# PHILIPPIANS

## BIBLE STUDY

*A Verse-by-Verse Study*



*To live is Christ: joy in every circumstance,*
*the mind of Christ, and pressing on toward the goal*

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**Philippians Bible Study: A Verse-by-Verse Study**

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**A note before you begin.** This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

# A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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# Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the book of Philippians. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

The season that should have been the most miserable was the start of my recovery. I walked into my first 12-step meeting on May 29, 2020, ashamed and broken. Yet that is where joy started coming back. Paul found joy in a prison cell. God can give joy in places we never expected it.

Philippians is one of the warmest letters in the New Testament. Paul wrote it from chains, not knowing whether he would live or die, and yet the word joy runs all through it. In just four chapters he shows us how to have joy in suffering, how to think the way Jesus thought, how to keep pressing on, and how to find peace and contentment in any situation. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on Philippians. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand what He has given us in His Son. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

*2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)*

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in Philippians. It is a thank-you letter from a missionary in prison to a church that loved him and had sent him a gift. Some of its best-known verses are often pulled out of that setting. "I have strength for all things in the One who strengthens me, Christ" (4:13) is about being content whether Paul had plenty or nothing, not a promise that we can do anything we want. "Work out your own salvation" (2:12) is not a call to earn salvation, because the very next verse says God is the One working in us. When we read each verse in the flow of the letter, these verses mean even more, not less.

## Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

**Exegesis** means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

**Eisegesis** means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

**Hermeneutics** is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

*2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)*

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. Philippians is a personal letter that teaches plainly, and this study takes Paul at his word: Jesus really is God who became a man and died on a cross, God really does

finish the work He starts in His people, and a believer really can have joy and peace in chains because Christ is his life.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Greek, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

## How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.
- Old and New Testament links: after many verses you will find a short line in small type that lists the places where the other Testament quotes, fulfills, pictures, or echoes that passage. "Quoted" means the New Testament quotes the Old Testament words. "Fulfilled" means the New Testament tells us a prophecy or promise came true. "Pictured" means the New Testament itself points to an Old Testament person, event, or object as a picture of Christ. "Alluded to" means a clear echo in shared words or pictures. Every link is listed again in a table at the back of the book.

## Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. Here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: four weeks. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background together, and a last meeting to go back over the whole letter.
- Half a chapter a week: eight weeks. The Scripture for each chapter is already printed in two parts, and the start of the second part is a natural place to stop.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of Philippians touch painful subjects: suffering and facing death (1:20-24), serious illness (2:25-30), conflict between believers in the same church (4:2-3), worry and anxiety (4:6-7), and going without (4:11-12). If you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. Someone in your group may be grieving, sick, or carrying a heavy load of anxiety.

If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of Philippians. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

# Overview of Philippians

Philippians is the eleventh book of the New Testament. It sits between Ephesians and Colossians. It is one of four letters, often called the Prison Letters, that Paul wrote while under arrest. The other three are Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Of the four, Philippians is the most personal. Paul writes to old friends, people who had stood with him from the first day they heard the gospel.

The key word of the letter is joy. In the SLB, the words joy and rejoice show up sixteen times in these four short chapters. That is striking when you remember where Paul was. He was a prisoner, chained to a Roman soldier, waiting to hear whether he would be set free or put to death. Some people were preaching Christ just to make his life harder. And yet he writes, "Rejoice in the Lord always" (4:4). Paul's joy did not come from his circumstances. It came from Christ. He tells us so in the verse that best sums up the letter:

*Philippians 1:21 (SLB)*

"For to me, to live ***is*** Christ, and to die ***is*** gain."

Philippians also holds one of the greatest passages in the Bible about who Jesus is. In 2:5-11 Paul tells us that Jesus existed in the form of God, emptied Himself, took the form of a slave, and humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross, and that God has highly exalted Him so that every knee will bow to Him.

Philippians has 4 chapters and 104 verses. Here is its structure:

**Part One: Joy in Christ and the Mind of Christ (chapters 1 and 2)**

- Chapter 1: To Live Is Christ
- Chapter 2: The Mind of Christ

**Part Two: Knowing Christ and the Peace of God (chapters 3 and 4)**

- Chapter 3: Pressing On Toward the Goal
- Chapter 4: Rejoice in the Lord Always

# Background of the Book

**Author:** The letter opens with "Paul and Timothy, slaves of Jesus Christ" (1:1). Timothy was with Paul when he wrote and was well known in Philippi, but Paul is the one speaking all through the letter, and he speaks of Timothy as "he" in 2:19-23. The early church accepted Paul as the author without question, and almost all modern scholars agree. Some scholars believe our Philippians is two or three of Paul's letters joined together, because of the sharp turn at 3:2. I take the letter as one letter, just as the church has always received it. A friend writing from prison may well change subjects suddenly when a danger comes to mind, and the same themes of joy, unity, and the mind of Christ run from the first chapter to the last.

**Who it was written to:** Paul writes "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons" (1:1). The overseers were the leaders who shepherded the church, also called elders. The deacons were servants who cared for the practical needs of the church. The church seems to have been made up mostly of Gentiles, people who were not Jewish by birth.

**The city of Philippi:** Philippi was in Macedonia, the northern part of what is now Greece. It was named after Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. In 42 B.C. a famous battle was fought near the city, where the armies of Mark Antony and Octavian (who later became Caesar Augustus) defeated Brutus and Cassius, the men who had killed Julius Caesar. After that, Rome made Philippi a colony and settled many retired Roman soldiers there. Luke calls it "a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a colony" (Acts 16:12). A Roman colony was like a small piece of Rome set down in another land. Its people were Roman citizens, it followed Roman law, and its people were very proud of it. That background helps explain why Paul writes, "Only conduct yourselves as citizens worthily of the gospel" (1:27) and "our citizenship exists in the heavens" (3:20). The city sat on the Via Egnatia, the great Roman road that ran east and west across Macedonia.

**How the church began:** The church in Philippi was the first church Paul planted in Europe. On his second missionary journey, Paul saw a vision of a man of Macedonia pleading, "Having crossed over into Macedonia, help us!" (Acts 16:9). Paul and his companions went to Philippi. Silas was with him, Timothy had joined them a short time before (Acts 16:1-3), and Luke, who wrote Acts, writes as one of the group in this part of the story (Acts 16:10-17). There seem to have been few Jews in the city, because there was no synagogue (a Jewish meeting place for prayer and the reading of Scripture). On the Sabbath, Paul found a group of women praying by the river. One of them was Lydia, a businesswoman from Thyatira who sold purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart, and she and her household were baptized (Acts 16:13-15). Then Paul cast an evil spirit out of a slave girl who made money for her masters by fortune-telling. Her masters had Paul and Silas beaten with rods and thrown into prison. At midnight, with their feet in the stocks, they were praying and singing hymns to God. An earthquake shook the prison open. The jailer was about to kill himself, but Paul stopped him, and the jailer asked, "Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved?" They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:30-31). He and his household believed and were baptized that same night. Luke does not tell us what became of the slave girl, but think of the people God reached in those first days: a

businesswoman from Asia and a Roman jailer and his family. Paul visited the city again on his third journey (Acts 20:1-6).

**When and where it was written:** Paul was in chains when he wrote (1:7, 13, 17). He speaks of the "praetorium" (1:13), the Roman guard or the governor's headquarters, and he sends greetings from "those of Caesar's household" (4:22). Most Bible teachers believe he wrote from Rome during his house arrest, about A.D. 61 to 62 (Acts 28:16, 30), and that is the view this study follows. Some scholars suggest he wrote from an imprisonment in Ephesus, which would bring the date a few years earlier, and others suggest Caesarea, where Paul was held for two years (Acts 23:33-35; 24:27). Paul seems to expect a decision on his case soon (2:23), and he hopes to be released and visit them again (1:25-26; 2:24).

**Epaphroditus and the gift:** The believers in Philippi had given to Paul again and again. They sent help to him more than once when he was in Thessalonica (4:16), and they were among the poor but generous churches of Macedonia that gave beyond their means (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). When they heard Paul was in prison in Rome, they sent a gift with one of their own men, Epaphroditus (4:18). While he was with Paul, Epaphroditus became so sick that he nearly died (2:27). The church heard about it and was worried. Now that he was well, Paul sent him home, most likely carrying this letter.

**Purpose:** Paul writes for several reasons. He thanks them for their gift and their partnership in the gospel (1:5; 4:10-18). He tells them how things are going for him and that his chains have helped spread the gospel (1:12-26). He calls them to unity and humility, using Jesus as the great example (2:1-11; 4:2-3). He explains why he is sending Epaphroditus back and why Timothy will come soon (2:19-30). He warns them against false teachers who wanted Gentile believers to be circumcised and keep the law (3:2-11), and against people who lived for their own appetites (3:18-19). Above all, he wants them to rejoice in the Lord and to know the peace of God in every circumstance (4:4-9).

# Chapter 1: To Live Is Christ

## Scripture

**1:1-11** Paul and Timothy, slaves of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with ***the*** overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and ***the*** Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God at all the remembrance of you, always in every supplication of mine for you all, making the supplication with joy, for your partnership in the gospel from ***the*** first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will complete ***it*** until ***the*** day of Jesus Christ; even as it is right for me to think this about you all, because I have you in the heart, both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all being fellow partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all in ***the*** affection of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, so that you may be pure and without offense for ***the*** day of Christ, having been filled with fruits of righteousness, which ***are*** through Jesus Christ, to ***the*** glory and praise of God.

**1:12-30** Now I want you to know, brothers, that the things concerning me have come rather to ***the*** advancement of the gospel, so that my chains in Christ have become clearly known in the whole praetorium and to all the rest, and most of the brothers in ***the*** Lord, having become confident by my chains, dare more abundantly to speak the word without fear. Some indeed even from envy and strife, but some also from goodwill, preach Christ. Those indeed out of selfish ambition proclaim Christ, not purely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but those out of love, knowing that I am appointed for ***the*** defense of the gospel. What then? Only ***that*** in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice. For I know that this will turn out for me to salvation through your supplication and ***the*** supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing I will be ashamed, but in all boldness, as always, also now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death. For to me, to live ***is*** Christ, and to die ***is*** gain. But if to live in ***the*** flesh, this ***is*** fruit of work for me; and what I will choose, I do not make known. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having the desire to depart and to be with Christ, ***which is*** very much better; but to remain in the flesh ***is*** more necessary for your sake. And being confident of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of the faith, so that your boasting may abound in Christ Jesus in me through my coming to you again. Only conduct yourselves as citizens worthily of the gospel of Christ, so that whether having come and seen you or being absent, I may hear the things concerning you, that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one soul striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not being frightened in anything by those who oppose, which is to them indeed a demonstration of destruction, but to you of salvation, and this from God. For to you it was granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer on behalf of Him, having the same conflict such as you saw in me and now hear ***to be*** in me.

