

Embracing Christ as All in Our Journey of Life

Gleanings from Philippians



Notes for your edification

By

Geoffrey Bull

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PO Box 549 Cowaramup

Western Australia 6284

geoffrey@geoffreybull.com

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Course Outline

Purpose of the course:

As we make our journey through life we all face opposition and suffering of one form or another and a variety of circumstances and situations, some pleasant and others that are more difficult. How we face these issues is what is important, as our attitude and actions can be either of benefit or of detriment to us.

The folks at Philippi were no different to us and in his letter to them Paul encourages them, and us, to follow his example in embracing Christ as all. Let his words resound in our hearts:

... *“for me to live is Christ, to die is gain”* ...

... *“I count all things loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord”* ...

... *“that I may know Him”* ...

... *“forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* ...

... *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”* ...

So the purpose of this course is to encourage us to follow Paul’s example and draw near to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; that we may know Him; that we may gain Christ; that we may rejoice in Him always; that we may conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; and as citizens of heaven, that we may live by the life of Christ giving expression to the attitude of humility and love we find in Christ our Lord.

Key Verses:

Phil 1:6 ... *“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus”*.

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

Phil 1:27 ... *“conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”*.

Phil 2:3-4 ... *“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others”*.

Phil 2:5-11 ... *“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on*

earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”.

Phil 2:12-13 ... *“work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure”.*

Phil 3:8-10 ... *“that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of the faith, that I may know Him”.*

Phil 3:13-14 ... *“forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”.*

Phil 3:20 ... *“For our citizenship is in heaven”.*

Phil 4:4 ... *“Rejoice in the Lord always”.*

Phil 4:6-7 ... *“Be anxious for 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 comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”.*

Phil 4:8 ... *“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things”.*

Phil 4:11 ... *“I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am”.*

Phil 4:13 ... *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”.*

Phil 4:19 ... *“my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus”*

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Lesson 1 Introduction

For Me to Live is Christ

From before the foundation of the world our Heavenly Father had a plan and purpose for our lives (Eph 1:4). We were chosen to be “in Christ”. His plan was, and still is, that He place His Seed in us so that we may become partakers of His Divine nature (2 Pet 1:3-4), so that we can walk through our journey of life living by the abundant life of Christ in us – expressing Him in all our attitudes, words and actions – and in doing so to bring pleasure to our Heavenly Father.

In this life we will face a wide variety of circumstances and situations. There will be times of blessing and times of adversity. But what is most important is summarised in Paul’s words in:

Rom 8:28-29 ... *“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to **His purpose**. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become **conformed to the image of His Son**, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren”.*

As the born again we are saved, not just from hell and the torment of punishment all sinners will face there for all eternity, but that ... *“the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh”*. In fact the whole verse actually says:

2 Cor 4:11 ... *“For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh”.*

It’s adversity that makes us exhibit the life of Christ in our mortal flesh, **if** we embrace Him as our all as we go through all the things we face. So we are faced with the question: **is my life exhibiting the sweet essence of the Christ life as I walk in union with Him, or just the basic irritation and anger of my ‘self’ that I would have in living apart from Him?**

You see, the only thing that will enable me to ‘rejoice’ in the face of adversity is the acute sense of eagerness of allowing the life of the Son to evidence itself in and through me. No matter how harsh the situation, no matter how difficult the circumstances, I must bow before my Lord and say, “my heart’s desire is to submit to You, to trust You and obey You in this matter”. If I do this then instantly it’s His life and power that that moves to the forefront of my life, and will manifest in my attitude, words and actions that which glorifies Him. You see, if God allows you to face adversity, He is more than able and willing to ... *“do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us”* (Eph 3:20).

As we take a journey through Paul’s epistle to the Philippians we will see the essence of his message is all about keeping our soul properly conditioned to manifest the life of the Son of God.

