to anguish in prayer, He made an amazing statement. “These things I have spoken to you,” He asseverated, “that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full” (John 15:8). In the midst of the world’s worst suffering, He still had joy and was conscious of the need of the saints who were yet to come to be able to have joy also. The apostle Paul, then, building upon the point that God is at work in each Christian strengthening their wills, exhorts, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may prove yourselves blameless and innocent ...” (Philippians 2:14,15). Christians, being joyful, are not complainers; they understand that this world has been cursed since Adam and Eve sinned, and they comprehend that not everything is going to work perfectly all the time. They recognize that much difficult and repetitive work has to be done by somebody, and if it is their turn, they jump into their tasks with joy. They have great attitudes, and do not fight or argue with those who have charge over them. They are the best workers, demonstrating the character of Christ to those around them.
- **Proving yourselves** - The old saying is, “I’d rather see a sermon than hear one.” While the word of God must be preached, that preaching is most effective when it is lived out in the lives of believers. “Prove yourselves,” the apostle Paul and the Holy Spirit enjoin the brethren, “to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15). The saints are obligated to demonstrate to the world that they are transformed individuals. They are to be honest and upright, taking responsibility for mistakes or misunderstandings that usually happen in the course of human interaction. They are to be innocent; they are not to be conniving or manipulative, or have hidden motives and agendas.
- **Lights in a dark world** - “The whole world,” the apostle John pointed out, “lies in the power of the evil one” (I John 5:19). The scripture repeatedly refers to those trapped by their own sin and the lies of Satan as “a crooked and perverse generation.” The call is for those who would be God’s children to come out of the darkness, and, by their behavior, “appear as lights in the world.” As the Lord Jesus Himself exhorted, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

When the apostle Paul described the gospel of Christ to the Corinthian brethren, he noted that it included the fact that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, and that He was resurrected on the third day. But the apostle does not stop there; he also included the expression, “He appeared” (I Corinthians 15:5). That appearance was the key point in establishing the truthfulness of His resurrection. Christians, in a parallel manner, die and are buried with Christ in their immersions, and are resurrected to walk in newness of life. But their participation in the gospel does not end there either; as Christ appeared, so are saints to appear as lights in the world, the continuing key point in establishing the truthfulness of Jesus’ resurrection!

Holding Fast the Word of Life

“Once saved, always saved,” is not a Biblical doctrine. The fact that millions of spiritual descendants of John Calvin believe it does not make it true. The doctrine of so-called “eternal security” is based on a more foundational false teaching entitled *total depravity*. The idea is that God is so holy and man, by contrast, is so corrupt from birth that man cannot even understand one word of the scripture or make a decision that would lead him in the direction of Christ. Hence, in this system of thought, God decides who is to be saved without participation by the individual. Since the person could not make the decision to be saved in the first place, it follows that he cannot make a decision to be lost later. All this, of course, runs counter to the scriptures, which plainly teach that a person must make a decision to obey the gospel in the first place, and continue to make decisions that keep him focused on Christ and within the fold of the Great Shepherd.

- **The word of life** - The living God and loving Father desires that His children exhibit His character qualities to a world that is in darkness. Satan, the god of this world, is running every confusion and distraction tactic he can before the face of the saint, trying to get him to return to the ways and habits of unbelievers. The apostle Paul thus exhorts the brethren to be “holding fast the word of life ...” (Philippians 2:16). The teachings of the scripture are called *the word of life* in contrast to all else, which is *the way of death*. Consequently, that word of life is to be “held on to for dear life” by the saint!
- **Cause to glory** - The apostle labored all his life to seek and to save the lost, as well as laboring to keep the saints on track. He always gave credit to the Almighty for opening doors for the gospel, for giving him the grace to do what he did, and for the special powers he had as an apostle. But at the same time he invested his life in people, including the Philippians, and he understandably did not want that effort to be wasted. His encouragement for the brethren, therefore, is that they hold fast the word of life, “so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.” His glorying would of course be “glorying in the Lord.”
- **Joy in it all** - The apostle looked forward to “the day of Christ,” the day when his reward for toiling would be granted him. His joy and crown would be those whom he was able to influence so that they made their decisions to take up their crosses and follow Jesus. “But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering,” he therefore writes, “upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all” (Philippians 2:17). What a picture! As the saints offered their bodies as living and holy sacrifices in service to the Lord, Paul portrays his possible physical death as a libation poured out on that fire, a special added flame ascending to the glory of God. With that picture, he could rejoice and share that joy with the brethren. “And you too,” he invites, “rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me” (Philippians 2:18).

Earthly life is filled with many discouragements and disappointments. Jesus Himself is prophetically described as “a man of sorrows” as He experienced the challenges of the Jewish people’s rejecting Him and the world’s refusing to acknowledge Him. But the joy is there for those who seize it, and for those who have the opportunity as Paul did to see others seize it. That’s why he held fast to the word of life, and encouraged others to do so too. The message is clear: hold on!

Sending Timothy

The apostle Paul's concern for the congregations and the individual saints rings loudly and clearly throughout his writings. He knew the value of each believer's soul, and he knew the necessity of strong local churches to help keep those saints headed in heaven's direction. Over the years, as his sphere of influence grew, he acquired a team of dedicated men who worked with him to spread the gospel and strengthen the congregations. These saints were willing to be directed to come and go, to some degree, at Paul's bidding, and thus were extremely valuable in the overall warfare against the forces of darkness and confusion. One such man was Timothy.

- **Purpose** - In those days travel was difficult and communication, by our present day standards, was poor. Paul's concern for each congregation was intense, but reliable information about the churches was pretty sketchy. Not only would information have to be communicated by someone trustworthy, but someone spiritual enough and experienced enough to be really able to assess the true condition of the congregation. "But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly," explains the apostle, "so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition" (Philippians 2:19). Timothy was definitely qualified, and Paul was hopeful that the young evangelist would be able to come to Philippi shortly and be able to give a positive assessment of the church's progress.
- **Kindred spirit** - There always seems to be a shortage of capable and qualified man-power, as Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few" (Matthew 9:37). Such was the case even with Paul and his team. "For I have no one else of kindred spirit," he explains, "who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare" (Philippians 2:20). What a blessing for Paul to have someone whom he could describe as of a "kindred spirit," someone who operated with the same understanding, perspective, and goals as the apostle! That type of teamwork always has been extremely rare. By contrast, though, Paul comments about some others, "For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:21). There is actually an encouraging point here for those modern brethren who diligently labor in the Lord's fields, that it was even difficult for the apostle Paul to have every member of his team set aside personal interests and work for the big picture.
- **Accepting Timothy** - The congregation in Philippi was doing comparatively well, but it is clear that Paul wanted to do some things to help the brethren step up to another level. One of their number, Epaphroditus, was being sent right away, then Timothy as soon as possible. The apostle wants Timothy to have full acceptance, and writes accordingly. "For you know of his proven worth," he reminds the brethren, "that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father" (Philippians 2:22). Timothy had already been tested on a number of spiritual battlegrounds, and had established to the satisfaction of all knowledgeable brethren that he was capable and qualified. The point here is that if the Philippians trusted Paul, they could trust Timothy's guidance and direction also. "Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; and I trust in the Lord that I myself also shall be coming shortly" (Philippians 2:23,24). Paul apparently needed Timothy to wrap up a few things for him while he was still in jail, but once those things were cleared away, and the apostle's release was imminent, then he could send Timothy immediately. And Paul's clear desire, if the Lord willed, was to follow Timothy into Philippi as soon as possible.

The number of lost people, who are headed for a Christless eternity in the fires of hell, is staggering. The fight to maintain those who have been delivered from the domain of darkness is almost mind-numbing. The picture therefore being painted by the apostle in this epistle is for brethren to move past self-serving interests, and work as a great team to accomplish God's awesome purposes in helping people out of Satan's snare, and helping them onward to heaven.

About Epaphroditus

Sometimes it is hard to understand what the Lord has planned and what specifics He has in motion. Because He is the ultimate great general, He clearly has a strategy [or prosecuting His warfare against the prince of darkness and his minions, as demonstrated throughout the inspired record. But His strategy has to be one which operates from before the foundation of the world until Christ returns and the world burns. Hence a Christian could be being used at any point in his earthly sojourn for the execution of a tactic which will not be carried out in his lifetime. Those early saints, for example, suffered greatly for the cause of the gospel so that it could be clear they had no earthly gain from believing that Jesus is the Christ; they instead went to their deaths as a demonstration to future generations that they really believed the testimony and the verifying signs of the first century that Jesus was risen from the dead. This is the stratagem the Lord has used to cut the legs from under the religion of Islam, which progressed only because it was of earthly value for new adherents to convert to that belief to avoid being decapitated. The All Wise used the first century church to accomplish victories that would be executed hundreds or even two thousand years following their passage to Paradise.