## Chapter 1 Preview

Paul opens his letter with thanks and prayer. Every time he remembers the believers in Philippi, he thanks God for them and prays with joy, because they have been his partners in the gospel from the first day. He is sure that God, who began a good work in them, will finish it. He prays that their love will keep growing in knowledge and discernment, so that they will live pure lives filled with the fruit of righteousness.

Then Paul tells them how things are going for him in prison. His chains have not stopped the gospel. They have spread it. The whole Roman guard knows why he is there, and other believers have become bolder. Some preach Christ out of envy, but Paul still rejoices that Christ is preached. He faces the real possibility of death, and he gives us one of the greatest lines in the Bible: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." He ends the chapter by calling the church to live as citizens worthy of the gospel, standing together without fear, because suffering for Christ is part of the gift God has given them.

## Chapter 1 Study

**1:1** *Paul and Timothy, slaves of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with* ***the*** *overseers and deacons:*

Paul names himself and Timothy, and he calls them both "slaves of Jesus Christ," In Ephesians and Colossians he calls himself an apostle. Here he does not. This is a letter to friends, and he does not need to lean on his authority. He takes the lowest title there is. A slave in the Roman world belonged completely to his master. Paul gladly says that he and Timothy belong completely to Jesus.

He writes "to all the saints." A saint is not a special class of Christian. The word means one who is set apart for God, and every believer is a saint. Notice the word "all." Paul will soon deal with some division in this church (4:2-3), so he is careful to include everyone.

He also greets "the overseers and deacons." An overseer is a leader who watches over and shepherds the church. In the New Testament the same men are also called elders and shepherds (Acts 20:17, 28). A deacon is a servant who cares for the practical needs of the church.

**1:2** *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and* ***the*** *Lord Jesus Christ.*

This was Paul's usual greeting, but it is not empty. Grace is God's favor that we did not earn. Peace is what comes to us because of that grace: peace with God, and the peace of God in our hearts (4:7). Grace always comes first. We cannot have real peace until we have received God's grace.

Paul puts "God our Father" and "the Lord Jesus Christ" side by side as the one source of grace and peace. Paul knew Jesus is God, and he will say so plainly in chapter 2.

**1:3-4** *I thank my God at all the remembrance of you, always in every supplication of mine for you all, making the supplication with joy,*

"I thank my God at all the remembrance of you." Every time Paul thought of these people, he thanked God. Not every church gave him that kind of joy. The Corinthians and the Galatians gave him many hard days.

Then comes the first mention of joy in the letter: "making the supplication with joy." Supplication means asking God for something, a humble and earnest prayer. Paul was in chains, but his prayers for others were full of joy. Joy does not wait for good circumstances. It comes from knowing God and loving His people.

**1:5** *for your partnership in the gospel from **the** first day until now,*

Why was Paul so thankful? "For your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." The Greek word for partnership is koinonia, which means fellowship, sharing, or having something in common. The Philippians shared in Paul's work. They prayed for him, they gave to him, and they spread the gospel where they lived.

"From the first day" takes us back to Acts 16, when Lydia opened her home to Paul right after she believed. That was more than ten years before this letter, and this church had stood with Paul the whole time.

**1:6** *being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will complete **it** until **the** day of Jesus Christ;*

This is one of the most loved verses in the Bible. Paul is "confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."

What is the good work? It is God's work of saving them and making them like His Son. Notice who began it. God did. They did not save themselves. And notice who will finish it. God will. The word "complete" means to bring to its goal, to carry all the way through to the end. God does not start projects and leave them half done.

"The day of Jesus Christ" is the day Jesus comes for His people. Paul speaks of this day three times in this letter, and in 1:10 and 2:16 he calls it simply the day of Christ. It points to the day the Lord comes for His church (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). On that day God's work in us will be complete, and even our bodies will be changed to be like His glorious body (3:21).

Bible teachers disagree about what this verse means for eternal security, the question of whether a true believer can ever lose their salvation. Many read it as a promise that God will keep every true believer to the end, and they put it beside verses like John 10:28-29 and Romans 8:38-39. Others agree that God is faithful but believe a person can still turn away from Him, and they point to warnings like Hebrews 6:4-6 and to Paul's own words in 3:12-14 about pressing on. What every side agrees on is this: our hope does not rest on how strong we are. It rests on a faithful God who finishes what He starts.

**1:7** *even as it is right for me to think this about you all, because I have you in the heart, both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all being fellow partakers of grace with me.*

"It is right for me to think this about you all." Paul's confidence was not a guess. He had seen their faith in action for years. They had stood with him "both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel." The Greek word for defense is apologia, a legal defense in court. Paul was preparing to defend himself and the gospel before Roman officials.

"I have you in the heart." Paul did not see these people as a ministry project. He loved them. And he calls them "fellow partakers of grace with me." When they stood with him in his chains, they shared in the grace God was giving him.

**1:8** *For God is my witness, how I long for you all in **the** affection of Jesus Christ.*

"For God is my witness." Paul calls God to testify that what he says is true. He longed for them "in the affection of Jesus Christ." The word for affection points to the deepest feelings of the heart. Paul loved them with the very love of Jesus. That kind of love does not come naturally. It comes from Christ living in us.

**1:9** *And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment,*

Now Paul tells them what he prays for them. "That your love may abound yet more and more." The Philippians were already a loving church. Paul did not pray that they would start loving. He prayed that their love would overflow even more.

But he wants a certain kind of love: love that grows "in knowledge and all discernment." Love without knowledge can be foolish. It can approve of anything and call it kindness. Discernment means the ability to see clearly and make good judgments, to tell right from wrong and good from best.

**1:10** *so that you may approve the things that are excellent, so that you may be pure and without offense for **the** day of Christ,*

Why does love need knowledge? "So that you may approve the things that are excellent." The word "approve" was used for testing metals to see if they were genuine. Love that knows God's Word can test things and choose what is best, not just what is acceptable.

The goal is "that you may be pure and without offense for the day of Christ." "Without offense" means not stumbling and not causing others to stumble. Living with the day of Christ in view changes how we live today.

**1:11** *having been filled with fruits of righteousness, which **are** through Jesus Christ, to **the** glory and praise of God.*

"Having been filled with fruits of righteousness." Righteousness is being right with God and living in a right way. Here Paul means the good fruit that grows in a life that has been made right with God. Notice where this fruit comes from: it is "through Jesus Christ." We do not produce it on our own. Jesus said that apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5).

And notice the purpose: "to the glory and praise of God." The fruit in our lives is not meant to make us look good. It is meant to make God look good. That is the end of every good thing in the Christian life.

**1:12** *Now I want you to know, brothers, that the things concerning me have come rather to **the** advancement of the gospel,*

Paul now turns to his own situation. The Philippians must have been worried about him. Is he safe? Is he discouraged? Has the gospel been stopped? Paul answers: "the things concerning me have come rather to the advancement of the gospel."

The word for "advancement" was used for an army's engineers cutting a road ahead of the troops through rough country. Paul's arrest looked like a roadblock. God turned it into a road. Paul had wanted to go to Rome for years (Romans 1:13-15). He may not have pictured arriving in chains, but God used it. When things go wrong in our lives, do we ask what God might be doing through it?

**1:13** *so that my chains in Christ have become clearly known in the whole praetorium and to all the rest,*

"My chains in Christ have become clearly known in the whole praetorium." The praetorium was the Roman imperial guard, the elite soldiers who guarded the emperor, or the headquarters where they served. During his house arrest, Paul was kept by a soldier and was in chains (Acts 28:16, 20). The guards most likely took turns, so one soldier after another would have spent hours at Paul's side, hearing him pray and teach his visitors. Soon everyone knew he was not a criminal. He was in chains "in Christ," because of Jesus.

**1:14** *and most of the brothers in **the** Lord, having become confident by my chains, dare more abundantly to speak the word without fear.*

Paul's chains had a second result. "Most of the brothers in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, dare more abundantly to speak the word without fear." You would think that seeing Paul arrested would make other believers afraid. It did the opposite. They saw God's faithfulness to Paul, they saw the gospel spreading, and they became bolder. When one believer stands firm under pressure, others find courage too.

**1:15-17** *Some indeed even from envy and strife, but some also from goodwill, preach Christ. Those indeed out of selfish ambition proclaim Christ, not purely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but those out of love, knowing that I am appointed for* ***the*** *defense of the gospel.*

Not everyone preaching in Rome had good motives. "Some indeed even from envy and strife, but some also from goodwill, preach Christ." Paul names two groups.

The first group preached "out of selfish ambition," which is the spirit of someone running for office, thinking only of his own success. They preached "not purely, supposing to add affliction to my chains." These were not false teachers. Paul does not say their message was wrong. Their motives were wrong.

The second group preached "out of love." They knew Paul was "appointed for the defense of the gospel." Envy can be found even among those who serve Christ, so we should check our own hearts. Why do we serve?

**1:18** *What then? Only* ***that*** *in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice.*

"What then?" How would you feel if people were preaching just to hurt you? Paul's answer is amazing. "Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice."

Paul did not care who got the credit. He cared that Jesus was being preached. His joy did not depend on his reputation. This only works because the message itself was true. In Galatians 1:8-9, Paul is very hard on people who preach a different gospel. Here the gospel was right, only the motives were wrong. Paul left those motives for God to judge and rejoiced that the truth was getting out.

**1:19** *For I know that this will turn out for me to salvation through your supplication and* ***the*** *supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,*

"For I know that this will turn out for me to salvation." What does Paul mean by salvation here? He was already saved. Some take it as his release from prison. Others take it in a larger sense, the good outcome of his whole life before God, whether he lives or dies, and the next verse fits that reading.

Notice the two means God would use: "your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." God works through the prayers of His people, and the Holy Spirit supplies what we need.