If anyone could have delved into a mega pity party as a result of the adversity he faced, with the beatings, shipwreck, hunger, insults, unjust imprisonments he faced, just to name a few, it was Paul. But in this letter of joy and rejoicing he shows us the example of one who truly embraced Christ as His all in his journey through life, no matter what he was facing, and encourages us with his words:

Phil 3:19 ... *“Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us”.*

That I May Know Him

While a small portion of the letter is devoted to dealing with controversy, the main thrust and central theme is “knowing Christ”. Knowing Christ, now and forever, is the passion of Paul’s heart and is clear throughout this epistle. Paul’s passion is stated in the single expression: *“for me to live is Christ, to die is gain”* (1:21).

Knowing Christ is not to be seen as an intellectual exercise. It is to live in a relationship with Him where we become intimately acquainted with Him and through that intimate knowledge we become conformed to His image; or as Paul puts it, we *“gain Christ”* (3:8). Our words and actions then become an outward expression of Him who is our life and all, and by that lifestyle we ... *“conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”* (1:27).

This is the single purpose for our redemption, that Christ may be formed in us so that He may be expressed through us in all our attitudes, words and actions. This underlies all the other themes that Paul discusses such as: suffering, joy, unity and pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. It is this singular focus on Christ that holds together the theology of this epistle.

As we read this epistle and draw near to Him who is our life and all, may we be more and more conformed into His image and likeness, so that we may prove ourselves ... *“to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life”*. (2:15-16).

Historical Background

So with those thoughts in mind, in order to maximise our gleanings from the epistle to the Philippians, let us now start by looking at the history of the Philippian church and the events that led up to the writing of this letter of joy. We’ll do this because the background information can throw light on some of the things we will find later as we explore this letter.

A Roman Colony

Philippi was named after Philip of Macedon (father of Alexander the Great) around 356 BC when, by diplomacy and military conquest, he made himself master of the city-states of Greece. Because of its strategic location, on the main route between Rome and Asia, after a series of battles Philippi and its surrounding state of Macedonia was later colonised by the Romans. Then in 42 BC two major battles were waged on the nearby plains between Cassius and Brutus (assassins of Julius Caesar) and the victors of the battles, Octavian and Mark Anthony. Following these victories Octavian (who later was endowed with the title “Augustus” – “sacred” or “revered” one) honoured the city by re-founding it as a Roman military colony and endowed its populace with Roman citizenship.

The history, city, people and general background at Philippi were therefore highly influenced by Greco-Roman culture and traditions. Now while this was evidenced in a positive manner in things like the social reciprocity between the Philippian church and Paul, it was also the main reason for the opposition and suffering that the Philippian believers faced.

With colonial status and the privilege of Roman citizenship enjoyed by the Philippian community, due to this special grace bestowed on them by Octavian, the city would always have special allegiance to the Roman emperor. This allegiance and devotion to their emperor approached that attributed to deities, and Claudius, who was emperor at the time of the formation of the church, and Nero, who was the emperor at the time of Paul's writing, were known throughout the empire as *kurios* (lord) and *sōtēr* (saviour).

The Philippian believers, who were both Roman citizens and citizens of heaven, were compelled to conduct themselves ... *"in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ"* (1:27) and in doing so give their allegiance and devotion to **the Kurios** (Lord) and **the Sōtēr** (Saviour) Jesus Christ. Their allegiance was not to Nero but to another *Kurios*, Jesus Christ, before whom someday every knee, including the emperor and other citizens of Rome living in Philippi, would bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ alone is Lord and Saviour.

This was the main cause and source of their opposition and suffering at the hand of the unbelievers in Philippi. Especially when, in line with the gospel they proclaimed and Paul's writing, Jesus the Lord and Saviour was revealed as having taken on the form of the Servant-Man who was finally condemned to die on a cross for our salvation. The pagan unbelievers would have scoffed at the thought of their deity being a mere "man", let alone a "slave", and to add to it, one condemned to die on a cross – something they reserved only for infliction of maximum pain on the condemned.

So it was the gospel of the Servant-Saviour that drew to the Philippian believers much opposition from those unbelievers who revered their emperor Nero. Where Paul refers to ... *"a crooked and perverse generation"* (2:15) who are destined for destruction (1:28) this can only refer to the pagans who are citizens of Rome living in Philippi, a Roman military colony, and descendants of repatriated soldiers who are intensely loyal to the emperor. They were the persecutors of the church in Philippi.