- **Epaphroditus** - Epaphroditus was sent by the congregation at Philippi to assist Paul in his and his team's efforts. But Paul was sending him back to Philippi with this letter. After describing his intent to send Timothy soon, and his own arrival later, the apostle states, "But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need, because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick" (Philippians 2:25,26), Paul has nothing but praise for this man, a dedicated servant of the Lord, describing him as his "brother and fellow soldier." He was also trusted by the congregation at Philippi, representing them as "your messenger and minister to my need." He was clearly a demonstration of what a good Christian man should be.
- **Sickness** - One of the reasons for sending Epaphroditus immediately was Epaphroditus' own concern for the Philippian brethren. "He was longing for you all," Paul observes, "and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow" (Philippians 2:26, 27), Epaphroditus was sent to assist Paul, and he was greatly concerned when the brethren heard that he was sick, and would therefore be unable to carry out his mission, Thus he desired to go back, and would be the one carrying this epistle to the brethren.
- **No healing?** - Here is the apostle Paul, whose ability to heal- along with exhibiting all the other gifts of the Spirit - was well-known, and yet he does not heal Epaphroditus. This man was a dedicated Christian, who "came close to death for the work of Christ," and one about whom Paul would have had "sorrow upon sorrow" should he have passed away. So why wasn't he healed? Epaphroditus' case establishes that the purpose of healing was not simply to heal the sick among mankind, but to be used to buttress the testimony that Jesus was risen from the dead.

Epaphroditus' usefulness to Paul, his ability to be a "messenger and minister" to assist Paul in his work, and his sickness were all orchestrated by God for His purposes. One of those would be the communication to the 21st century church that the apostles such as Paul did not always heal all sickness among them. Rather, the miracles were accomplished in the presence of the unbelievers, that they might believe that Jesus is the Christ, as Paul explained to the church in Corinth: "My message...[was] in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:4,5).

More on Epaphroditus

The spread of the gospel was of the highest importance among the saints of the first century. Hence it was that the congregation at Philippi was willing to send Epaphroditus to assist Paul in getting the gospel preached "in all creation under heaven." This man, a "fellow worker and fellow soldier," was eminently qualified to provide a high level of assistance to Paul, apparently capable of carrying a teaching and preaching load. But not all things work out as the mind of man plans; Epaphroditus fell sick and Paul was not in a position to heal him. Epaphroditus ended up longing to return to Philippi, and was "distressed" about the Philippian brethren hearing of his sickness and apparent failure to carry out what he was sent for.

- **Being sent** - Much earlier in Paul's preaching, John Mark left Paul and Barnabas and went back to Jerusalem. So, on the second missionary journey, when Barnabas wanted to bring Mark along, Paul absolutely refused. But here, in the case of Epaphroditus, who was unable to carry out his mission because of sickness, Paul has a different perspective. "Therefore, I have sent him all the more eagerly," comments the apostle, "that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you" (Philippians 2:28). Paul is backing the reputation of Epaphroditus all the way, and uses the word "eagerly" in regard to his willingness to understand Epaphroditus' desire to return. He furthermore looks forward to the reunion of the brethren with the survivor of a near deadly sickness, knowing that the Philippians will rejoice at his happy return. Paul superadds the comment that he will be less concerned about the Philippians upon Epaphroditus' return to them, clearly establishing his high regard for this fellow worker.
- **High regard** - It is easy to find fault in others - real or imagined! Epaphroditus was distressed that the brethren in Philippi heard that he was sick; there may have been those who were looking for an opportunity to criticize him. But the apostle Paul takes the high ground, sending Epaphroditus back as a trusted messenger. "Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy," instructs the apostle, "and hold men like him in high regard..." (Philippians 2:29). Even though Epaphroditus was being sent back to Philippi, he was coming with high commendation from the apostle. The congregation was not to shun him, or have a tepid welcome. Rather he was to be accepted in his return "with all joy." The apostle and the Holy Spirit further instruct that he and others like him were to be held "in high regard." Any injunction or exhortation that Epaphroditus might give was to be accorded with serious consideration.
- **Risking his life** - Paul gives one reason for holding Epaphroditus in high regard. "He came close to death for the work of Christ," the apostle adverts, "risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me" (Philippians 2:30). Because the Philippian brethren could not physically be with Paul and assist him in the distribution of the gospel, the work of Epaphroditus was regarded as filling in the gaps, or completing "what was deficient." In contracting the sickness while serving in assisting Paul, Epaphroditus was regarded as "risking his life" and "coming close to death for the work of Christ." In effect, this man of God was literally laying down his life for the sake of Christ and the brethren.

The work of Christ - saving the lost and conserving the saved - is the only work which has eternal value. Everything else will be scraped into the dustbin of history, or burned with fire at Jesus' second coming. Epaphroditus and men like him (women, too!) are to be held in high regard for what they accomplish in sacrificing themselves for the spreading of the word of God. Sometimes they come close to death for the work, sometimes they are put to death, and sometimes they just pass away. But they are to be appreciated!

Some Safeguards

Most saints most of the time do not need to learn something new; they need to be reminded of what they already know. Hence it is that the Lord Himself, in working with mankind and with His special peoples, uses and has used memorials. Whether it was the rainbow, the mummy of Joseph, the Passover, or the Lord's Supper, the All Wise has set in motion these types of remembrances so that the lessons once learned will not be forgotten. Likewise, He has enjoined upon His disciples the memorization of scripture, which obviously involves much repetition, and the concomitant driving into the consciousness of the follower of Christ the teachings and exhortations of scripture. Therefore, also, teachers of the word will go back over the principles and practices of God's word again and again, saying the same things in different ways in hope that some of the doctrine will stick in the minds of some of the students some of the time.

- **Rejoice!** - Jesus talked about joy during the years of His sojourn upon the surface of this earth. "These things I have spoken to you," the apostle John recorded, "that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (John 15:11). One of the highly commended "fruit of the Spirit" is joy. It is clear, then, that the abundant life in Christ is to be one of joy, where saints have learned to look at the things above and not on the things of this earth. "Finally, my brethren," comes the exhortation of Paul to the saints in Philippi, "rejoice in the Lord" (Philippians 3:1). Make a decision to have a good time doing what you are doing! Enjoy your activities, and do your work heartily! "To write the same things again," is the apostle's exordium, "is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard to you." When the joy is gone, the saint essentially slogs mindlessly through the routines of Christianity, and ends up a walking corpse. The exhortation to have joy is indeed a safeguard for the soul.
- **Some "bewarees"** - Over and over again the scripture talks about the fight for the soul and the challenges for the followers of Christ. "Beware of the dogs," warns Paul, "beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision" (Philippians 3:2). When the apostle warns about the "dogs," he is obviously warning about "dogs" in a spiritual sense rather than the mangy curs which would occasionally bark and snarl along his route of travel. So how does the word of God use the word "dog"? A clue about this terminology comes from God's words to Moses as the children of Israel were preparing to enter the Promised Land: "None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute," dictated the Lord, referring to the practice of the women serving as priestesses at the Asherah, "nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a cult prostitute," referring to the way the men who served at the altar of Baal, for example, were used. "You shall not bring the hire of a harlot," continued the righteous God in a parallel construction, "or the wages of a dog into the house of the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 23:17, 18). "Dogs" are male homosexuals. The apostle warns about them because the sodomites as a whole have always been aggressively hostile to the preaching of the gospel and the calling of them to repentance. Likewise the Philippian brethren were warned about "the evil workers" -- the crooked businessmen who conspire against the gospel of God, the gang leaders and mobsters, the gurus and movers and shakers of false religions. And he warned about the "false circumcision" -- the Jews who were hostile to the message of the Messiah.

The whole world really does lie in the power of the evil one, as the apostle John had noted. The apostle Paul, therefore, concerned about the eternities of the Philippian brethren, encouraged them to have great attitudes, and to be aware of the evils around them, that he might do his part to safeguard their souls.

The True Circumcision

Many still think "the Jews" are God's chosen people. They believe this in spite of the fact that not one modern "Jew" can prove his ancestry. They believe this in spite of the destruction of the temple nearly 2000 years ago, along with the destruction of the priesthood, the sacrifices, and the altar. They believe this in spite of the fact that God said that they were cast out, as was Hagar and her son Ishmael, that the Jews would not be competition to the church. They believe this in spite of the fact that Jesus repeatedly said that they would be destroyed, that the kingdom would be taken away from them and given "to a nation producing the fruit of it."

But what about the Jews of the first century AD? If they did not convert to Christianity but remained in their law and their customs, where did they stand with the almighty? And who are the true "chosen of God"?