**Old Testament links:** Job 13:16 (alluded to)

**1:20** *according to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing I will be ashamed, but in all boldness, as always, also now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death.*

Paul tells us his "earnest expectation and hope." The word for earnest expectation pictures someone stretching his neck to look ahead, eager to see what is coming. What did Paul hope for?

Not first of all to be released. He hoped that "in nothing I will be ashamed," that he would not let the Lord down or back away from the truth when he stood before the court.

His goal was that "Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death." To magnify means to make bigger, to make great in the eyes of others. Paul wanted his body, whether alive or dead, to help people see how great Jesus is.

**1:21** *For to me, to live **is** Christ, and to die **is** gain.*

"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." This is the key verse of the letter.

"To live is Christ." For Paul, life was not about his career, his comfort, or even his ministry. Life was Jesus. He knew Him, served Him, loved Him, and lived for Him. Try finishing that sentence yourself. What would honestly fill in the blank? Money? Family? Success? Only someone who can say "to live is Christ" can also say "to die is gain." If we live for anything else, death is loss, because death takes all of it away.

"To die is gain." For the believer, death is not the end. It is a promotion. Paul is not making light of grief. He is saying that death cannot take from him the One he loves most.

**1:22** *But if to live in **the** flesh, this **is** fruit of work for me; and what I will choose, I do not make known.*

"But if to live in the flesh, this is fruit of work for me." To live "in the flesh" here means simply to go on living in this body. If Paul stayed alive, he would have more fruitful work to do.

"And what I will choose, I do not make known." Paul is torn. Both choices are good. The choice was really up to God, but Paul shows us his heart.

**1:23** *For I am hard-pressed between the two, having the desire to depart and to be with Christ, **which is** very much better;*

"For I am hard-pressed between the two." The picture is of a man squeezed from both sides.

"Having the desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is very much better." The word "depart" was used for a ship pulling up its anchor and setting sail, or for soldiers taking down their tents to break camp. For the believer, death is leaving one place to go home.

And notice where Paul goes. He goes "to be with Christ." This tells us something important. When a believer dies, he does not fall into a long, unaware sleep. He goes to be with the Lord, aware and at home. Paul says the same thing in 2 Corinthians 5:8, where to be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord. The body waits in the grave for the resurrection, when Jesus comes for His church and raises the dead in Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). But the believer himself is with Christ. Paul calls it "very much better." In Greek he piles up three words, as if he could hardly find words strong enough.

If you have lost a loved one who knew Jesus, this verse is for you. They are not lost. They are with Christ, and that is very much better.

**1:24** *but to remain in the flesh **is** more necessary for your sake.*

"But to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." Here is the other side. Paul's own desire was to go and be with Jesus. But the Philippians still needed him. So he puts their need ahead of his own wish.

This is the mind of Christ that Paul will describe in chapter 2: not looking at our own things, but at the things of others (2:4).

**1:25-26** *And being confident of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of the faith, so that your boasting may abound in Christ Jesus in me through my coming to you again.*

"And being confident of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all." Paul seems to have sensed that God would keep him alive for now. Many Bible teachers believe Paul was released after this first imprisonment in Rome, traveled again, and later wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. Later he was arrested again and wrote 2 Timothy.

Why would Paul remain? "For your progress and joy of the faith." Progress is the same word used for the "advancement" of the gospel in 1:12. Paul wanted them to move forward in their faith and to find more joy in it. And when Paul came to them again, their "boasting may abound in Christ Jesus." This is good boasting, rejoicing in what God has done.

**1:27** *Only conduct yourselves as citizens worthily of the gospel of Christ, so that whether having come and seen you or being absent, I may hear the things concerning you, that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one soul striving together for the faith of the gospel,*

"Only conduct yourselves as citizens worthily of the gospel of Christ." The word Paul uses here comes from the Greek word for a city and its citizens. To the Philippians, that word meant something. They lived in a Roman colony and were proud of their Roman citizenship. Paul tells them to live as citizens, but as citizens of a greater kingdom, in a way that fits the gospel. He will come back to this in 3:20.

Whether Paul came or stayed away, he wanted to hear that they were "standing firm in one spirit, with one soul striving together for the faith of the gospel." "Striving together" is a word used for athletes or soldiers working as a team. The Christian life is not a solo sport.

**1:28** *and not being frightened in anything by those who oppose, which is to them indeed a demonstration of destruction, but to you of salvation, and this from God.*

"And not being frightened in anything by those who oppose." The believers in Philippi had enemies, just as Paul did when he founded the church (Acts 16:19-24). Paul tells them not to panic.

Their courage would be a sign. To their enemies, it was "a demonstration of destruction," a warning that those who fight against God's people are on the losing side. To the believers, it was a

sign "of salvation, and this from God." When God gives a believer calm courage in the face of opposition, that courage itself is evidence that God is at work.

**1:29** *For to you it was granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer on behalf of Him,*

"For to you it was granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer on behalf of Him." The word "granted" comes from the Greek word for grace. It means given as a gift.

We all know that faith in Christ is a gift. But Paul says suffering for Christ is part of the gift too. That is not how we usually think. Suffering for Jesus is not a sign that God has left us. It is a privilege, a sign that we belong to Him and share in His story. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name (Acts 5:41). This does not mean we go looking for suffering. It means that when it comes because we belong to Jesus, we can see it the way God sees it.

**1:30** *having the same conflict such as you saw in me and now hear* ***to be*** *in me.*

"Having the same conflict such as you saw in me and now hear to be in me." The word for conflict is agon, from which we get our word agony. It was used for a hard struggle in the athletic games or in battle.

The Philippians had seen Paul's conflict with their own eyes, when he and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison in their city (Acts 16:22-24). Now they heard of his chains in Rome. And they were in the same kind of struggle. Paul is telling them they are not alone. The same Lord who carried Paul through will carry them through.

## Chapter 1 Summary

Paul and Timothy greet the saints in Philippi with their overseers and deacons. Paul thanks God for them with joy because of their partnership in the gospel from the first day, and he is confident that God, who began a good work in them, will complete it until the day of Christ. He prays that their love will abound in knowledge and discernment so they will approve what is excellent and be filled with the fruit of righteousness. Paul reports that his chains have advanced the gospel: the whole praetorium knows he is in chains for Christ, and other believers have become bold. Some preach from envy and some from love, but Paul rejoices that Christ is proclaimed. Whether he lives or dies, he wants Christ to be magnified, because to live is Christ and to die is gain. Departing to be with Christ is very much better, but he expects to remain for their sake. He calls them to live as citizens worthy of the gospel, standing firm together without fear, since God has granted them not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for Him.

## Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. Paul calls himself and Timothy "slaves of Jesus Christ," What does that title tell you about how Paul saw himself? (1:1)

2. Why was Paul so thankful for the believers in Philippi? (1:3-5)

3. Who began the good work in the believers, and who will complete it? (1:6)

4. What kind of love did Paul pray for, and why does love need knowledge and discernment? (1:9-10)

5. How did Paul's chains advance the gospel instead of stopping it? (1:12-14)

6. Why could Paul rejoice even when some people preached Christ to hurt him? (1:15-18)

7. Where does a believer go at death, according to Paul? (1:23)

8. Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ." If you finish that sentence honestly for yourself, what fills the blank, and what does that show you? (1:21)

9. Have you ever seen God use a hard situation in your life to help someone else or spread the gospel? What happened? (1:12)

10. Paul says suffering for Christ is a gift (1:29). How could that change the way you face opposition for your faith this week?

# Chapter 2: The Mind of Christ

## Scripture

**2:1-11** If ***there is*** therefore any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of ***the*** Spirit, if any affections and compassions, fulfill my joy, so that you may think the same ***thing***, having the same love, united in soul, thinking the one ***thing***, ***doing*** nothing according to selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility considering one another ***as*** surpassing yourselves; do not look at your own ***things***, each one, but also the ***things*** of others, each one. For let this be thought in you which ***was*** also in Christ Jesus, who, existing in ***the*** form of God, did not consider being equal with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, having taken ***the*** form of a slave, having come to be in ***the*** likeness of men; and having been found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself, having become obedient as far as death, even death of a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted Him and granted to Him a name, the ***one*** above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of ***those*** in heaven and ***those*** on earth and ***those*** under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ ***is*** Lord, to ***the*** glory of God ***the*** Father.

**2:12-30** So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is the ***One*** who is working in you both to will and to work for the sake of ***His*** good pleasure. Do all things without grumblings and disputes, so that you may become blameless and innocent, children of God unblemished in ***the*** midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine as lights in ***the*** world, holding forth ***the*** word of life, for a boast to me for ***the*** day of Christ, that I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. But if I am even being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and rejoice together with you all. And ***in*** the same ***way*** you also, rejoice and rejoice together with me. But I hope in ***the*** Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I also may be encouraged, having come to know the ***things*** concerning you. For I have no one of like soul, who will genuinely care for the ***things*** concerning you; for they all are seeking their own ***things***, not the ***things*** of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven worth, that as a child ***with*** a father, he served with me for the gospel. Therefore I hope indeed to send him immediately, whenever I see the ***things*** concerning me; but I have been persuaded in ***the*** Lord that I myself also will come soon. But I considered ***it*** necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, but your messenger and minister of my need; since he was longing for you all and was deeply distressed, because you heard that he was sick. And indeed he was sick, near to death; but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I sent him all the more eagerly, so that, having seen him again, you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in ***the*** Lord with all joy, and hold such ***men*** in honor, because for the sake of the work of Christ he came near as far as death, having risked his life, so that he might fill up your lack of service toward me.

## Chapter 2 Preview

At the end of chapter 1, Paul called the Philippians to stand firm together. Now he shows them how. Unity comes from humility: thinking the same thing, having the same love, doing nothing

out of selfish ambition, and counting others as more important than ourselves. Then Paul gives the greatest example of humility there has ever been. Jesus existed in the form of God, yet He emptied Himself, took the form of a slave, became a man, and humbled Himself all the way to death on a cross. Because of that, God has highly exalted Him, and one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

In the second half of the chapter, Paul calls the believers to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, because God is working in them. They are to stop grumbling and shine as lights in a dark world. Then Paul gives two real-life pictures of the mind of Christ: Timothy, who truly cared for them, and Epaphroditus, who nearly died serving Christ and serving Paul.