Similarly, right from the foundation of the church in Philippi we see that Paul and Silas met with this opposition, as is made clear in the words recorded in Acts 16:19-20 ... *"These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans."*

The Gospel Reaches Philippi

Christianity reached Macedonia approximately twenty years after the crucifixion of Christ. We establish this from the fact that the first letter to the Thessalonians was written by Paul and sent from Corinth sometime in AD 51, not too long after the establishment of this church, and in this letter there is reference to the visit to Philippi prior to Paul's coming to Thessalonica (1 Thess 2:2).

Luke records the establishment of the Philippian church in the book of Acts.

Acts 16:9-40 ... *"A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them".*

"So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of

the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days. And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled”.

“A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.’ And she prevailed upon us”.

“It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, ‘These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.’ She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!’ And it came out at that very moment”. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, “These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans.”

“The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks”.

“But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!’ And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ They said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household”.

“Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, ‘Release those men.’ And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, ‘The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace.’ But Paul said to them, ‘They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out.’ The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city. They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed”.

This passage gives the account of Paul’s vision and call to Macedonia and the early days and beginnings of the church at Philippi.

When Paul arrived in Philippi he would have gone looking for a synagogue, as it was his custom on a Sabbath to go to the local synagogue, where he would find a gathering of Jews, Jewish proselytes and God-fearing gentiles to address with the Gospel. But the minimum number required for the formation of a synagogue is ten men. So the fact that on the Sabbath Paul had to go outside the gates of the city to a place where he had been told there would be a gathering of god-fearing worshippers next to the river was testament to the fact that there was no synagogue in Philippi. This is also borne out by the fact that the God-fearing worshippers he found were all women; no men.

Lydia was the first convert in Europe and was the person God used to provide lodging and care for Paul and his apostolic team while they were in the district of Macedonia.

God orchestrates circumstances such that Paul and Silas end up in the Philippian jail. This is so that the gospel could reach the other prisoners and the jailer and his family, demonstrating God’s love for all people in all walks of life.

Upon release from jail and before leaving the city, Paul and Silas encouraged the believers of this fledgling church. They were able to do this because they were built up in the Lord as a result of their trial and deliverance. Their unwavering conduct and trust in the Lord in the midst of adversity stood as a wonderful example to the local people. Paul and Silas had put into practice that which James wrote to a different audience when he said:

Jas 1:2-4 *... “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing”.*

Interlude

After the departure of the apostolic team from Philippi¹, the Philippian church maintained contact with Paul for some time and while he was in Thessalonica and later in Corinth they send him gifts.

¹ It is possible that Paul left Luke, the writer of Acts, behind in Philippi to oversee the work there as we see the change from “we” or “us” to “they” after Acts 16:16, 17 and the next time we see “we” or “us” is about seven or eight years later again in Acts 20:5,6 when Luke sailed from Philippi.

Over time Paul did go back to visit them again a couple of times but then it appears that sometime after these visits that the Philippian believers lost contact with Paul for some time until they eventually found out that he was in prison in Rome. Sensing he may be in need they sent a love gift to him by the hand of Epaphroditus, one of the brethren from Philippi.

While there, Epaphroditus also informed Paul of the disharmony between Euodia and Syntyche, two women from the Philippian assembly, and would have also updated Paul on the state of affairs in general in the church and in particular concerning the opposition they continue to face. The fact that the congregation is suffering as a result of opposition is evident in Paul's statement in Phil 1:27-30 and alluded to metaphorically in Phil 2:17.

After delivering the gift Epaphroditus had fallen ill and word of this illness had got back to Philippi. Concern for his wellbeing then got back to Paul. So as soon as Epaphroditus was well again, Paul sent him back to Philippi bearing the letter Paul had written to the believers he so loved.

This letter was written around ten years after the formation of the church in Philippi, while Paul was in prison in Rome awaiting judgement that would affect his liberty and possibly his life.

Context of Suffering

The Philippian believers are facing opposition and are suffering for their faith. Paul gives a theological reason for this ... *"For to you it has been granted **for Christ's sake**, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake"* (1:29), and also shows the connection between his present suffering and the struggle they face ... *"experiencing the **same conflict** which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me"* (1:30).