- **Circumcision** - Circumcision was a physical sign of a covenant God initiated in the days of Abraham. When Israel was given the law through Moses, circumcision was incorporated into that covenant, a physical sign for a physical people. Thus, by the time the scriptures of the New Testament were being written, "the circumcision" was an expression for the Jewish people - those in Judea and surrounding areas, and those of the dispersion. Because of their hostility toward the gospel, the apostle Paul called them "the false circumcision." "For we are the true circumcision," he explains, referring to Christians, "who worship [literally serve] in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:3). If a male in Israel was not circumcised, he was excluded from the old covenant and to be separated from God's people. Under the terms of the new covenant, a "circumcision made without hands" - a spiritual circumcision - is accomplished in immersion into Christ. In this type of circumcision, a spiritual "body of flesh" - a spiritual encasement that formed when the person committed his first sin, was separated from God, and became fleshly-minded and part of the world. The parallel is this: if a person has not been spiritually circumcised in immersion, he is excluded from the new covenant and separated from the people of God.
- **Worship or service?** - Unfortunately, there is a lot of confusion regarding what worship is and what service is under the terms of the new covenant. Worship for saints is the prostration of their spirits in the presence of the eternal God, they having been raised up and seated with Christ in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. Service is the action carried out by the saints as they do their part to forward the plan of God executed on earth. The translators, not having followed the progression of God's instruction through, often interchange worship and service. "We are the true circumcision," is the reading of this epistle to the Philippians, "who serve by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus." In other words, Christians serve God by the strength which the Holy Spirit provides, the Spirit who indwells those who come under the terms of the new covenant and who are spiritually circumcised. The Spirit was not indwelling those of the old covenant and who were merely physically circumcised.

The saints, then, serve God by the Spirit, glory in Christ Jesus, "and put no confidence in the flesh." The natural tendency of mankind, because Adam was formed out of the dust of the ground, is to be physically-minded and therefore totally miss the existence and true value of those things of the spiritual realm. Hence the Jew looked to his physical circumcision and ancestral heritage as the means by which he was acceptable to God. But the special people of the new covenant are a spiritual people, a people who know that they have been born again by the living and abiding word of God, and who walk by faith in that which has been revealed in the written word of God rather than by sight. They indeed are "the true circumcision."

Paul's Pedigree

Mankind in general, alienated from God and without hope in this world, look to physical things to enable themselves to have a false confidence. Some pride themselves on being descendants of those who crossed the Atlantic on the *Mayflower*, or whose ancestry included the nobility of Europe. Some feel elevated because of their Lithuanian heritage, or that they are distant relatives of Genghis Khan, or their family was part of the Zulu consolidation, or that they are of the ancient Malay people. But what if that ancestry were of the special lineage brought into existence by God Himself -the people of Israel? Paul says that Christians are not putting any confidence in the flesh, however. If a person has been "born of God," what does it matter, what his physical heritage may have been?

- **Confidence in the flesh** - The apostle Paul slams his comments into the face of any Jew who was priding himself on his family ancestry. "Beware of the false circumcision," he has just stated, and "we are of the true circumcision," referring to the faithful followers of Christ. We, he emphasizes, "put no confidence in the flesh." But he is going to superadd, "Although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh." To destroy the underpinnings of those who would argue against him, he lists his pedigree in these terms, "If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law; found blameless" (Philippians 3:4-6). Small wonder that Saul (later known as Paul), would become the upcoming young man on the Jewish high council! As a Pharisee and a son of Pharisees, he became one of the ranking teachers - a Hebrew of Hebrews, as he put it. No other extant Jew could really compete with that list.
- **What is of real value** - Following his encounter with the risen Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, the apostle Paul learned what was of real value. Being of the "strictest sect" of the Pharisees, educated under Gamaliel, gave him no real standing in Christ. He found that the careful and religious observance of the feasts and customs of the Law was of no redemptive value before the righteous Judge. And, of course, his persecution of the early church was a serious mark against him rather than commending him. They catapulted him to the top of Jewish society, "but whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ" (Philippians 3:7). He willingly trashed all those points in his pedigree to become a humble servant of Christ. "You are distinguished," he told the Corinthian brethren, "but we [apostles] are without honor." "We have become the scum of the world, the dregs of all things" (1 Corinthians 4:10, 13). The real value was not in earthly marks on a peg, but rather in what he called "the sake of Christ," or the cause of Christ.

The apostle Paul willingly laid aside his personal pedigree perks in order to pick up his cross and follow Jesus. That cross and that cause led him into persecution and suffering almost incomprehensible. "More than that," he comments, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8). The value of knowing Christ, and the concomitant becoming deeply involved in the lives of thousands who would obey the gospel became far greater than what he could have known as a stem Pharisee and judge on the high council. As a leading exponent of the gospel, and one for whom the love of God had been poured out in his heart, the apostle stands to this day as one who would be worthy of imitation. May we follow him, as he followed Christ!

Found in Christ

Some day soon, Jesus is going to come roaring back. And what will He find? "And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains," was the prophetic vision of the apostle John, "and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?'" (Revelation 6:15-17). They will want to hide, but Jesus will find them! In view of the spiritual decline of mankind on planet earth as the end of the world approaches, Jesus issues a challenge, "However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find the faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). That is a question that those who claim the name of Christ had best be able answer in the affirmative if they still sojourn on the surface of this planet. What was it that the apostle Paul desired that Jesus find?

- **Surpassing value** - Paul's Jewish pedigree had a long check list that very few, if any, could match. But he was willing to set those earthly ties aside for the sake of being called one of the adopted sons of God. He lost his standing with the Jews, his position on the high council, and the respectful greetings in the market place; but he gained high standing in the courts of heaven. He was willing to be homeless and persecuted for the cause of Christ. But the great value was just being able to know Jesus. "More than that," states the apostle, in reference to his standing as a Jew prior to his conversion, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him..." (Philippians 3:8, 9). The only way anyone can know Jesus is to repent and be immersed into Him. Simply because people feel like they are in close fellowship with Christ does not make it so; the individual must be indwelt by the Holy Spirit in order to know Christ and to be known by Him. "God is Spirit," and the connection with Him must be through His Spirit. Properly understood, there is nothing that could compare with "the surpassing value of knowing Christ."
- **Found in Him** - The earnest desire of the apostle Paul's heart is on display in this section of the letter to the Philippians. He, for the best of reasons, has the intense hope that, at the Lord's second coming, he "may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Philippians 3:9). At the Lord's return, the angels will be taking the wicked out from the righteous; Paul wants to be "found" in Christ so that he is not cast "into the furnace of fire." To be righteous, a person has to be in Christ; initially he has no personal righteousness to bring before the Almighty in order to recommend himself for eternal life. Following being clothed with Christ in immersion, God expects that the saint's participation in "the faith of Christ" will produce an actual practicing righteousness.

The disciple of Christ has been "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). "Little children," explained the apostle John, "let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous" (1 John 3:7). By the word of God, and by the strength which the Spirit supplies, the saint - like Paul - can be found in Christ at His return, exhibiting the righteousness which comes from God.

Righteousness Through Faith

"The wrath of God," said Paul, "is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Romans 1:18). The great "faith" book, the great "imputed righteousness" book - the book of Romans - is all about those who have been called out of darkness being able to walk in the light. Paul opened the book of Romans talking about the apostles' purpose being "to bring about the obedience of faith among the Gentiles," and he closed with God's commands being made known to the "nations, leading to the obedience of faith" (Romans 1:5; 16:26). God's goal, through the gospel, has been to produce a special people who can and who will keep the commandments of God.

- **Not of law** - If a person could keep the law of God, he would be righteous based on his own efforts, as the apostle Paul noted in his epistle to the Romans: "For Moses writes," Paul recalled, "that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness" (Romans 10:5). The problem is that one mistake is a violation of the whole law, and the result is that the individual spiritually dies. Paul, then, in writing to the Philippi brethren, comments that his desire is to be found in Christ, "not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law." The commandments exhibit God's standards of what is righteous, holy, and good, but end up affecting the spiritual death of anyone who violates one of them.
- **Through the faith of Christ** - As contrasted to "the law of Moses," the new covenant is introduced under the heading "the faith of Christ." Paul informs the brethren that he is going to be found in Christ; that finding will not be because of his own righteousness, but because of the righteousness "which is through the faith of Christ" (Philippians 3:9 KJV). "With the heart man [has faith]," averred the apostle, "resulting in righteousness" (Romans 10:10). When anyone participates in the faith of Christ, he is granted the righteousness of Christ; he has the same fellowship with the Father as does the Son.
- **Producing righteous behavior** - "Pursue peace with all men," exhorted Hebrew's writer, "and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). There is a sanctification-there is a holiness, there is a righteousness - which has to be pursued on an individual basis. "Be holy yourselves," was the word from the apostle Peter, "in all your behavior" (1 Peter 1:15). Obviously the apostle is not talking about an "imputed holiness," but rather actual holy and righteous behavior. Could this "practicing righteousness" be produced apart from what is supplied by Christ through the Holy Spirit? The answer is demonstrably NO! When the saint of God does his part by renewing his mind and the Holy Spirit does His part in renewing the inner man of the saint, the result is a new creation in Christ Jesus who walks in the footsteps of Christ. This is the ultimate result of the "righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith."