## Chapter 2 Study

**2:1** *If **there is** therefore any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of **the** Spirit, if any affections and compassions,*

Paul starts with four ifs. In Greek these are not doubts. Each one has the sense of since: since there is encouragement in Christ, and there is.

He names four things every believer has received. "Encouragement in Christ," the strength and comfort that come from belonging to Him. "Comfort of love," the soothing words of love that God speaks to His children. "Fellowship of the Spirit," the shared life we have because the same Holy Spirit lives in each of us. And "affections and compassions," the tender mercy God has shown us. If you have received all this from God, how can you hold back from your brothers and sisters?

**2:2** *fulfill my joy, so that you may think the same **thing**, having the same love, united in soul, thinking the one **thing**,*

"Fulfill my joy." Paul already had joy in this church (1:4). What would make it full? Seeing them united. He asks them to "think the same thing," to have "the same love," to be "united in soul," and to be "thinking the one thing."

Does this mean every believer must agree on every detail? No. It means a shared mindset, a heart set on the same goal: Christ and His gospel. A church can hold different opinions on small things and still have one mind on what matters most. Paul knew that unity starts in the mind.

**2:3** ***doing** nothing according to selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility considering one another **as** surpassing yourselves;*

"Doing nothing according to selfish ambition or vain conceit." Selfish ambition is the same word Paul used in 1:17 for the rivals who preached to hurt him. Vain conceit means empty glory, thinking we are more than we are, hungry for praise.

The cure is "humility considering one another as surpassing yourselves." Humility was not a virtue in the Greek and Roman world. They saw it as weakness, the attitude of a slave. Jesus turned that upside down. Humility does not mean thinking badly of yourself. It means thinking of yourself less and of others more, because love puts them first.

**2:4** *do not look at your own **things**, each one, but also the **things** of others, each one.*

"Not look at your own things, each one, but also the things of others, each one." Notice the word "also." Paul does not say we can never care for our own needs. He says we should not look only at our own. We are to keep our eyes open to what others need. Most church fights come from people looking only at their own things. Paul is about to show us the One who looked at our needs instead of His own rights.

**2:5** *For let this be thought in you which **was** also in Christ Jesus,*

"For let this be thought in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Bible teachers often call this the mind of Christ. Paul wants the way Jesus thought to become the way we think.

What follows in verses 6 to 11 is one of the greatest passages in the Bible about who Jesus is. Many scholars believe it may have been an early Christian hymn, because of the way it is built in short, balanced lines. Either way, Paul wrote it under the Holy Spirit. And notice why he brings it up. He gives us this deep truth about Jesus to change how we treat one another.

**2:6** *who, existing in **the** form of God, did not consider being equal with God a thing to be grasped,*

"Who, existing in the form of God." The word for form is morphe. It does not mean outward shape or appearance only. It means the true nature of a thing, what it really is. Jesus did not just look like God. He was and is God. And the word "existing" tells us this was always true of Him. He did not become God at some point. He always was God (John 1:1).

"Did not consider being equal with God a thing to be grasped." Jesus was equal with God. The question was what He would do with that. Some take "a thing to be grasped" to mean something to grab that He did not have. But Paul has just said He existed in the form of God, so the better sense is something to hold on to tightly, or to use for His own advantage. Jesus did not cling to His rights and His glory. He let go of them for our sake. Adam was a man who reached to be like God (Genesis 3:5). Jesus was God and did not cling to it.

**2:7** *but emptied Himself, having taken **the** form of a slave, having come to be in **the** likeness of men;*

"But emptied Himself." This phrase has caused a lot of discussion. Some people have taught that Jesus gave up being God, or gave up some of His divine nature, when He became a man. That is not what Paul says, and it does not fit the rest of Scripture. Jesus did not stop being God. In Colossians 2:9 Paul writes that in Him all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form. On earth Jesus forgave sins, calmed the storm, and accepted worship, things only God can do.

So what did He empty Himself of? Paul tells us in the next words. He emptied Himself by "having taken the form of a slave, having come to be in the likeness of men." He emptied Himself by adding, not by subtracting. He added a full human nature to His divine nature. He laid aside the glory He had with the Father (John 17:5). He laid aside His rights and His privileges, and He chose not to use His power for His own comfort. He lived in dependence on the Father, got tired and hungry, and had no place to lay His head.

Notice that Paul uses the same word, form, for both. Jesus was truly in the form of God, and He truly took the form of a slave. He became fully man while remaining fully God. That is the great mystery of the incarnation, the eternal Son becoming flesh (John 1:14).

**2:8** *and having been found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself, having become obedient as far as death, even death of a cross.*

"And having been found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself." Becoming a man was already a giant step down. But Jesus kept going down. He did not come as a king in a palace. He came as a servant, and as a servant He "humbled Himself, having become obedient as far as death."

And not just any death. "Even death of a cross." Crucifixion was the most shameful and painful way to die in the Roman world. It was used for slaves and rebels, and Roman citizens were normally spared it. To the Jews, a man hanged on a tree was under God's curse (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13). There was no lower place to go. If Jesus humbled Himself that far for us, how can we refuse to humble ourselves before a brother or sister?

**2:9** *Therefore God also highly exalted Him and granted to Him a name, the **one** above every name,*

"Therefore God also highly exalted Him." The word "therefore" shows the result. Because Jesus humbled Himself, God lifted Him up. "Highly exalted" means lifted above all, raised to the highest place. Jesus rose from the dead, went up to heaven, and sat down at the Father's right hand (Ephesians 1:20-21).

God "granted to Him a name, the one above every name." In the Bible a name stands for the person and his position. Many teachers believe the name here is "Lord," as verse 11 says, the same title the Greek Old Testament used for the name of God. Jesus who became nothing for us now holds the highest name there is. Jesus said that whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Luke 14:11). The way up in God's kingdom is down.

**Old Testament links:** Isaiah 52:13 (alluded to)

**2:10-11** *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of **those** in heaven and **those** on earth and **those** under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ **is** Lord, to **the** glory of God **the** Father.*

"So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and those on earth and those under the earth." Paul is drawing from Isaiah 45:23, where God says that to Him every knee will bow and every tongue will swear. In Isaiah, that honor belongs to God alone. Paul gives it to Jesus. This is one more clear proof that Jesus is God.

"Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." Those "in heaven" are the angels. Those "on earth" are people living on earth. Those "under the earth" are the dead, and many teachers include the fallen angels and demons too. Everyone will bow. Does this mean everyone will be saved? No. Scripture is clear that not all will be saved (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 20:15). Some will bow in worship and love. Others will bow because they must, admitting at last what they refused to believe. Every person will bow to Jesus one day. The question is whether we bow to Him now, willingly, as Lord and Savior. And all of this is "to the glory of God the Father."

**Old Testament links:** Isaiah 45:23 (quoted)

**2:12** *So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;*

"So then, my beloved." Paul now applies the great truth he has just taught. The Philippians had "always obeyed," and with Paul far away he wants them to keep obeying even more.

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Some people read this as if we have to earn our salvation. That is not what Paul means. He has already said that God began the good work in them (1:6), and he will say in 3:9 that righteousness comes through faith, not from the law. "Work out" means to carry something through to its full result, the way you would work a field or work out a math problem. You don't work for your salvation. You work it out. God has put it in you, and you live it out in your daily life.

Paul is also speaking to the church as a whole. "Your" is plural here. He wants them to work out their life together, in unity and humility, as the first half of the chapter taught.

"With fear and trembling" does not mean living in terror before God. It means a deep respect for God and a serious attitude toward sin. We take our walk seriously because we take God seriously.

**2:13** *for God is the **One** who is working in you both to will and to work for the sake of **His** good pleasure.*

Here is the reason we can work it out: "for God is the One who is working in you both to will and to work for the sake of His good pleasure." The word for "working" gives us our word energy. God is the power at work inside us.

Notice that God works on both "to will and to work." He changes our desires, so we want to do what pleases Him. And He gives us the power to do it. We do the working out. God does the working in. That is good news. You are not left to grow on your own strength.

**2:14** *Do all things without grumblings and disputes,*

"Do all things without grumblings and disputes." Grumbling is the low muttering of a complaining heart. Disputes are arguments. Paul likely had Israel in the wilderness in mind. They grumbled against Moses and against God again and again, even after He had rescued them from Egypt (Exodus 16:2-8; Numbers 14:1-4; 1 Corinthians 10:10). Notice the word "all." A grumbling spirit can poison a whole church, and it says something about how we see God.

**2:15** *so that you may become blameless and innocent, children of God unblemished in **the** midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine as lights in **the** world,*

"So that you may become blameless and innocent, children of God unblemished." Blameless means no one can rightly point a finger at you. Innocent means pure, with nothing mixed in. Unblemished was used for animals fit to be offered to God.

Believers live "in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation." Paul borrows these words from Moses' song in Deuteronomy 32:5, where Moses described rebellious Israel. Crooked means bent, twisted away from what is straight. That describes our world too. But in the middle of it, believers "shine as lights in the world." The word is used for stars shining in a dark sky. The darker the night, the brighter a star looks. We do not shine by hiding from the world. We shine in the middle of it.

**Old Testament links:** Deuteronomy 32:5 (alluded to)

**2:16** *holding forth **the** word of life, for a boast to me for **the** day of Christ, that I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.*

"Holding forth the word of life." Some Bibles translate it as holding fast, meaning to keep a firm grip on it. The SLB says holding forth, like holding out a torch for others to see by. Both ideas are true. We keep hold of God's Word, and we hold it out to people who need life.

Paul wanted to be able to rejoice "for the day of Christ" that he had not run or labored in vain. He pictures himself as a runner and a hard worker. When Jesus comes for His church, Paul wants to see the fruit of his work standing firm.

**2:17** *But if I am even being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and rejoice together with you all.*

"But if I am even being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice." A drink offering was wine poured out on or beside a sacrifice (Numbers 15:1-10; 28:7). It was the finishing touch on the main sacrifice.

Paul sees the Philippians' faith and service as the main sacrifice offered to God, and his own life, possibly his death, as the drink offering poured out on it. That is humility. Near the end of his life he used the same picture again (2 Timothy 4:6). And even facing death, he says, "I rejoice and rejoice together with you all."

**2:18** *And **in** the same **way** you also, rejoice and rejoice together with me.*

"And in the same way you also, rejoice and rejoice together with me." Paul asks them to join him in his joy. Don't grieve over my chains, he is saying. Rejoice with me. Joy is not only something we feel. Here it is a command. We can choose to rejoice, because our joy rests on Christ, not on how things are going.