While suffering is not the dominant theme of Philippians, it constitutes the primary historical context for the church in Philippi and therefore underlies much of what Paul has to say to the Philippian believers.

The context of suffering helps explain the emphasis on Paul's imprisonment and suffering in both his words of thanksgiving (1:7) and explanation of his current state of affairs (1:12-26). Part of Paul's reason for giving thanks is their partnership with him in chains in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. In explaining his current state of affairs Paul illustrates how he is responding to both his suffering at the hands of the Roman Empire, and to the selfish ambition and rivalry of other believers who are trying to discredit and upset him. While his words are written in a manner that serves to reinforce the bonds of friendship and fellowship between himself and the Philippian believers, they also serve to demonstrate how Paul lives the Christ-life in the face of opposition and suffering providing them with an example to follow.

Suffering and opposition to the gospel also underlie a further very significant theme of the letter – the certainty and security of the believer's future with its ultimate triumph. Threaded throughout the letter are the eschatological statements. We see these in 1:6, 10 in the thanksgiving and prayer; in 1:21-24 in Paul's explanation of his state of affairs; in 2:9-11 where we see the glorious exaltation of the One who ... *"humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross"*; in 2:16 in the appeal that this verse and the preceding ones present; in 3:4-14 in Paul's explanation of his goal of life; in 3:20-21 and 4:1 in the appeal that Paul submits after explaining his

goal of life; in 4:5 an affirmation to the humble; and finally in 4:19-20 in the final words of theology and doxology.

Internal Dissent

While the opposition and the associated suffering at the hands of the pagan Roman citizens of Philippi is the historical context and the main underlying influence in this epistle, in the sections where Paul exhorts the Philippians his main concern is related to the internal rivalry and posturing that is going on within the church. This is evident throughout the letter and is seen in the words in 1:10 ... *“be sincere and blameless”* (not causing someone to stumble); in 1:27 ... *“stand firm in one spirit with one mind striving together”* ; 2:1-4 dealing with unity, humility, self effacement and consideration of others above one’s self; 2:12-16 ... *“do all things without grumbling or disputing”* ; 2:20-22 ... *“they all seek after their own interests”* ; 3:4-14 where Paul denounces these insidious ways of the old life ; and finally in 4:2-3 ... *“live in harmony”*. Certainly this issue lies behind some of the key exhortations of this letter, particularly where Paul calls for humility of mind that will cause them to lookout for the interests of others to replace the attitude of selfish-ambition and empty conceit that are so divisive and damaging.

This is a letter of joy and is designed to uplift and direct believers who may otherwise deviate from the way of truth. It is written in such a way that does not just single out the two dissenting women, Euodia and Syntyche, but directs everyone to focus on Christ, in whom they will find the inner graces they are to “put on”. Paul’s aim is to have the people so engrossed with Christ that their selfish aims or desires fade away and are replaced by an outworking of the inner graces of Christ.

Paul’s use of the word “gospel” occurs more times in this letter than any of his others, demonstrating that his overarching concern is for the gospel. Specifically, his concern is for the Phillipians and their ongoing relationship with Christ. Every time he issues a specific exhortation, as well as in other of his statements, his primary goal is the strengthening of this relationship.

This message is very practical and relevant to us today and will help resolves situations where the flesh is at work between believers. It is the epistle that presents Christ as our all. It presents Christ in a way that as we objectively focus on Him in our daily lives and learn to live by His life, we see the subjective result in our lives and the lives of those we affect around us. Hence, in this letter we are encouraged to embrace Christ and live the crucified life in the midst of opposition and suffering.

Christ is our all: He is our life, our hope, our joy, our song and our righteousness, our holiness and our redemption. May we live to His praise and glory!

Letter of Joy

It is a book of joy. Joy, rejoicing, inner joy and gladness are mentioned nineteen times in these four brief chapters.

While not intended as a doctrinal treatise, this letter presents significant doctrine and contains the greatest doctrinal passage about Christ to be found in the entire Bible. In 2:5-11 is the revelation of how Christ laid aside His preincarnate glory to become a man, and not only man but a servant man. Also in 3:9, where Paul tells of his desire to be found in Christ, we have in this one verse the entire argument of the book of Romans: ... *“not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law,*

but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of the faith”.