The underlying basis of Catholicism is that the individual is going to be a sinner on earth until he dies. The underlying basis of Protestantism is that the only righteousness a person will ever have is an "imputed righteousness" from Christ, and that his actual performance will always be sinful. The scripture, by contrast, teaches that "the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:4 NKJV). The disciple of Christ really can overcome the spiritual obstacles in his path, which is the general thrust of the apostle Paul in Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." "Because as He is," wrote the aged John, "so also are we in this world" (1 John 4:17). Jesus is righteous; let's be righteous!

What to Know

There is a lot of knowledge in the world, but most of it is irrelevant to eternity. Daniel, for example, had prophesied the coming of a time when "many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase" (Daniel 12:4). It is a good possibility that our own time is what was contemplated by the prophet, inasmuch as it is now possible to be almost anywhere in the world within a day or two, and as the digital revolution has caused a tremendous knowledge explosion. But most of that knowledge is as irrelevant as some starlet's hourly "tweets." The apostle Paul had counted everything that might have been gain to him as loss for one purpose: knowing Christ. He suffered the loss of all things for one purpose: knowing Christ. He even sought and found the righteousness of God found through "the faith of Christ" for one purpose: knowing Christ.

- **Knowing Christ** - The apostle Paul really emphasizes the importance of knowing Christ. He calls it "the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." He states that his desire is to "be found in Him" - not having his own righteousness, but that which comes through the faith of Christ - "that I may know Him," he again adverts (Philippians 3:10), It is worth reemphasizing that the only way to know Christ is to be "immersed into Christ" (Romans 6:3). No one can know Christ on his own terms or by trying to negotiate a separate deal. The conditions of fellowship with the Lord are laid out by Him, and only those who submit willingly to His terms are admitted to His fellowship or can know Him. "This is eternal life," said the Lord Jesus Himself, "that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3).
- **The power of His resurrection** - Not only did the apostle desire to know Christ, he also wanted to know "the power of His resurrection." Resurrection power manifests itself in the saint in various ways. The followers of Christ know that God "raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 2:6). Faith in that picture, revealed in the scriptures by God, lets the disciple of the Lord know that his prayers are heard instantly at the throne of grace, and that he by faith has already received a spiritual resurrection. The Christian knows that, since he has been raised up with Christ, he is exhorted to "keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." He is further encouraged to "set your mind on things above, not on the things are on earth" (Colossians 3:1, 2). Those who belong to Christ also know that since Christ has been raised from the dead, they also will attain to the resurrection of the righteous. "But now Christ has been raised from the dead," was how he posited it for the Corinthians, "the first fruits of those who are asleep." "But each in his own order," the apostle added, "Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming" (I Corinthians 15:20, 23).
- **The fellowship of His sufferings** - Because of the hope that lay in front of him, the apostle was willing to charge forward into the same types of suffering that the Lord endured during the years of His earthly sojourn. His desire was to know "the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." Those who have gone through a Communist prison camp successfully together have deep fellowship; they experienced the same pain, won the same mental battles. Paul's intent was to suffer as Christ suffered, that he might identify with Him and have even more intense fellowship with Him than those survivors of a prison camp could have.

Paul's knowing Christ, knowing the power of His resurrection, and knowing the fellowship of His sufferings all pointed to one end, as he asseverates, "in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:11). May modern Christians be imitators of Paul, even as he was an imitator of Christ!

Not There Yet

The apostle Paul had already stated to the Philippian brethren that it would be better for him to die than to remain on earth. "Yet," he said, "to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake" (Philippians 1:24). Because the Lord was not done with him in the time of his testing on the earth, the apostle would have to go through more persecutions and sufferings, more malicious gossip and more death threats, and more personal growth. All this, he said, will mean "fruitful labor for me" (Philippians 1:22). Hence it was that he willingly marched forward into the persecution that comes with preaching the gospel, as he put it, "being conformed to His death." Jesus had said, "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it" (Mark 8:35). The apostle Paul still stands as a great example of someone who was willing to give up everything, ultimately including his earthly life, for the sake of Christ and His word.

- **Not obtained it** - Paul's expressed earnest desire was to attain to the resurrection from the dead. The secret to attaining that desire is to know Christ, and to remain faithful to Him. Thus, as the apostle contemplates the grand picture, he comments, "Not that I have already obtained it..." (Philippians 3:12). He, like everyone sanctified through faith in Christ, had to keep moving forward until the Lord called him home. The "it" is his successful resurrection to life.
- **Become perfect** - There are three perfections that are considerations of the scriptures. The first is a perfect conscience, a clean conscience which is granted when the sinner's body is washed (Hebrews 10:22). The second is perfect character, which is the goal of the New Testament writings for each Christian, to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48). The third is a perfect body, which is granted to those declared righteous at Jesus' second coming, like the body of Jesus' glory (Philippians 3:21). Paul says he has not already "obtained it" -- referring to his resurrection body -- which he then restates as "or have already become perfect" -- refining likewise to receiving his perfect body in the resurrection on the last day.
- **Press on** - "Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow," said the Lord Jesus Christ, "for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34). The apostle Paul therefore had to take each day, one day at a time, until the time came for him to make his exit from this earth. Since he hadn't become "perfect" in his resurrection yet, he affirms that "I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12). Christ, through the gospel, calls those whose names were written in the book of life of the Lamb before the foundation of the world. Rather than using the word "called," the apostle uses the expression that Christ "laid hold" of him. Paul likewise had an obligation every day to "lay hold" himself, to make his "calling and choosing" certain, that his name not be erased from the book of life.

God stripped the apostles of nearly every earthly thing, and implanted in them the desire for the resurrection of the dead, the one hope. "For I think," said Paul, "God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men" (I Corinthians 4:9). Hungry, thirsty, homeless, poorly clothed, persecuted and slandered, these men labored and changed the world. But in them, as Paul so clearly stated, was the drive to "press on." "I exhort you therefore," comes the challenge that rings down through the centuries, "be imitators of me" (I Corinthians 4:16). Because Dad says we're not there yet!

Following the Upward Call through Philippians

Focused!!

The English language proverb says, "Do one thing; do it well!" In a competitive market place, a business or a company has to be near the top in order to continue to provide great sales and service. To accomplish that, the leadership has to focus on the one thing that they do well, better than or competitive with other entities in their niche or realm. Many a business or corporation has gone under because they became slack and didn't focus, or because they became too scattered and lost their focus. Or, as has also been said, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." Such lessons should not be lost on the Disciples of Christ.

- **Finish strong** - The scripture does not teach "once saved, always saved." What it does emphasize in a multiplicity of ways is the importance of finishing strong, "faithful until death" (Revelation 2:10). Paul states that his purpose in sharing in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and knowing the power of the Lord's resurrection is to know Christ and to "attain to the resurrection from the dead." He is conscious, obviously, that he has not "already obtained it," or, as he rephrases it, has "already become perfect." The apostle is really using a multiplicity of words to emphasize the significance of receiving the resurrection of the righteous, saying that he wants to "lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." Again he states, "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet" (Philippians 3:13). But the drive to finish is clearly there!
- **"One thing I do"** - Having honed his words and fixed his focus the apostle states his determination and drive in these terms: "But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on ... " Remembrance of past mistakes or terrible trauma is a hindrance to present performance and progress. One of the sometimes seemingly brutal actions that the saint of God has to take is to forget what lies behind. Even if the past has some pleasant memories, those also have to be set aside so that the focus can be on what has to be done right now to attain to the goal of the resurrection of the dead. The mindset has to be to "reach for what lies ahead."
- **"I press on"** - Satan, like the Titanic, is going down. And as a large vessel creates a whirlpool as it sinks, so the god of this world has created a giant spiritual maelstrom as he is being sent on his way to an everlasting hell fire. This sucking power of this whirlpool is powerful and pulls many a well-intentioned person into its center, one who did not seriously enough recognize its suction and take disciplined measures to get to the calm waters provided by Christ. The apostle Paul, then, puts tremendous emphasis on his mindset, and the mindset that is so necessary for victorious union with Christ, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). The power of those words shakes the ground: I PRESS ON!

What a person is reaching for is a much more powerful long-term motivator than what he is running from. For those who understand the picture and plan of God, the most powerful of all is the reach for the prize - the positive resurrection from the dead - of what the apostle terms "the upward call of God." On one side is the sucking maw of Satan's careening downward; on the other is that beckoning voice of the Lord Jesus appealing for all mankind to leave this world behind to come and fellowship with Him for all eternity. "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice," affirmed the Lord Jesus. "My sheep hear My voice," He averred, "and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:27,28). Keep listening, keep following! It is the upward call of God.