**2:19** *But I hope in **the** Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I also may be encouraged, having come to know the **things** concerning you.*

Paul now turns to his travel plans, but this is still teaching. Timothy and Epaphroditus are living examples of the mind of Christ.

"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon." Notice that Paul's plans are "in the Lord." He makes plans but holds them loosely, knowing they depend on Jesus (James 4:13-15). Paul in chains wanted to be encouraged by news of them.

**2:20-21** *For I have no one of like soul, who will genuinely care for the **things** concerning you; for they all are seeking their own **things**, not the **things** of Christ Jesus.*

"For I have no one of like soul." Timothy was like-minded with Paul. He "will genuinely care for the things concerning you."

Then comes a sad line. "For they all are seeking their own things, not the things of Christ Jesus." Paul does not mean every believer in Rome. He likely means the men available to send. This is the opposite of 2:4. Timothy looked at the things of others. Which kind of person are you?

**2:22** *But you know his proven worth, that as a child **with** a father, he served with me for the gospel.*

"But you know his proven worth." The Philippians had known Timothy since the church began (Acts 16:1-3; 17:14-15). His "proven worth" was character that had been tested and found true, like metal tested in the fire.

"As a child with a father, he served with me for the gospel." Paul may have led Timothy to faith on his first journey, and he calls him his true child in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2). Paul does not say Timothy served him, but "with me for the gospel."

**2:23-24** *Therefore I hope indeed to send him immediately, whenever I see the **things** concerning me; but I have been persuaded in **the** Lord that I myself also will come soon.*

"Therefore I hope indeed to send him immediately, whenever I see the things concerning me." Paul was waiting to hear how his trial would go. Once he knew, he would send Timothy with the news. "But I have been persuaded in the Lord that I myself also will come soon." Paul expected to be released and to visit them. His confidence is "in the Lord."

**2:25** *But I considered **it** necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, but your messenger and minister of my need;*

"But I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus." Epaphroditus was the man the Philippians had sent with their gift (4:18). Paul gives him five titles. "My brother," because they shared one Father. "Fellow worker," because they shared one work. "Fellow soldier," because they shared one battle. "Your messenger," which is the word apostolos, meaning one sent, here used in its plain sense of the church's messenger. And "minister of my need," meaning the one who served Paul on the church's behalf.

Epaphroditus is not famous. This letter is the only place in the Bible he is mentioned (2:25; 4:18). But Paul honors him like a hero. God sees the faithful service that the world never notices.

**2:26** *since he was longing for you all and was deeply distressed, because you heard that he was sick.*

"Since he was longing for you all and was deeply distressed, because you heard that he was sick." Epaphroditus was not upset about being sick. He was upset that they were worried about him. He had the mind of Christ, thinking of others even while he was the one suffering. "Deeply distressed" is a strong word, the same one used of Jesus in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37).

**2:27** *And indeed he was sick, near to death; but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow.*

"And indeed he was sick, near to death." This was not a small cold. Epaphroditus almost died. "But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow."

Faithful believers get sick, even in the middle of God's work. Sickness is not always a sign of sin or weak faith. Paul does not say he healed Epaphroditus. He says God had mercy. Healing is in God's hands. And Paul was not ashamed to admit that losing his friend would have brought him "sorrow upon sorrow." Grief is not a lack of faith.

If you have been sick for a long time, or have prayed for healing that has not come, you are not a second-class believer. Paul's own friend nearly died, and Paul himself left Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20).

**2:28** *Therefore I sent him all the more eagerly, so that, having seen him again, you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful.*

"Therefore I sent him all the more eagerly." Paul did not keep Epaphroditus for himself, even though he needed him. He sent him home so the church could rejoice at seeing him well. Some in Philippi may have wondered why Epaphroditus came home early. Paul makes sure no one thinks he failed. Paul himself sent him.

**2:29** *Receive him therefore in **the** Lord with all joy, and hold such **men** in honor,*

"Receive him therefore in the Lord with all joy, and hold such men in honor." Paul tells the church how to welcome him: with joy, and with honor.

Who should we honor in the church? Not the most popular or the most gifted. "Such men," people like Epaphroditus, who serve faithfully and risk everything for Christ.

**2:30** *because for the sake of the work of Christ he came near as far as death, having risked his life, so that he might fill up your lack of service toward me.*

"Because for the sake of the work of Christ he came near as far as death, having risked his life." The word for "having risked" was used for a gambler who throws the dice and bets everything.

Epaphroditus put his life on the line for Jesus. Notice that Paul uses the same words, "as far as death," that he used of Jesus in 2:8. Epaphroditus followed his Lord's example.

"So that he might fill up your lack of service toward me." This is not a criticism of the church. They could not all come to Rome. Epaphroditus came on their behalf, and he did in person what they all wanted to do. He carried their love to Paul.

## Chapter 2 Summary

Paul calls the Philippians to be of one mind and one love, doing nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility counting others as more important than themselves. He points them to Christ Jesus, who existed in the form of God but did not cling to equality with God. He emptied Himself by taking the form of a slave and becoming a man, without ever ceasing to be God, and He humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross. Therefore God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name above every name, so that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Paul then tells them to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, because God is working in them both to will and to work. They are to do all things without grumbling and shine as lights in a crooked generation, holding forth the word of life. Paul rejoices even if his life is poured out as a drink offering. He plans to send Timothy, who genuinely cares for them, and he sends Epaphroditus home, who nearly died serving Christ, and tells them to honor such men.

God is asking me to stop grumbling about not getting the satisfaction I want out of life. Paul wrote about contentment from prison. If he could do it there, I can do it here.

## Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. What four things does Paul say every believer has received in 2:1, and why should they lead to unity?

2. What does humility look like, according to 2:3-4?

3. What does it mean that Jesus existed "in the form of God"? (2:6)

4. When Jesus "emptied Himself," did He stop being God? What did He take on? (2:7)

5. How far did Jesus humble Himself, and what did God do as a result? (2:8-9)

6. Will everyone bow to Jesus one day? Does that mean everyone will be saved? (2:10-11)

7. What is the difference between working for your salvation and working it out, and who is working in you? (2:12-13)

8. Where in your life is God asking you to stop grumbling? (2:14)

9. Timothy cared about others more than himself, and Epaphroditus risked his life to serve. Who has served you that way, and how could you honor them? (2:20-30)

10. Think of a relationship where you have been looking only at your own things. What would the mind of Christ look like there this week? (2:4-5)

# Chapter 3: Pressing On Toward the Goal

## Scripture

**3:1-11** Finally, my brothers, rejoice in ***the*** Lord. To write the same ***things*** to you ***is*** indeed not troublesome to me, but for you ***it is*** safe. Watch out for the dogs, watch out for the evil workers, watch out for the mutilation; for we are the circumcision, who worship God in ***the*** Spirit and boast in Christ Jesus and have not put confidence in ***the*** flesh, although I myself have confidence even in ***the*** flesh. If any other ***man*** thinks to have confidence in ***the*** flesh, I more: in circumcision eight days old, of ***the*** nation of Israel, of ***the*** tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; according to ***the*** law, a Pharisee; according to zeal, persecuting the church; according to ***the*** righteousness which ***is*** in ***the*** law, having become blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, these I have considered loss because of Christ. But indeed, rather, I also consider all things to be loss because of the surpassing ***worth*** of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, because of whom I was made to suffer the loss of all things, and I consider ***them*** to be rubbish, so that I may gain Christ and may be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which ***is*** from ***the*** law, but that which ***is*** through faith of Christ, the righteousness from God on the basis of faith; to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if somehow I may attain to the resurrection of the dead.

**3:12-21** Not that I have already received ***it*** or have already been perfected, but I pursue, if indeed I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brothers, I ***do*** not count myself to have laid hold ***of it***; but one ***thing I do***: forgetting the ***things*** behind and reaching forward to the ***things*** ahead, I pursue toward ***the*** goal for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, as many as ***are*** perfect, let us think this; and if you think anything differently, God will reveal even this to you; nevertheless, to what we have attained, ***let us*** walk by the same rule, ***let us*** think the same ***thing***. Be fellow imitators of me, brothers, and observe those who walk thus, just as you have us ***for*** a pattern. For many walk, ***about*** whom I often was telling you, and now tell ***you*** even weeping, ***that they are*** the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end ***is*** destruction, whose god ***is*** the belly, and the glory ***is*** in their shame, who think ***on*** the earthly ***things***. For our citizenship exists in ***the*** heavens, from which also we eagerly await a Savior, ***the*** Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humiliation, so that it may become conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working of His being able even to subject all things to Himself.

## Chapter 3 Preview

Paul begins to wrap up with "rejoice in the Lord," then turns sharply to a warning. False teachers were telling Gentile believers they had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses to be right with God. Paul had more reason than anyone to trust his own record, yet he counts it all loss compared to knowing Christ, and he wants to be found in Him with the righteousness that comes from God through faith.

Paul has not arrived. He forgets what lies behind and presses on toward the goal. He warns with tears about enemies of the cross, and he ends with the great hope of every believer: our

citizenship is in heaven, and from there we eagerly await our Savior, who will change our humble bodies to be like His glorious body.

## Chapter 3 Study

**3:1** *Finally, my brothers, rejoice in **the** Lord. To write the same **things** to you **is** indeed not troublesome to me, but for you **it is** safe.*

"Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord." The word "finally" does not mean Paul is about to stop. It can mean as for the rest, or from here on. Paul still has two chapters to go.

Notice where our joy is found: "in the Lord." Circumstances change. The Lord does not. "To write the same things to you is indeed not troublesome to me, but for you it is safe." A good teacher repeats the important things. We do not always need new truth. We need to be reminded of the old truth (2 Peter 1:12-13).

**3:2** *Watch out for the dogs, watch out for the evil workers, watch out for the mutilation;*

"Watch out for the dogs, watch out for the evil workers, watch out for the mutilation." Who were these people? Most Bible teachers believe they were Jewish teachers who claimed to follow Jesus but taught that Gentile believers had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses to be saved. They are often called Judaizers. Paul fought the same teaching in Galatia (Acts 15:1-2; Galatians 5:2-4).