Paul’s secret is that his mind is filled with Christ. This is evident in the number of times we see Him refer to Christ – sixty four times in the letter! Nineteen times in the first chapter alone! He counts all things to be loss ... *“compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord”* (NLT). In the same way we should be so preoccupied with Christ that we see Him in everything we face in life. Paul exhorts us to ... *“have this mind (attitude) which was in Christ Jesus”* (2:5). Our mind and Christ’s should be one. Jesus, our example, emptied Himself in obedience and was totally submitted to the Father; our place as believers is to hold Christ as the focal point and centre of our lives, only saying and doing what we hear and see in Him. Our driving passion should be as Paul’s, who said ... *“for me to live is Christ”*.

Structure of the Letter

Although Paul would have written it as one continuous letter, rather than the four chapters we have in our modern bibles, there are four natural divisions in the epistle. In each of these, Paul presents Christ in some different way:

- **Christ our life** ... *“for me to live is Christ”* (1:21)

In singleness of mind we are encouraged to embrace the ***gospel mindset***.

- **Christ our example** ... *“have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus”* (2:5)

With humility and lowliness of mind we are to embrace the ***submissive mind***.

- **Christ our object** ... *“but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus”* (3:12)

With minds fixed on Christ we are enabled to demonstrate a ***steadfastly determined mind***.

- **Christ our strength and supply** ... *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”* (4:13)

With Christ’s peace, power and provision we walk secure in Him with ***confidence of mind***.

In this epistle we are encouraged to embrace Christ, the author and perfecter of the faith, the one who has begun and who will complete His work in us, as our all as we make our journey through this world. He will enable us to face off the enemies of our soul and deal with the spirit of division that so easily besets His church. It’s as we draw near to Christ and gain a deeper revelation of Him, and put on the mind of Christ, that we will see the selfish aims, disunity, bad attitudes and other works of the flesh melt away.

So as we take a journey through Philippians it is my prayer for us all that the God inspired words of this letter will penetrate the depths of our hearts and that we will receive an amazing fresh and powerful revelation of Jesus Christ and that we will embrace Him and His sufficiency to perfect that which He has begun in us. May we emerge from this brief study sounding out the words ... *“for me to live is Christ”*!

Lesson 2 Christ Our Life

Embrace the Gospel Mind

As we consider the first chapter of Philippians we will see that Christ who is our life and the “gospel mind” go hand in hand. This is evident in the many references to Christ and the gospel found here.

... *“I thank my God ... in view of your participation (fellowship) in **the gospel**”* (1:5)

... *“in the defence and confirmation of **the gospel**, you all are partaker of grace with me”* (1:7)

... *“my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of **the gospel**”* (1:12)

... *“I am appointed for the defence of **the gospel**”* (1:16)

... *“conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of **the gospel**”* (1:27)

... *“with one mind striving together for the faith of **the gospel**”* (1:27)

In our day, just as it was in Paul’s day, the gospel of Christ is under attack. There are a number of contributing influences, including:

- The force of secularisation that is driving all forms of religion, especially Christianity, out into the peripheral corners of life. The overpowering focus that has been placed on the economy, wealth creation, fitness, sport, politics, academic attainment and entertainment has caused the vast majority of our society to become largely ignorant of the gospel. When the few devoted believers, who do attempt to evangelise, discuss and present the gospel they are mostly met with scepticism and disinterest. This has all led to the sad state of affairs in the church, where believers will, in select company and in an unobtrusive manner, declare their faith in Christ and their belief that the world needs Christ, but their zeal for the gospel of Christ has largely diminished. Many have found a comfortable quiet corner, a holy huddle, where they can have their private times of fellowship, isolated from the world and in a place where they know they will not face persecution or opposition from the secular world.
- The deluding attractions of self-indulgence have diminished the spread of the gospel as believers have become more interested in their creature comforts and material security than in a life of self-sacrifice and looking out for the interest of others above themselves. This is most dominant in western cultures where life is relatively easy. Comfortable lounge furniture, TV entertainment and warm beverage have turned prayer warriors into prayerless worriers and ineffective “couch potatoes”.
- The rise of a fear of “political incorrectness”. Particularly in western nations, we have seen the increase in diversity of races, religions, philosophies, cultures and moral values. While there is nothing wrong with that in itself, with this pluralism has come the fear of treading on anyone’s toes by the declaration of the gospel. We can’t have prayer or bible reading in our schools for fear of offending the atheists or heathens from other non-Christian religious groups. Evangelism is strongly opposed as it is seen as unacceptable proselytising, and the gospel of Christ is no longer accepted as the only way of salvation. The minority groups, like the gay-rights movements, extreme environmental lobbyist groups and other similar