As Many as Are Perfect

It has been said that the sincerest form of admiration is imitation. The apostle Paul twice appealed to the Corinthian brethren on this basis: "In Christ Jesus," said he, "I became your father through the gospel," as contrasted to those who were simply follow-up tutors. "I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me" (I Corinthians 4:15, 16). "Be imitators of me," he appealed also, "just as I also am of Christ" (I Corinthians 11:1). The exhortations for imitation ultimately point to Christ, the apostle and high priest of our confession. "The one who says he abides in Him," adds the apostle John, "ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked" (I John 2:6). "Christ suffered for you," was Peter's contribution to the discussion, "leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth" (I Peter 2:21, 22). And if the exhortations of the apostles Paul, John, and Peter were not enough, Jesus Himself had stated, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

- **Perfection in Philippi** - The apostle Paul has written at length on the surpassing value of knowing Christ, and amplified his desire to participate in the positive resurrection from the dead that Christ offers to those declared righteous. "Let us therefore," he encourages the brethren, "as many as are perfect, have this attitude" (Philippians 3:15). Some of the brethren in Philippi were walking in the footsteps of Christ. This is significant because the charge is often made that no one can be an imitator of Christ. Some of the saints were, and had probably suffered much in their Christian walk so that the dross of their character had been purged in the refining fires of their persecutions; they also had to fight that good fight of faith every day.
- **God's working** - The all out drive of those who were of the similar mindset as Paul were pressing on toward upward call of God in Christ Jesus, "And if in anything you have a different attitude," appends the apostle, "God will reveal that also to you" (Philippians 3:15). "The Father of spirits", said Hebrews' writer, "disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness" (Hebrews 12:9, 10). The goal of God is that disciples of Christ "be holy," as the Almighty stated it, "for I am holy" (I Peter 1:16). Hence it is that He has a disciplined program for each of His children of faith, and is working on His part to help them "be perfect" as he is perfect. So if there is any saint still short or that perfection, God will show him where he lacks through "the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing" (I Peter 4:12). To the extent that anyone had hit a series of days where they were being "imitators of God, as beloved children" (Ephesians 5:1), Paul encourages them with these words: "however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained" (Philippians 3:16).

"Brethren," is Paul's sincere way of identifying with and appealing to the saints at Philippi, "join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us" (Philippians 3:17), Paul was an imitator Christ who unashamedly encouraged others to follow his example - this is certainly a victor in Christ, not one who cried out as a Christian, "Wretched man that I am!" (Romans 7:24). And it wasn't just Paul; there were others who could be pointed out as those who exhibited the character of Christ, and whose lives were worthy patterns for developing saints. "As He is," were the words of John as he described the positive picture of Christ in glory, "so also are we in this world" (I John 4:18). Imitation is indeed the sincerest form of admiration. Let us admire the Jesus who is, and imitate His character!

Enemies of the Cross

Satan, the prince of darkness, has from the beginning done everything in his power to drag mankind down to his level. Using all the pull power of fleshly desires, the outcast angel works inside the skulls of people to draw them into sin. "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins," averred the apostle Paul, "in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:1, 2). When the devil gets enough control of the minds of certain men, then he can use those people to influence others and confuse them with false doctrines. "But the Spirit explicitly says that in latter times some will fall away from the faith," explained the apostle, "paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron" (1 Timothy 4:1, 2). The warnings are there!

- **Two walks** - Everyone is walking, spiritually speaking, through this life on earth. Those who will follow Paul's example and "walk according to the pattern" of those who are approved by Christ will enter by the narrow gate and tread the path that leads to eternal life. But there are others. "For many walk," warns Paul, "of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ" (Philippians 3:18). The gospel, from the first time it was preached on the Day of Pentecost, 30 AD, contains the basic elements of Christ's death on the cross, His bodily resurrection on the third day, His appearances to witnesses over a period of forty days, and His ascension to glory. Those who were "enemies of the cross" were enemies of the whole gospel; by attacking the first point they were attacking all. The apostle was sorry that guys and gals, some men chose to be enemies of the cross, some their "end is even coming from the ranks of those who had once been Christians. But they were choosing to walk the wrong direction, and Paul is hopeful that none of the Philippian brethren would be fooled into following in their steps.
- **Enemy characteristics** - The apostle Paul wants the saints in Philippi, along with the overseers and deacons to understand clearly those men and women who would choose to be enemies of the cross. Enemies are not content to let someone have their belief system; they are aggressively engaged in destroying their opposition. "The mind set on the flesh." Paul informed the brethren in Rome, "is hostile toward God" (Romans 8:7). The apostle desires that the brethren understand the nature of that hostility so that they are not blind-sided by these enemies' viciousness. Paul had to tell the brethren, "even weeping," of these people, many of whom at one point were Christians. Their "end is destruction," asseverates the apostle, "whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is their shame, who set their minds on earthly things" (Philippians 3:19).

Because these people want what they want - whether it be power, position, or money - they will attempt to destroy what stands in their way. Their "god" is their appetite. Because their minds are set "on earthly things," they cast aside true spiritual values easily, and ignore the omnipresence of God who is aware of any secret meetings or hidden agendas. Whatever glories they receive, whatever accolades are sent in their direction from fawning carnal admirers, are really black marks against their souls when measured by heaven's standards. Regardless, then, of whatever vicious attacks or threats these enemies of the cross make against those who are standard bearers for Christ, the saints are to be encouraged and to continue to "walk according to the pattern" set in motion by the apostle Paul. As for these other guys and gals, their "end is destruction"!

Body of Glory

"You are from below." said Jesus to some of the hostile Jewish hierarchy. "I am from above; you are of this world. I am not of this world" (John 8:23). Jesus clearly came from heaven, as revealed in some of the poignant comments recorded in the gospel according to John. Another example is in regard to the glorification of the Christ. Speaking of the rivers of living water referenced by Jesus, the scripture commented. "But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39). For that glorification Jesus prayed using these words: "And now, glorify Me together with Yourself with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5). The Lord had come from glory, and was returning to glory following His crucifixion and resurrection. He came from heaven to earth, and returned to heaven again. His goal: to lift men - those who would be willing to be redeemed from the morass into which mankind in general had fallen - up to the heights of heaven itself.

- **Born from above** - Jesus came "from above"; He used similar terminology in describing those who would be immersed into Christ. "Truly, truly, I say to you," He animadverted, "unless one is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). This more literal rendition of this famous verse really brings out what Jesus was intending to accomplish; no longer would His disciples be "from below"; they would like Him be "from above."
- **Heavenly citizenship** - The Philippian brethren had all been "born of water and the Spirit." Hence Paul, contrasting them with the enemies of the cross, "who set their minds on earthly things," lifts their spirits with these words: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). Saints have been raised up and seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:6). It makes sense, then, that each Christian is already a citizen of heaven, and is also "from above."
- **The second coming** - The angels ("two men in white clothing") explained to the apostles as Jesus lifted off the earth and was received out of their sight by a cloud: "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). "Behold," said John the revelator. "He is coming in the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him" (Revelation 1:7). Saints, then, "eagerly wait for a Savior" who will come from heaven.
- **Resurrection body** - At the Lord's return, everyone - saved and unsaved - will receive their resurrection bodies. For the faithful disciples of Christ, this will be a tremendously joyous moment. Jesus, at that time, "will transform the body of our humble state into conformity of the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:21). How awesome will it be to be a recipient of that great power of Christ, when that power transforms our humble, weak, transient bodies into conformity with that tremendous glory that Jesus now possesses following His ascension!

The apostle Paul has been making the general point all the way through this section about how much he personally desires the proper resurrection from the dead. As he discussed the enemies of the cross, he noted that their "end is destruction." Properly understood, that destructive end in the lake of fire, where the smoke of the torment goes up forever and ever, is overpowering and mind-numbing. At the exact opposite end of the spiritual spectrum is the resurrection of the righteous. "We know that," said the apostle John, "when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2). We eagerly await!

Stand Firm in the Lord

The Christian life is a life of struggle. Even champion Christians such as the apostle Paul had to "go, fight, win!" "I have fought the good fight," he commented as he knowingly approached his last days on earth, "I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (II Timothy 4:7). The pull of the world, the pressures from friends and enemies, the mounting discouragements, and the complications of health issues can all wage war against the faith of the saint, and in "losing heart" the Christian can lose it all. Hence the Holy Spirit, through His inspired authors, in various ways encourages the followers of Christ to be victors rather than victims, overcomers rather than overcome.