Paul turns their own words around. Jews sometimes called Gentiles dogs, meaning unclean. Paul says these teachers are the real dogs. They thought of themselves as good workers of the law, and Paul calls them "evil workers." They were proud of circumcision, and Paul calls it "the mutilation." In Greek, there is a play on words. The word for circumcision is peritome, and the word Paul uses here is katatome, which means a cutting down or a hacking.

**3:3** *for we are the circumcision, who worship God in **the** Spirit and boast in Christ Jesus and have not put confidence in **the** flesh,*

"For we are the circumcision." Paul gives three marks of God's true people. They "worship God in the Spirit," not by outward rituals (John 4:23-24). They "boast in Christ Jesus," placing all their confidence and joy in Him. And they "have not put confidence in the flesh." The flesh here means what we are and what we can do in our own strength, without God: family line, religious works, moral effort.

Even in the Old Testament, circumcision was meant to point to a heart that belonged to God (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6). Real circumcision is of the heart, by the Spirit (Romans 2:28-29). This does not mean God has cast off the nation of Israel. Paul is clear in Romans 11 that God still has a future for Israel. Here he is answering one question: how is anyone made right with God? Not by the flesh, but by Christ.

**3:4** *although I myself have confidence even in **the** flesh. If any other **man** thinks to have confidence in **the** flesh, I more:*

"Although I myself have confidence even in the flesh." Paul is not saying he trusts in his own record. He is saying that if anyone could trust in his own record, he could. "If any other man thinks to have confidence in the flesh, I more." He is not bragging. He is setting up his point: if Paul's record could not save him, no one's can.

**3:5** *in circumcision eight days old, of **the** nation of Israel, of **the** tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; according to **the** law, a Pharisee;*

Here is Paul's list. "In circumcision eight days old." He was not a convert circumcised as an adult, but on the eighth day, as the law commanded (Leviticus 12:3). "Of the nation of Israel." He was born a Jew. "Of the tribe of Benjamin." Benjamin was the tribe of Israel's first king, Saul, whose name Paul shared. It stayed loyal to the house of David when the kingdom split. "A Hebrew of Hebrews." His parents were Hebrews, and they raised him in the Hebrew language and ways.

"According to the law, a Pharisee." The Pharisees were the strictest group in Judaism. They studied the law carefully and added many rules to guard it. Paul trained under Gamaliel, an honored teacher (Acts 22:3).

**Old Testament links:** Leviticus 12:3 (alluded to)

**3:6** *according to zeal, persecuting the church; according to **the** righteousness which **is** in **the** law, having become blameless.*

"According to zeal, persecuting the church." Zeal means burning devotion. Paul's zeal was so great that he dragged Christians to prison (Acts 8:3; 26:9-11). He thought he was serving God. A person can be sincere and still be sincerely wrong.

"According to the righteousness which is in the law, having become blameless." Paul does not mean he never sinned. He means that by the outward standards people could see, no one could point to a rule he had broken. Yet the command against coveting showed him the sin in his heart (Romans 7:7-11).

**3:7** *But whatever things were gain to me, these I have considered loss because of Christ.*

"But whatever things were gain to me, these I have considered loss because of Christ." Paul uses the language of business. He thought his credentials were profit. Then he met Jesus on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1-6), and he moved every one of them into the loss column. His religious record had been keeping him from Christ. As long as he trusted in himself, he could not trust in Jesus.

**3:8** *But indeed, rather, I also consider all things to be loss because of the surpassing* ***worth*** *of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, because of whom I was made to suffer the loss of all things, and I consider* ***them*** *to be rubbish, so that I may gain Christ*

Paul goes even further. "I also consider all things to be loss." Not just his religious record. Why? "Because of the surpassing worth of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Notice the word "my." Paul knew Jesus personally.

"Because of whom I was made to suffer the loss of all things." Paul lost his standing, his career, and his comfort (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).

"And I consider them to be rubbish." The word was used for garbage, scraps thrown to the dogs, or even dung. It is a strong word, and Paul means it to be. "So that I may gain Christ." Like the man in Jesus' parable who sold everything to buy the field with the treasure (Matthew 13:44), Paul traded everything for Jesus and counted himself the winner.

**3:9** *and may be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which* ***is*** *from* ***the*** *law, but that which* ***is*** *through faith of Christ, the righteousness from God on the basis of faith;*

"And may be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law." Paul does not want to stand before God in his own righteousness. The best record any of us can build is not good enough for a holy God (Isaiah 64:6).

Instead, he wants "that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness from God on the basis of faith." Here are two kinds of righteousness. One is our own, earned by keeping the law. The other comes from God, received by faith. This is the heart of the gospel. God gives us His righteousness as a gift when we trust in Christ. Bible teachers call this justification, God declaring a guilty sinner righteous because of Christ (Romans 3:21-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

The phrase "faith of Christ" can be read two ways in Greek. Most Bibles read it as faith in Christ, our trust in Him. Others read it as the faithfulness of Christ, His perfect obedience on our behalf. Both are true in Scripture, and the end of the verse is clear that we receive this righteousness "on the basis of faith."

**3:10** *to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,*

"To know Him." This was the passion of Paul's life. He wanted to know Jesus, not just know about Him, the way you know a close friend. Paul had known Jesus for more than twenty-five years, and he still wanted to know Him more.

"And the power of His resurrection." The same power that raised Jesus from the dead works in believers today (Ephesians 1:19-20).

"And the fellowship of His sufferings." This is the part most of us would rather skip. Paul knew that knowing Christ meant sharing in His sufferings, being rejected and hurt for His sake (1:29).

Our sufferings do not pay for sin, but when we suffer for Him, we come to know Him in a deeper way.

"Being conformed to His death." To be conformed means to be shaped into the same form. Paul wanted to be like Jesus even in His death, dying to self and ready to die for Him if it came to that.

**3:11** *if somehow I may attain to the resurrection of the dead.*

"If somehow I may attain to the resurrection of the dead." Is Paul unsure that he will be raised? No. He has just said he is in Christ and has God's righteousness. The "if" expresses longing and humility, not doubt.

The phrase Paul uses can be read as a resurrection out from among the dead. Believers will be raised first, when Jesus comes for His church (1 Thessalonians 4:16), before the rest of the dead are raised (Revelation 20:5-6).

**3:12** *Not that I have already received* ***it*** *or have already been perfected, but I pursue, if indeed I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.*

"Not that I have already received it or have already been perfected." This is one of the most honest verses in the Bible. The great apostle Paul says he has not arrived.

"But I pursue." The word was used for a hunter chasing his prey or a runner chasing the finish line. Why? "If indeed I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." Jesus grabbed hold of Paul on the Damascus road for a purpose. Now Paul wants to grab hold of that purpose. We chase after Him because He has already taken hold of us.

**3:13** *Brothers, I* ***do*** *not count myself to have laid hold* ***of it****; but one* ***thing I do****: forgetting the* ***things*** *behind and reaching forward to the* ***things*** *ahead,*

"Brothers, I do not count myself to have laid hold of it." If Paul had not arrived, none of us have. "But one thing I do." Many of us are pulled in a hundred directions. Paul had one aim.

"Forgetting the things behind." Paul had to put behind him both his old religious record and his sins as a persecutor, which God had forgiven. To forget does not mean we lose our memory. It means the past no longer controls us. We do not live on past successes, and we do not stay chained to past failures.

"Reaching forward to the things ahead." The word pictures a runner leaning toward the finish line. A runner who keeps looking back will slow down or fall.

**3:14** *I pursue toward* ***the*** *goal for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

"I pursue toward the goal for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus." The goal is the finish line, and the prize is what the winner receives. "The upward calling" is God's call to come up, to be with Him and be like Christ. Paul is not running to earn his salvation. That was settled when he believed (3:9). He is running to finish the race well and receive the reward God gives His

faithful servants at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:7-8).

**3:15** *Therefore, as many as **are** perfect, let us think this; and if you think anything differently, God will reveal even this to you;*

"Therefore, as many as are perfect, let us think this." Didn't Paul just say he was not yet perfect (3:12)? The word here means mature. The mature are the ones who know they have not arrived and keep pressing on.

"And if you think anything differently, God will reveal even this to you." Paul taught the truth and trusted God to correct those who did not yet see clearly.

**3:16** *nevertheless, to what we have attained, **let us** walk by the same rule, **let us** think the same **thing**.*

"Nevertheless, to what we have attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us think the same thing." While we wait for God to show us more, we should live up to what we already know. The word for walk here was used for marching in line. Believers keep in step with each other.

**3:17** *Be fellow imitators of me, brothers, and observe those who walk thus, just as you have us **for** a pattern.*

"Be fellow imitators of me, brothers." That might sound proud, but Paul has just told us he is not perfect. He asks them to follow him as he follows Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

"And observe those who walk thus, just as you have us for a pattern." We all need examples to watch, and we are all examples to someone. Who is watching your walk?

**3:18** *For many walk, **about** whom I often was telling you, and now tell **you** even weeping, **that they are** the enemies of the cross of Christ,*

"For many walk, about whom I often was telling you, and now tell you even weeping." Paul now warns about a second kind of danger. These are not the law-keepers of 3:2. They seem to be people who claimed to be Christians but lived for themselves and their appetites. Notice that Paul tells this "even weeping." When we warn about false teaching or ungodly living, we should do it with tears, not with pride.

"The enemies of the cross of Christ." The cross calls us to die to self (Luke 9:23). These people wanted Christ without the cross.

**3:19** *whose end **is** destruction, whose god **is** the belly, and the glory **is** in their shame, who think **on** the earthly **things**.*

Paul describes these people four ways. "Whose end is destruction." Their road leads to ruin.

"Whose god is the belly." Their appetites ruled them. The belly stands for every fleshly desire.

"And the glory is in their shame." They bragged about things they should have been ashamed of. Our culture often does the same today.

"Who think on the earthly things." Their minds were set on this world and nothing beyond it. Compare Colossians 3:2.

**3:20** *For our citizenship exists in **the** heavens, from which also we eagerly await a Savior, **the** Lord Jesus Christ,*

"For our citizenship exists in the heavens." Remember that Philippi was a Roman colony. Its people were proud to be citizens of Rome, though they lived far from it. Believers are citizens of a greater city. Their names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20), and they live on earth as an outpost of heaven, under their King.

"From which also we eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." We are not waiting for something. We are waiting for Someone. Jesus Himself is coming from heaven for His people.