minority groups have everyone dancing to their tune and not daring to offend them by presenting or promoting the “truth”.

When Paul wrote to the Philippians they were facing similar pressures from the world around them. He was aware of the dangers this young church faced; the internal rivalry and posturing, as well as the external opposition and secular seduction that could so easily beset them. He writes to encourage them to be on guard against the subtle attacks of the enemy and to counter these opposing forces by embracing Christ and the gospel mindset.

The Servant-Heart Greeting

Phil 1:1-2 ... *“Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”.*

Paul’s letter is predicated on the friendship and mutual goodwill that exists between him and the Philippian believers. This partnership also includes mutual suffering for the gospel of Christ and reciprocity in friendship, concern and actions for one another. This is evidenced in Paul’s earnest desire to see them again and for their growth in Christ; his prayers of thanksgiving for them and his exhortations that they walk in unity and remain steadfast in Christ in the face of opposition. Their actions on Paul’s behalf along with their prayers for him and their recent gift, along with past gifts to him, and Paul’s acknowledgement of their kindness and concern for him, demonstrate the reciprocity of friendship that exists between Paul and the Philippian believers.

However, in his approach to the Philippians in this letter Paul purposely avoids any patronage here; no patron-client or patron-protégé relationship is expressed in his approach to the Philippians. Paul begins by identifying himself and Timothy as “slaves” or “bond-servants” of Christ Jesus. Paul’s use of this designation is significant as he has resounding in his mind the Spirit breathed words concerning his Master of whom he will write in Phil 2:7-8

... *“who emptied Himself, taking on the form of a bond-servant ... and ... humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”.*

Paul does not introduce himself as “apostle” as he does in the majority of his letters. It is significant to note that he uses this title of “slave” or “bond servant” of himself without the addition of the title “apostle” in the letter to the Philippians and no title at all in the letters to the Thessalonians, as these are the letters in which he specifically and intentionally presents his submissive servant-heart attitude and way of life, that he sees in Christ, as an **“example”** to follow.

On the basis of his mutual friendship and fellowship in suffering for the gospel, Paul addresses the recipients of his letters with the underlying attitude that he understands what they are facing in life as he is facing the same opposition, and far worse, with the exhortation to follow his example of embracing Christ as his all as he presses on ... *“toward the goal for the for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”.*

Phil 3:17 ... *“Brethren, join in following **my example**, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us”.*

2 Thess 3:7 ... “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow **our example**”.

2 Thess 3:9 ... “not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow **our example**”.

Although the letter to the Philippians contains much exhortation, there is no appeal to Paul’s authority as the basis of his exhortation. Instead he appeals to their mutuality (Phil 2:1) and to his own **example**, as he follows Christ’s example (Phil 1:12-26, 3:4-14, 4:10-13 and 4:17-19).

Paul’s life in adopting the humble servant attitude of his Lord is testament to the manner in which Christ’s life and power comes to the fore and causes him to live in victory and joy no matter what he is facing by way of opposition and suffering. His use of the word “slave” is intentional as he, by doing so, implies that he is totally and unconditionally submitted to and at the disposal of his Master. He is here to serve. He also understands that as slave of his Master, as he carries out his Master’s commands, his words and actions carry the full authority and backing of his Master. In this kind of service the slave realises perfect freedom.

Pause for thought: In the face of our struggles in life, as we embrace Christ and the self-denying, others-
uplifting principle of the cross, we will see the release of Christ’s power in our lives and walk in true freedom!