- **Stand firm** - The one hope of all saints - the clearly stated goal- is the resurrection of the righteous at Jesus' coming. At the last trumpet, the "body of our humble state" will be transformed into conformity with the body of Jesus' glory. "Therefore, my beloved brethren," appeals the apostle Paul, "whom I long to see, my joy and my crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved" (Philippians 4:1). Twice the apostle uses the word "beloved"; these brethren were among those for whom he laid down his life, and the apostle cared intensely about them and their eternities. He calls them his "joy" also; Paul's purpose was to present every man complete before Christ, and that these brethren were still walking with the Lord was a source of great joy to him. The saints were also his "crown"; they were also his reward before the great King. But all of this would be meaningless if the brethren wandered away from the faith. Hence comes the exhortation, "stand firm in the Lord."
- **Live in harmony** - The congregation at Philippi, in contrast to so many others to whom epistles were written, had minimal problems. The one remonstrance in this letter is to two women: "I urge Euodia," emphasizes the apostle, "and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord" (Philippians 4:2). The language indicates that these two ladies needed to get past their personal differences, quit fighting, and start speaking to one another civilly again, recognizing the big picture and focusing on the Lord. "Indeed, true comrade," appends Paul, possibly speaking directly to Epaphroditus, who would be carrying this letter, "I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel..." (Philippians 4:3). These women had participated somehow in the challenges the apostle went through for the gospel, but had apparently got so focused on personal issues that Paul asks his "true comrade" to give these ladies an assist. God's goal is that all brethren live together in harmony.
- **Fellow workers** - Euodia and Syntyche, to their credit, had shared with Paul in his struggles for the cause of the gospel, "together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life." Reaching the lost and strengthening the saints is called "struggle" and "work." Clement and others are commended for their participation with Paul. Clearly, sacrifice is necessary in order for the gospel to go forward, as well as harmony and teamwork.

Once again, the scripture mentions "the book of life." For the individual to have his name entered in the book of life, he needs to "be born again," wherein he has moved out of death into life. In immersion into Christ, the saint now has the assurance that his arising "to walk in newness of life" has resulted in his being in fellowship with God and that his name is now recorded among the ranks of the spiritually living. But that name can be erased from the book of life (Revelation 3:5). It is incumbent that the believer continue to fight the good fight of faith. "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). Get your name written there, and keep it written there!

Joy and Forbearance

God's analysis is that, overall, this world is not a happy place. Jesus, said the apostle Paul, "gave Himself that He might deliver us out of this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). Even when the surface seems somewhat serene, underneath there is a lot of "twistedness," as was described by Jesus "O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?" (Matthew 17:17). The situation down here is so far removed from what God's desire is that Jesus Himself would exclaim, "I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49). The Almighty God's long term goal, however, has been to use the gospel to pull a special people out of this world. "You are," said Peter to the early Christians, "a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (II Peter 2:9). Such a people, then, are to exhibit special qualities in order for that proclamation to be effective.

- **Joy** - Most of the human race operates under the delusion that something or someone will make them happy, and sometimes Christians have not yet learned that such a supposition is indeed a delusion. Joy, as God helps His saints to understand, is a mental state of mind that is a result of God's working within the disciple of Christ - helping him make the decision to be joyful, and helping him develop the habitual attitude of rejoicing. Thus it is that the apostle Paul writes to the Philippian brethren, "Rejoice in the Lord always; - again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). Joy is commanded; it is clear then that joy results from a decision. All the big things for Christians are taken care of, so long as the saint maintains his fellowship with God through Christ. He has passed out of death into life; nothing can separate him from the love of God, whether it be things of life or physical death itself. Viewed from the eternal perspective, the faithful follower of Christ can be continually joyful as he sets his mind and his affection on things above rather than on things of the earth. Each word needs to be savored: "Rejoice in the Lord always!"
- **Forbearance** - Forbearance is feeling like reaching out and pushing someone, but keeping your hands in your pockets instead. (Some translations render it tolerance, but that word is so politically charged that it really does not convey the sense that Paul wants to communicate here.) "Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men," says he. "The Lord is near" (Philippians 4:5). The saint, on his part, is to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, exhibiting the character of Christ in all situations. The lost people of this world obviously are not walking in the path of Christ, and the brethren themselves often fall short. The forbearing Christian will keep his eye on the big picture of others' eternity rather than allowing the real or imagined slights to cause him to retaliate. A classic example of forbearance occurs in Jesus' own home in Capernaum. When a paralyzed man was brought to Jesus for healing, the crowd was too thick and the conveyors of the paralytic could not get near the Lord. Determined, they hauled the paralyzed man up on the roof of the house, tore a hole in it, and let the man down through the hole on his stretcher. Jesus, keeping the big picture of eternity in mind, forbore to be upset at the fact that inconvenience and expense had just been dumped on Him, and forgave the man's sin and healed him.

"The Lord is near!" The brethren need to keep constantly in mind the presence of the Lord. They need to be rejoicing continually because of the value of the spiritual blessings they already possess, and need to be forbearing in their demeanor, words, and actions toward other saints and the lost sheep of this world. Such joy and forbearance on the part of saints would really impact the world!

Peace Beyond Comprehension

People want inner peace. They often do not know how to get it, or are unwilling to yield to the principles which will provide it. But they want it. Hence it is that the purveyors of the world are able to supply all sorts of remedies, offering a temporary relief or fake hope. Whether it is the liquor business, the drug trade, or false religion, the providers are playing on their clientele's need for inner peace. The solutions proffered, of course, do not work; they simply pull people deeper into the quagmire of despair and confusion. The answer, by the All Wise' design, is for the denizens of this planet to turn God for help. Only He can provide inner peace, and only on His terms!

- **Handling anxiety** - The reasons for anxiety are almost infinite. They range from as small as being anxious about an upcoming appointment or a flight that is coming in to as large as whether some dear family member is going to live or die. Here is the Holy Spirit's advice to the saint: "Be anxious for nothing." Well, how is that done? The inspired apostle Paul continues, "But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). The saint of God who develops a disciplined prayer life will be able to handle anxiety. When the prayers are systematic, with significant portions devoted to praise and thanksgiving, then the Christian's mind is refocused on things above and he knows his supplications have pull power in the presence of the Almighty. Under these conditions, the disciple of Christ has the Biblical assurance that God has everything handled, and that there is no reason for anxiety.
- **God's peace** - No one who is separated from Christ by his own personal sin can have God's peace. Until that individual is willing to submit to King Jesus and obey His gospel by being immersed into Christ, he is guaranteed to lack inner peace. When we have "been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Once that reconciliation with the Lord of the universe has been accomplished, then prayer can kick in. "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension," explains Paul, "shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). What mega-words these are! The peace of God surpasses all comprehension!! It cannot be bought, it cannot be mined, it cannot be planted and harvested. This peace only comes from God; it comes first through the initial union with Christ in immersion, then through the follow up of disciplined prayer.
- **Guarding the heart and mind** - The results of anxiety are a quivering heart and an unsteady mind. God is willing to have His peace stand as a sentry at the entrance to the heart and the gateway to the mind. Peace's job is to ensure that no major or minor perturbations reach the chambers of the heart. It is peace's function to block unsettling messages that would set up tremors in the brain. No wonder it is called "peace that surpasses comprehension." And because this peace is from God, and backed by His unshakeable word, it is guaranteed to accomplish what God said it will.

God's part is certain. So if there is any lack, it is coming from the Christian himself. There is a general tendency on the part of the flesh to want instant results, similar to popping some kind of pill and having peace immediately flood the soul. But it doesn't work that way. God's peace comes when the saint consistently engages in the type of prayer that praises and thanks God. If a brother or sister is inconsistent, or their prayers are not significantly filled with praise and thanksgiving, then the peace of God will not show up to guard their hearts and minds. And the anxiety which remains will not be God's fault. So pray consistently, and let the peace of God roll in!

Your Mental Environment

The mind is going to live someplace. Whether it lives in the depths of despair or whether it lives focused on the courts of glory depends on the cumulated decisions of the individual Christian.

The word of God emphasizes that all attitudes and actions of members of the human race are decision-based. Therefore the Judge of all mankind holds each person accountable for all those decisions. From the time of Adam and Eve onward, however, the natural tendency of people has been to duck that accountability and blame others or circumstances for their decisions and attitudes. The word of God, to correct that misunderstanding, brings an individual face to face with himself. Using the righteous principles of the law, the scripture speaks, "that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God" (Romans 3:19). No one gets to blame anyone else; everyone is held accountable for his own decisions. Thus the apostle Paul lets Christians know where to build the dwelling place for their minds.