Bible teachers call this the rapture of the church, from a Latin word for being caught up. Paul describes it in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. The Lord Himself will come down from heaven, the dead in Christ will rise first, and believers who are alive will be caught up together with them to meet Him in the air. I believe this happens before the seven-year Tribulation, the time of God's judgment on the earth, because God has not appointed us to wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9). Jesus promised to come and take His people to Himself (John 14:1-3). After the Tribulation, He will return visibly to the earth with His saints to set up His kingdom (Revelation 19:11-16; 20:1-6).

**3:21** *who will transform the body of our humiliation, so that it may become conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working of His being able even to subject all things to Himself.*

"Who will transform the body of our humiliation, so that it may become conformed to the body of His glory." Our present bodies are humble bodies. They get tired, sick, and old, and they die. But when Jesus comes for His church, He will change our bodies to be like His own resurrection body.

Paul tells us more in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, the dead will be raised and the living will be changed. John says that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

How will He do this? "According to the working of His being able even to subject all things to Himself." The power that will bring everything under Jesus' rule will change our bodies. If you are suffering in your body right now, hold on to this verse. Your body is not the end of the story. Jesus is coming, and He will make it new.

## Chapter 3 Summary

Paul tells the believers to rejoice in the Lord and to watch out for teachers who demanded circumcision and law-keeping for salvation. True believers worship by the Spirit, boast in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh. Paul had every reason to trust his own record, but he counts it all loss, even rubbish, compared to knowing Christ, so that he may be found in Him with

the righteousness from God through faith. He wants to know Christ, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings. He has not yet been perfected, but he presses on toward the goal for the prize of God's upward calling. He warns about enemies of the cross whose god is their belly. Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our bodies to be like His glorious body.

## Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. Why does Paul say it is safe for them to hear the same things again? (3:1)

2. What were the false teachers in 3:2 demanding, and what three marks of true believers does Paul give in 3:3?

3. List Paul's reasons for confidence in the flesh (3:5-6). Which of them was he born with, and which did he achieve?

4. Why did Paul count all those things as loss? (3:7-8)

5. What is the difference between "my own righteousness" and "the righteousness from God"? (3:9)

6. What does Paul mean when he says he has not yet been "perfected"? (3:12)

7. What does it mean to forget the things behind? Is there something in your past, good or bad, that you need to stop living in? (3:13)

8. What are we eagerly waiting for, and what will Jesus do to our bodies when He comes? (3:20-21)

9. What things in your life are you tempted to trust in for your standing with God, other than Christ? (3:3-9)

10. Who has been a good example of the Christian life for you, and who might be watching your walk? (3:17)

# Chapter 4: Rejoice in the Lord Always

## Scripture

**4:1-9** So then, my brothers, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in ***the*** Lord, beloved. I exhort Euodia and I exhort Syntyche to think the same ***thing*** in ***the*** Lord. And I ask you also, true yokefellow, help these ***women***, who contended together with me in the gospel, with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names ***are*** in ***the*** book of life. Rejoice in ***the*** Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord ***is*** near. Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever ***things are*** honorable, whatever ***things are*** righteous, whatever ***things are*** pure, whatever ***things are*** lovely, whatever ***things are*** of good report, if ***there is*** any excellence and if any praise, ponder these things. The things which you also learned and received and heard and saw in me, practice these things; and the God of peace will be with you.

**4:10-23** But I rejoiced in ***the*** Lord greatly that now at last you have revived the thinking on my behalf; in which you were also thinking, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak according to lack; for I have learned to be content in whatever ***circumstances*** I am. I also know ***how*** to be humbled; I also know ***how*** to abound; in everything and in all things I have been initiated, both to be filled and to hunger, both to abound and to be in lack. I have strength ***for*** all things in the ***One*** who strengthens me, Christ. Nevertheless you did well, having had fellowship in my affliction. And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that in ***the*** beginning of the gospel, when I went out from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in ***the*** account of giving and receiving except you only; for even in Thessalonica you sent to me both once and twice for my need. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your account. But I have all things in full and abound; I have been filled, having received from Epaphroditus the ***things*** from you, an aroma of fragrance, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. And my God will fill every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father ***be*** the glory to the ages of the ages. Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers with me greet you. All the saints greet you, and especially those of Caesar's household. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ***be*** with you all. Amen.

## Chapter 4 Preview

Paul calls the believers he loves to stand firm in the Lord. He pleads with two women, Euodia and Syntyche, to settle their disagreement, and he asks a trusted helper to step in. Then he gives some of the best-loved commands in the Bible: rejoice in the Lord always, let your gentleness be known, don't be anxious about anything but pray about everything, and the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds. He tells them what to think about and what to practice, and promises that the God of peace will be with them.

In the second half, Paul thanks the Philippians for their gift. He has learned to be content whether he has much or little, because he has strength for all things in Christ who strengthens him. Their gift was a sacrifice pleasing to God, and God will fill every need of theirs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Paul closes with praise to God, greetings from the saints, even those of Caesar's household, and a final word of grace.

## Chapter 4 Study

**4:1** *So then, my brothers, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in **the** Lord, beloved.*

"So then, my brothers, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown." Few verses show Paul's love for a church like this one. He calls them beloved twice in one verse. They are his joy and his crown. The word for crown here is not a king's crown. It is the wreath given to a winner at the games, or worn at a celebration. The Philippians were Paul's prize, the proof that his work for Christ was not in vain (2:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20).

"In this way stand firm in the Lord." In what way? In the way he has just described in chapter 3: pressing on toward the goal, living as citizens of heaven, and waiting for our Savior. We can only do that "in the Lord," in His strength.

**4:2** *I exhort Euodia and I exhort Syntyche to think the same **thing** in **the** Lord.*

"I exhort Euodia and I exhort Syntyche to think the same thing in the Lord." Now Paul names names. Two women in the church had a falling out. We are not told what it was about. It was serious enough that word reached Paul in Rome.

Notice how Paul handles it. He does not take sides. He says "I exhort" to each one separately, treating them equally. And he asks them "to think the same thing in the Lord," the same words he used in 2:2. He is asking both to come back to the mind of Christ.

**4:3** *And I ask you also, true yokefellow, help these **women**, who contended together with me in the gospel, with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names **are** in **the** book of life.*

"And I ask you also, true yokefellow, help these women." A yokefellow is someone who pulls in the same yoke, like two oxen sharing the load. We do not know who this person was. Some think it was Epaphroditus, Luke, or one of the church leaders. Others think "Yokefellow" (Syzygus in Greek) was the man's actual name, and Paul is saying he lives up to it. Scripture does not tell us. Paul asks a trusted person to help the two women make peace. Sometimes believers in conflict need a third person to help them talk it through (Matthew 18:15-17).

Paul honors these women. They "contended together with me in the gospel." The word is the one used for athletes striving side by side (1:27). They had worked hard beside Paul in spreading the gospel, along with Clement and others. And all of them have their names "in the book of life," God's record of those who belong to Him (Revelation 20:15; 21:27).

**4:4** *Rejoice in **the** Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.*

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice." This is the theme of the whole letter, and Paul says it twice so they won't miss it.

How can we rejoice always? Not by pretending things are fine. Paul was in chains when he wrote this, and two of his dear friends were fighting. The key is "in the Lord." We cannot always rejoice in our circumstances, but we can always rejoice in the Lord, because He does not change. Happiness depends on what happens. Joy depends on Who holds us. And this is a command. Joy is something we can choose, by turning our eyes to Jesus again and again.

**4:5** *Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord **is** near.*

"Let your gentleness be known to all men." The word for gentleness is hard to put in one English word. It means being fair, reasonable, and patient, not insisting on your own rights, willing to yield when it is right to yield. Paul wants this known to everyone, not just to fellow believers.

"The Lord is near." This can be taken two ways, and both are true. The Lord is near in His presence: He is with us right now (Psalm 145:18). And the Lord is near in His coming: He could come for His church at any moment (3:20). Either way, we don't have to fight for our rights, because the Lord is close, and He will make all things right.

**4:6** *Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God;*

"Be anxious about nothing." The word for anxious means to be pulled in different directions, a mind divided and worried. Jesus taught the same thing in Matthew 6:25-34.

But Paul does not just tell us to stop worrying. He tells us what to do instead: "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Notice the word "everything." Nothing is too small or too big to bring to God. Supplication is a specific request. And all of it is done "with thanksgiving," remembering what God has already done. God already knows our needs. So why tell Him? Because prayer moves our burden from our shoulders to His.

Anxiety can also be a medical condition, and some believers struggle with it deeply. This verse is an invitation, not a scolding. Getting help from a doctor or counselor is not a lack of faith.

**4:7** *and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.*

Here is the promise. "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."

Notice that Paul does not promise that God will give us everything we ask. He promises peace. Sometimes God changes our circumstances. Sometimes He changes us in the middle of them. Either way, His peace comes.

It does not make sense to the world. A believer can lie in a hospital bed, or sit in a prison cell like Paul, and be at peace.

"Will guard." This is a military word, the picture of a guard posted at the gate. God's peace stands guard over our hearts and our thoughts.

**4:8** *Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever* ***things are*** *honorable, whatever* ***things are*** *righteous, whatever* ***things are*** *pure, whatever* ***things are*** *lovely, whatever* ***things are*** *of good report, if* ***there is*** *any excellence and if any praise, ponder these things.*

"Finally, brothers, whatever things are true." Paul now tells us what to fill our minds with. What we think about shapes who we become.

He gives a list. True things match reality and God's Word, not lies or rumors. Honorable things are worthy of respect. Righteous things are right in God's eyes. Pure things are clean, not stained by sin. Lovely things are pleasing in a good way. Things of good report are worth speaking well of. And "if there is any excellence and if any praise," think on that too.

"Ponder these things." The word means to think carefully, to count up, to let your mind dwell on something. This is the cure for the anxious mind in 4:6. We do not just push bad thoughts out. We fill our minds with good ones. Think about what you watch, read, and scroll through every day. Does it pass this test?

**4:9** *The things which you also learned and received and heard and saw in me, practice these things; and the God of peace will be with you.*

"The things which you also learned and received and heard and saw in me, practice these things." Thinking right must lead to living right. The Philippians had learned from Paul's teaching and seen it in his life. Now they were to put it into practice.

"And the God of peace will be with you." In 4:7, they had the peace of God. Here they have the God of peace Himself.

**4:10** *But I rejoiced in* ***the*** *Lord greatly that now at last you have revived the thinking on my behalf; in which you were also thinking, but you lacked opportunity.*

"But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived the thinking on my behalf." Paul now thanks them for their gift. The word "revived" was used for a plant that blooms again in spring. Their care for Paul had flowered again.

Paul is careful not to make them feel guilty. "In which you were also thinking, but you lacked opportunity." They had not stopped caring. They simply had not had a way to help.

**4:11** *Not that I speak according to lack; for I have learned to be content in whatever* ***circumstances*** *I am.*

"Not that I speak according to lack; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am." Paul does not want them to think he is hinting for more.

"I have learned to be content." Contentment is learned. It does not come naturally to anyone. The word for content was used by the Greek philosophers for a man who needed nothing outside himself. Paul gives the word a new meaning. He was content, not because he needed nothing, but because Christ was enough.

Contentment does not mean we never want anything better or never work to change things. It means our peace does not depend on getting what we want.

**4:12** *I also know **how** to be humbled; I also know **how** to abound; in everything and in all things I have been initiated, both to be filled and to hunger, both to abound and to be in lack.*

"I also know how to be humbled; I also know how to abound." Paul had seen both sides of life. Sometimes he had plenty. Sometimes he went hungry and slept in the cold (2 Corinthians 11:27).

"In everything and in all things I have been initiated." The word was used for being let in on a secret. Paul had learned the secret of contentment, "both to be filled and to hunger, both to abound and to be in lack."

Which is harder, being content with little, or being content with much? Many people would say little. But plenty has its own danger. It can make us proud and forgetful of God (Deuteronomy 8:11-14). Paul learned to handle both.

**4:13** *I have strength **for** all things in the **One** who strengthens me, Christ.*

"I have strength for all things in the One who strengthens me, Christ." This may be one of the most quoted verses in the Bible, and one of the most misused. People use it to mean that Christ will help them win the game, get the job, or do anything they set their mind to.

Read it in context. Paul has just said he knows how to go hungry and how to have plenty. "All things" here means all those circumstances: plenty and want, comfort and hardship, freedom and chains. This is a verse about contentment. It is not a promise that we will get whatever we want. It is a promise that whatever we face, Christ will give us the strength to face it.

And notice who the strength comes from. Paul does not say, I am strong. He says Christ strengthens him. The word means to pour power into. Paul's strength was borrowed strength, given day by day by the Lord who lived in him (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). That is a bigger promise than the way most people use this verse. You may lose the game or not get the job, but Christ will give you the strength to stay faithful through all of it.

**4:14** *Nevertheless you did well, having had fellowship in my affliction.*

"Nevertheless you did well, having had fellowship in my affliction." Paul does not want his words about contentment to sound ungrateful. By giving, they shared in his trouble. Fellowship here is again the word koinonia (1:5), partnership. When we give to support someone who serves Christ, we share in their work.

**4:15-16** *And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that in **the** beginning of the gospel, when I went out from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in **the** account of giving and receiving except you only; for even in Thessalonica you sent to me both once and twice for my need.*

"And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I went out from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the account of giving and receiving except you only."

Paul uses business words again, like a ledger. When Paul first left Macedonia, the Philippians were the only church that supported him. Even while he was still in Thessalonica, the next city where he preached after Philippi, they sent help "once and twice" (4:16; Acts 17:1). Later they helped again when he was in Corinth (2 Corinthians 11:9).

This church was not rich. Paul says the churches of Macedonia gave out of deep poverty (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). Yet they gave again and again.

**4:17** *Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your account.*

"Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your account." Paul cared more about the givers than the gift. He uses the picture of interest building up in an account.

This is not a promise that God will make us rich if we give. It is a promise that God sees and rewards faithful giving (Matthew 6:19-21; 2 Corinthians 9:6-8).

**4:18** *But I have all things in full and abound; I have been filled, having received from Epaphroditus the **things** from you, an aroma of fragrance, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.*

"But I have all things in full and abound; I have been filled." Paul writes as if he were signing a receipt: paid in full. He had received the gift by Epaphroditus, and it was more than enough.

He describes their gift in the language of Old Testament worship. It was "an aroma of fragrance, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God." When the priests offered sacrifices, the smoke rose up as a pleasing aroma to the Lord (Leviticus 1:9). Paul says their gift to him was really a gift to God. Giving to support God's work is an act of worship.

**4:19** *And my God will fill every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

"And my God will fill every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." This promise follows their generous giving. They had filled Paul's need, and now Paul says God will fill theirs. It is the same word he used of himself in 4:18, "I have been filled."

Notice what God promises: "every need." Not every want. God knows what we need better than we do.

Notice also the measure: "according to His riches in glory." Not out of His riches, as if He gave a small portion from a big pile, but according to them, in a way that matches how rich He is. God's supply never runs low.

And notice where it comes from: "in Christ Jesus." The God who had met Paul's needs in prison would meet theirs too.

**4:20** *Now to our God and Father **be** the glory to the ages of the ages. Amen.*

"Now to our God and Father be the glory to the ages of the ages. Amen." Paul cannot talk about God's riches without breaking into praise. "To the ages of the ages" means forever and ever. Amen means so be it, or it is true. In 4:19 Paul said my God. Now he says our God.

**4:21-22** *Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers with me greet you. All the saints greet you, and especially those of Caesar's household.*

"Greet every saint in Christ Jesus." Paul wants every believer greeted, not just the leaders or his close friends. "The brothers with me greet you." This would include Timothy (1:1).

"All the saints greet you, and especially those of Caesar's household." This is a remarkable line. Caesar's household did not just mean the emperor's family. It included the many slaves, freedmen, and officials who served in the emperor's palace and government. If Paul wrote from Rome, as most believe, the gospel had reached right into the household of Nero, the emperor. Paul's chains had carried the gospel to the center of Roman power (1:12-13). No place is too dark or too high for the gospel.

**4:23** *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ **be** with you all. Amen.*

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." Paul ends the way he began, with grace (1:2). Grace is God's favor we did not earn. Everything in this letter flows from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many Greek copies, including the text the SLB follows, add a short note after the letter saying it was written from Rome and sent by Epaphroditus. That note was added later by copyists and is not part of Paul's letter itself, but it agrees with what the letter tells us (2:25; 4:18, 22).

## Chapter 4 Summary

Paul urges his beloved friends, his joy and crown, to stand firm in the Lord. He pleads with Euodia and Syntyche to think the same thing in the Lord, and he asks his true yokefellow to help these women who labored with him in the gospel. He calls the church to rejoice in the Lord always, to let their gentleness be known to all, and to be anxious about nothing, but to bring everything to God in prayer with thanksgiving. The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard their hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus. He tells them to ponder what is true, honorable, righteous, pure, lovely, and of good report, and to practice what they learned from him, and the God of peace will be with them. Paul thanks them for their gift. He has learned to be content in every circumstance, and he has strength for all things in Christ who strengthens him. Their gift is a fragrant sacrifice pleasing to God, and God will fill every need of theirs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Paul closes with praise, greetings from the saints, especially those of Caesar's household, and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. What two women does Paul name in 4:2, and what does he ask them to do?

2. How does Paul want the church and his "true yokefellow" to help them? (4:3)

3. How can a believer rejoice in the Lord always, even in hard times? (4:4)

4. What does Paul tell us to do instead of being anxious, and what does God promise? (4:6-7)

5. What eight kinds of things does Paul tell us to ponder? (4:8)

6. What does 4:13 mean in its context? How is it often misused? (4:11-13)

7. What does God promise to fill in 4:19, and what is the difference between a need and a want?

8. What are you anxious about right now? Will you bring it to God in prayer with thanksgiving this week? (4:6)

9. Is there a believer you are not getting along with? What would it look like to "think the same thing in the Lord" with them? (4:2)

10. Look at what you let into your mind each day. Which of the things in 4:8 could you fill it with instead?

# Conclusion

Philippians is a short letter, but it shows us how a believer can have joy anywhere, even in chains. In chapter 1, Paul showed us that his imprisonment had advanced the gospel, and that whether he lived or died, Christ would be magnified in his body. In chapter 2, he showed us the mind of Christ, who existed in the form of God, emptied Himself, took the form of a slave, and humbled Himself to death on a cross, and whom God has highly exalted. In chapter 3, he counted everything loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, and he pressed on toward the goal while waiting for our Savior from heaven. In chapter 4, he taught us to rejoice in the Lord always, to pray instead of worry, and to be content in every circumstance through Christ who strengthens us.

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. When we do that with Philippians, the source of Paul's joy is clear. It was not his circumstances. It was not his record, which he called rubbish. It was Christ. Paul put it in one line: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (1:21). If Christ is our life, then nothing this world takes from us can take our joy, and even death becomes gain.

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him, and encourage you to think the way Jesus thinks. Look at the things of others and not only your own (2:4). Stop grumbling and shine as a light in a dark world (2:14-15). Forget what lies behind and keep pressing on (3:13-14). And when worry comes, bring it to God in prayer with thanksgiving, and let His peace stand guard over your heart (4:6-7).

Paul's message is the same for us today as it was for the believers in Philippi. No one is made right with God by his own record. Paul wanted to be found in Christ, "not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness from God on the basis of faith" (3:9). The jailer in Philippi asked the most important question anyone can ask, and Paul and Silas gave him the answer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

*Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.*

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow and serve as part of the body of Christ. And take heart: He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

# Old and New Testament Links in Philippians

This table lists every Old and New Testament link printed in this study, in verse order. I took the links from the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, with help from the OpenBible.info cross-references, and I checked each one by reading both passages in the Steadfast Literal Bible. Where I was not sure of a link, I left it out.

| Verse in this study | Old Testament passage | Kind |
|---|---|---|
| 1:19 | Job 13:16 | alluded to |
| 2:9 | Isaiah 52:13 | alluded to |
| 2:10-11 | Isaiah 45:23 | quoted |
| 2:15 | Deuteronomy 32:5 | alluded to |
| 3:5 | Leviticus 12:3 | alluded to |

# Bibliography

The following sources were consulted for this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

Green, Jay P., Sr. (ed.). The Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-Greek-English. Hendrickson Publishers, 1986 (2nd ed.; printing used 2005). ISBN 1-56563-977-4.

Treasury of Scripture Knowledge. London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, about 1830. Public domain.

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