- **List of positives** - After commanding the brethren to rejoice always, to exhibit their forbearing spirit, and to pray so that the peace of God would guard their hearts and minds, the apostle then brings in his list of positives to the table for the brethren to consider. "Finally, brethren," says he, "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things" (Philippians 4:8). These are all powerful, uplifting concepts. And the command is for each saint to have his mind dwell in the midst of these.
- **Training the mind** - The mind of the saint has to be trained to reject the negative instantly and get over to these positives. Every time a falsehood pops up, the disciple of Christ immediately needs to have his mind focus on what is true. The dishonorable needs to be rejected, and that which is honorable instantly upheld. Wrong must be put in its proper category, and whatever is right needs to be exalted. Impurity must be shunned, and that which is pure pushed to the forefront of the mind. That which is dark and ugly is to be discarded, and that which is lovely is to occupy the frame of vision. That which is disgusting and downward is to be shunted off to the side, so that the things of good reputation stand forth. That which pulls man into Satan's darkness is to be repelled, and anything of excellence is to be lifted up for example. That which is critical and destructive is to be turned away from, and that which is praiseworthy needs to be seen by the reformed mind and held in high regard. The saint really must see how destructive negative thoughts are, and make the continuing conscious effort to retrain his mind immediately to jump to these scripturally specified positives. The proper name for this is repentance!

Every holy one of God is responsible for creating the proper mental environment in which his mind dwells, as the apostle emphasized, "Let your mind dwell on these things." If a brother or sister lets his mind live in the midst of Hollywood hype or hip hop culture, then all the twistedness of those environments will be what drives his mind, even though he claims to be a Christian. If a Christian allows himself to hang out in the "gloom and doom room," then his attitude is going to stink, and he will not be an effective purveyor of the gospel, someone easy to live with, or a brother that others like to be around. The solution for so many mental battles the saint fights is simple: live in the positive mental environment specified by the Holy Spirit!

Contemplating Some Positives

The Holy Spirit, through His servant the apostle Paul, has elucidated certain positive principles. These principles, if implemented so as to form the Christian's mental and spiritual environment, enable him to be victorious in the midst of what others would call defeat, to be winners where it really counts - in the spiritual realm. "We are afflicted in every way," stated Paul, describing his and the other apostles' experiences, "but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (II Corinthians 4:8-10). How could the apostles and other first century Christians go through such trials and seeming defeats, but yet maintain such positive and true perspectives? The answer is that they created and kept the proper mental environment.

- **Whatever is true** - Satan is a liar, and according to Jesus, the father of lies. The saint of God, to maintain his proper and victorious attitude, must recognize the lies, but always focus on the things that are true. The great and eternal truths are centered about Jesus in glory and the wonders of the spiritual universe to come. "Set your mind on the things above," was Paul's exhortation to the Colossian brethren, "not on the things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2). The things of earth are temporary, laden with lies, and often discouraging; the truths of the upward call of God never are.
- **Whatever is honorable** - "Honor your father and mother," the apostle Paul quoted from the commandments written on stone, "which," said he, "is the first commandment with a promise" (Ephesians 6:2). It is a positive and uplifting mental exercise to honor the positions rightfully given to those who reared their children, especially in the Lord. "Honor all men," was the encouragement from Peter, "love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king" (I Peter 2:17). All men are made in the lineage of God, and it is positive pick-me-up to grant each one honor as befitting those who are spirit beings. Likewise, the position of king or whatever governing authority is to be honored as well, as it ultimately points to the eternal governance of the Great King!
- **Whatever is right** - So many things are wrong in a world that has been cursed since Adam ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But there are principles and precepts that are right. The whole concept of righteousness is based on what is right, and it is fruitful to focus on the blessings that come from living righteously and holy in this present age. The concept of justice is comes from what is right, and it is especially uplifting when tempered with the proper amount of mercy applied at the appropriate time. The Christian whose life is focused on what is right will be upbeat and reaching for the positive.
- **Whatever is pure** - Certainly the world itself, filled with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is laced with impurity. The follower of Christ is called to lift his sights upward, to the realm where angels and the redeemed continually praise God, where nothing pulls on the saints' thoughts with a downward sucking sound. No place here for double entendres, or bawdy behavior. Here only the sublime, the wonderful, and the spiritual play. "Everyone," commented the apostle John, in reference to Jesus' second coming, "who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself just as He is pure" (I John 3:3). Pure thoughts are powerful positives!

"Whatever..." is often a "downer" comment. But when it is coupler' with the true, the honorable, the right, and the pure, it is a powerful means of focusing thoughts and attitudes upward. The saint who can live in this mental environment will always have an upbeat day, praising God and encouraging others - like Paul, writing this letter of encouragement from jail to those outside prison!

Contemplating Some More Positives

Many saints want positive attitudes and upbeat actions to emanate from them without creating the inward base for such attitudes and actions. Not going to happen! God has so constructed the physical shell of the Christian that the mind has to be changed by reprogramming. "Do not be conformed to this world," Paul enjoined the brethren in Rome, "but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Unless the thought patterns of the mind are altered by systematic and intense redirection, the attitudes and the actions of the saint are going to be predictably very similar to those of the past. Since God is very interested in helping His children really change, His Holy Spirit has offered some very specific concepts upon which the saint is to focus His mind.

- **Whatever is lovely** - Adding to the list containing the *true*, the *honorable*, the *right*, and the *pure*, the apostle Paul puts forth the concept of "whatever is lovely." The Christian who will make his mind live in such a way as to see the beauty of God's creation, to marvel at the sunlight after the storm, to notice the good in people and congratulate their progress, and to understand the value of one precious soul is well on his way to having a good day every day.
- **Whatever is of good repute** - There are plenty of scam artists, crooks, and evil plotters in the world. Some of them wear suits; some do not. While the Christian needs to be aware of their existence, and be wary of their plots, he is not to let his mind dwell down there with these types of low life. Rather, he is to concentrate on the things which make for a good reputation. Honesty, hard work, doing it right the first time every time, good customer service, and follow through ... these are all qualities which will give the saint a good reputation in the work place and in the midst of the people - saints and others - with whom he must interact.
- **If there is any excellence** - In this world there is a lot of poor performance and poor workmanship. But the saint of God is to train his eye to see that which is excellent. Often the difference between what is average or acceptable and that which is excellent is in the details. It takes effort to look one step deeper and note the excellency of the workmanship, or to pay attention to the little extras that separate the top level performer from those faces in the crowd. Of course, all that God has done is of superb excellence, and the child of God needs to be able see His excellent workmanship in the things He has provided in the spiritual realm.
- **Anything worthy of praise** - There are plenty of things to criticize on earth, and there are many very critical, negative people. The disciple of Christ, however, has been called to a more elevated level of thinking. He is always looking for something to praise rather than something to criticize. When the follower of Jesus makes a habit of finding something genuinely praiseworthy in each person or in each situation, he is a very upbeat individual and others are attracted to him. When he gives the appropriate adoration to Him who is "enthroned upon the praises of Israel" (Psalm 22:3), he is joyful and full of hope, for his trust is not in himself but very consciously in Him who raises the dead.

The apostle Paul was such a positive, attractive person. For those interested in eternal life, he and those like him were "a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved" (II Corinthians 2:15). "The things," says Paul, referring to his list of the true to the praiseworthy, "you have learned and received and heard and seen in me; practice these things, and the God of peace shall be with you" (Philippians 4:9).

The Secret of Trusting

The congregation at Philippi was one of the great congregations of the first century. Begun by Paul and his team on the second missionary journey, the congregation consisted almost entirely of converts from the Gentiles from the first. When Paul, Silas, and other members of the team moved on, the physician Luke stayed for about four years in Philippi to solidify and forward the work. It is a credit to the work Luke did that the assembly in Philippi was such a solid and generous congregation. The Holy Spirit, beginning with the vision that Paul received calling the preachers to Macedonia, clearly orchestrated the timing and placement of the congregation, and then used the Philippian brethren in a major way in assisting Paul in the continuing thrust of the gospel.

- **Revived concern** - Time and time again, while Paul was laboring for the Lord on his second missionary journey, the congregation sent him financial assistance. At one point the apostle worked as a tentmaker six days a week in Corinth, and could only do some serious work in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia (where Philippi was located), they brought finances so that Paul could now go back to preaching full time. In jail now, some fifteen years later, Paul is again in need, and the Philippians come through. "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly," exclaims Paul, "that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity" (Philippians 4:10). The congregation was always willing to help; the apostle simply hadn't had need until his recent imprisonment.
- **The lesson of contentment** - From his conversion onward, Paul was obviously a committed individual. Over the years, he learned more - not only the doctrines of Christ by revelation, but also things necessary for his personal growth as an imitator of Christ. Appreciating the generosity and concern of the Philippian brethren, he then comments, "Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am" (Philippians 4:11). What a lesson for all the saints to learn! If the brethren in Christ could learn to be content in their circumstances, then the days would be full of rejoicing and productivity. What is needed is more trust in the Lord, to be able to trust that He knows what He is doing.
- **Know how** - Whether he had little or whether he had much, Paul was satisfied with what the Lord had provided for him at that point in his life. "I know how to get along with humble means," he comments, "and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need" (Philippians 4:12). The apostle had learned, through all the facets of educational opportunity the Lord provided, to focus on things above rather than on the earth. His earlier comment in this epistle was the key: "Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13,14). With that as his focus, he had the "know how" to handle prosperity and poverty.

The most important factor in handling any situation, whether it be adversity or conviviality, is trust in the Lord. This trust cannot be artificial; it must be honest, and it must be based on what is stated in the word of God. Paul avers, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). For this to work, the individual must have been immersed into Christ. For this to work, he must have received the indwelling Spirit in obedience to the gospel, the Spirit who does the strengthening. For this to work, the follower of Christ must be truly working for the Lord rather for any selfish purpose. But if those things are in place, and the saint is really trusting in the Lord, this will work! This will work!!

Proper Profit

The jail cells of the first century were not nice Holiday Inn hotel rooms, with running water and television. They were low budget operations, prisoners not being deemed worthy of much in the way of allocation of tax monies. Often those incarcerated were dependent upon friends or relatives to supply them with food and drink; otherwise starvation or dehydration were just days away. The apostle Paul, then, is appropriately grateful for the aid which the Philippian brethren had sent to him to enable him to survive this latest stint in prison. But he also was making it clear that, in the midst of these trying circumstances, he knew that God was providing, and would provide. He had learned, as he put it, "the secret" of being filled and going hungry. In that context, for the benefit of the brethren in Philippi and all brethren to the end of the age, he wrote the words that have sustained millions: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

- **"You have done well"** - The remnants of a typhoon battering the isles of the western Pacific can become the vortex for a major snowstorm sweeping across North America. The point is that God can marshal His resources from afar and send them to do His bidding. Whether it is a plague of locusts swept in by the east wind, or an abundance of quail carried to the camp of Israel, the Almighty has command of everything upon the earth. The apostle Paul knows, then, that whatever he truly needs to carry out his mission - food, drink, or other resources - will be provided somehow. "Nevertheless," says he to the Philippian brethren, "you have done well to share with me in my affliction" (Philippians 4:14). While stating his trust in the Father for the benefit of the brethren, and giving Him the credit for all provisions, he at the same time wants the appropriate accolades to come to the brethren in Philippi.
- **Their consistency** - As the apostle thinks back over his ten-plus years of fellowship with the church at Philippi, he is grateful for their consistency. "And you yourselves know, Philippians," he recalls, "that after the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs" (Philippians 4:15,16). The first place where Paul went after being asked to leave Philippi was Thessalonica. The Philippians sent gifts to assist him there, showing from the first their generosity and desire to back Paul in his preaching of the gospel. Often they were the only ones continuing to share (monetary contributions) with the apostle. This really sets the standard for all congregations of Christ in the years and centuries to follow. What high commendation!!
- **Seeking their profit** - The years of preaching and teaching, of suffering for the sake of those who would inherit the kingdom of God, made Paul selfless. Hence, even in being the beneficiary of the gifts the brethren from Philippi sent to him in one of Rome's prisons, he is still more focused on the brethren than himself. "Not that I seek the gift itself," he explains, "but I seek for the profit which increases to your account" (Philippians 4:17). Paul is more pleased for the treasures in heaven accruing for the brethren than he is for having received their assistance.

The Greek word for the financial sharing for the spreading of the gospel is *koinonia*. The general concept connected with *koinonia* is *fellowship*, or things held in common. Hence it is that the Lord's Supper comes under this heading, as well as Paul's desire to share in the fellowship of the Lord's sufferings. Properly understood, contributing financially for the sake of the gospel is part of the joyous fellowship saints have in common. "And do not neglect doing good and *sharing*," says the Holy Spirit, "for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:16).

God's Ability To Supply

When Jesus sent the twelve apostles two-by-two out on their first teaching foray, He told them not to take any extra materials with them. "He instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belt" (Mark 6:8). His idea on this first training mission was that they should learn to trust Him to provide for their needs, even though there was no visible plan for their sustenance. They learned, and so did Paul. "I have learned," said he, "to be content in whatever circumstances I am." "I have learned," he again asseverated, "the secret of being filled and going hungry." All saints, likewise, should learn the same lesson, to know that God can and will provide in amazing ways for His children who are carrying out His mission.

Paul's needs met - The apostle Paul could have been in a very desperate situation in his imprisonment in Rome. But the Almighty worked through the brethren in Philippi and others to ensure that His bond-servant had his basic needs supplied while incarcerated. "But I have received everything in full," he writes in appreciation, "and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18). What was sent by the Philippians was not only a blessing to Paul, but it was - most importantly - a spiritual sacrifice that pleased God! How much more valuable are these types of offerings as contrasted to the smoke of burnt goat flesh ascending to Him who dwells on high.

- **What God can do** - It is interesting to sort out man's role in the production of the things necessary for life as contrasted to God's role. The Father, of course, supplies all the big and foundational things which man requires to live: air to breathe, water, photosynthesis, functioning of the cell, seed for planting ... But, since the time of Adam, man has to work for his daily bread. If he doesn't plant when he needs to plant, and if he is too lazy to harvest when he needs to harvest, he will starve. On a larger scale, socialist economic systems tend to collapse and result in massive starvation, whereas the free enterprise, private ownership of property economic systems result in plenty. The promise of God, for the saints, is that in the midst of mankind's muddling, He can provide what is necessary. "And my God," states Paul confidently, "shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). The resources of God's riches in glory are infinite. The faithful Philippians were going to be provided for regardless of the economic conditions around them.

Life on earth is a testing ground for the disciple of Christ. Can God supply what the Christian needs? Does the Christian have faith that God can supply all his needs? The answer to the first question is an obvious "Yes." But the answer to the second question is one that will be worked out in the earthly sojourn of the one making the claim to godliness. Will he compromise when faced with economic uncertainty, or will he continue to stand firm for the principles of the faith of Christ? Will he trust God, or will he sink to trusting himself?

But God is not only interested in providing for those who have true Biblical faith in Him. He is also very interested in finding those who, like the Philippians, have faith to give out of their limited resources for the support of men like the apostle Paul. They believe that God cannot only provide for them, but that He can use them as a conduit for the unlimited resources of the riches of glory. May the brethren of today develop such a faith, that the gospel of glory might go forward to the ends of the earth!

Closing Comments

It is amazing how God has communicated His message in the midst of the matrix of human history. The chronicles of the history of Israel intersect the chronicles of the ancient nations of the world. The spectacle of Jesus Christ, in the words of the apostle Paul, was not carried out in a corner; it was in the full sight of the Jewish and Roman worlds. The great doctrines concerning the Christ and His church are often revealed in the courtroom defenses of the apostles and other exponents of the gospel. And the encouragement, correction, redirection, and motivation of the early churches are accomplished by epistles to individuals and congregations. These letters are not fake or stilted; they have the ring of real epistles to real people, written with real concern and real love. The apostle Paul, for example, knew and loved the saints in Philippi, and they knew and loved him.

- **Proper praise** - The congregation in Philippi was certainly one of the greatest congregations, by any spiritual measure, in the history of the church as a whole. It is fitting, therefore, that this epistle should close with appropriate adoration to the great and mighty God who orchestrates it all. "Now to our God and Father," is Paul's expression of praise, "be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (Philippians 4:20). Certainly all the praise and glory rightfully belongs to the Father, and there should never be any shortage of praise to Him.
- **Closing greetings** - This letter opened with greetings to all the saints in Philippi, with special note of the elders and deacons. The apostle wants to bring everything to a close by completing the circle, as is often done in exiting a conversation. "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus," says he. "The brethren who are with me," he adds, "greet you. All the saints greet you," he has the opportunity to superadd, "especially those of Caesar's household" (Philippians 4:21, 22). What an awesome nugget of information for the faithful brethren in the Roman garrison town of Philippi! This congregation began to be on solid footing with the conversion of the Roman official, the jailer. For them to hear that the gospel had now reached right into the very household of the Roman emperor would be tremendously uplifting and exciting!!
- **The grace of God** - The letters always begin with comments on and appeals for God's grace, and often close with an expressed desire for that grace as well, and this epistle is no exception. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit," is how Paul finishes this letter (Philippians 4:23). This is interesting phraseology. The prayer is that all of God's bountiful provision - which is what His grace really is - be used to strengthen the individual spirits of the brethren in Philippi. Such an appeal is not surprising coming from the apostle Paul, who clearly had laid his life down for these brethren as well as many others.

The elements which run through the letter to the Philippians, though unique, are still typical of the types of things which the apostle would bring to the surface. The use of the names of saints inside the congregation, and a discussion of strengths, weaknesses, and solutions to their problems, all shout that these are real people and that this is not a faked letter. What it also shows, along with the other epistles of the New Testament writings, is that these congregations represent the real spread of the gospel throughout the Roman world and beyond. In spite of their being persecuted, in many cases to the maximum, these common people believed in the resurrection of the Jesus Christ and were willing to go to their graves without denying God or compromising the doctrinal truths connected with Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. These letters ring true, and confirm in a totally different way the truthfulness of the first century testimony.