Paul then refers to the recipients of his letter as the “*saints*” or “*holy ones*”. This is a term that literally means “ones that have been separated unto God in Christ Jesus”. It’s not referring to “special” people; just ordinary believers like you and me. He adds to their description as being “***in Christ Jesus***”. These are not just the “religious” people, the Jews or Jewish proselytes who may be in Philippi, but those who are the born again, those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and in whom Christ lives. This is significant as it is only those in whom Christ lives that can live by His life, and the main point and thrust of this letter is an appeal to the Philippian believers to intimately “*know*” and to “*gain*” (profit from that which you already possess) Christ in order that they may “*conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ*”.

Not only that, but he writes to “***all*** the saints in Christ Jesus”. He uses the word “*all*” in this letter in a way not seen in his other letters. It appears in 1:1; 1:4; 1:7 (twice); 1:8; 1:25; 2:17; 2:26; and 4:21. He greets them all; he thinks well of them all; he prays for them all; he knows in the end God will bring them all to perfection/completion; he encourages them all to be united in spirit, with one mind and striving together for the gospel of Christ; finally in closing conveys the greetings of his fellow saints and those of Caesar’s household to them all (“*every saint*”) and God’s grace to them all.

Although Paul knows there is internal rivalry and divisions, he refuses to focus on this and adopts his customary approach of focusing on the answer and not the problem. His greeting and the ensuing inclusion of “*all*” the saints makes it clear that Paul’s primary desire is to bind them together in love and acceptance and encourage them to be one in Christ. We see this same approach in 1 Corinthians where Paul is addressing a very troubled church; his greeting and initial words (1 Cor 1:1-9) to them are uplifting and focused on the answer, not the problem. Only after first assuring them in Christ does he go on later to discuss the issues that need attention and how to deal with these. As 1 Cor 13:7 is translated in The Message Bible, love ... “*trusts God always, always looks for the best*”. This heart of love is a trade mark of the apostle of grace!

Paul is addressing the entire church in Philippi. The church is made up of the believers; young and old, male and female, mature and immature – he makes no distinction for we are all one in Christ.

But in the greeting he also adds the words, *“including the overseers and deacons”*. The Greek word is literally translated *“together with”*. Now it is clear from a number of scriptures (Acts 14:23 & Acts 20:17, 28 for example) that Paul encouraged the raising up of leadership in the churches he established, for the purpose of guiding and helping those who were new in the faith. But in addressing the Philippians he is not addressing a leadership issue; he does not single out the leaders to address them individually as he does in some of his other letters (Timothy, Titus and Philemon), as his message here is directed to the mutuality of submission and unity, contributed to by everyone, that makes the body function as a whole to God’s glory. Paul’s primary purpose here is to encourage a spirit of humility and unity, and that involves everyone!

Other than his letters addressed to Timothy, Titus and Philemon (where he addresses leaders concerning specific leadership issues), Philippians is the only letter where leaders are mentioned in the greeting. It is interesting that, after singling them out in the greeting, he makes no further reference to them. This is because the thrust of his writing is the encouragement of unity of all the members of the local body of believers.

There are also other useful observations we can make here as well as in other passages, where Paul refers to leaders.

- Whenever Paul refers to leadership in the church he uses the plural, and in his writings there is no evidence of a single leader as head of the local assembly of believers. Paul makes it very clear (Eph 1:22; 4:15; Col 1:18) that Christ alone is head of the church. Consistent with his teaching, leaders (plural) in the church are simply the mature believers that have been appointed to help the less mature to be established in Christ. They are there to serve. In Matt 20:25-28 Jesus said,

... “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”.

- The words ... *“including”* or *“together with”* reveals the role of leaders in the church. Paul is addressing the community as a whole of which the overseers and deacons are a part. Paul singles them out as a distinguishable part but clearly as a part of the whole, not as being *“over”* or *“outside”* it.
- All of Paul’s designations of church leaders – overseer, deacon, pastor, teacher, evangelist, prophet and apostle – refer to people who function in accordance with the definition of the term rather than hold an office. The noun form of the word *“overseer”* literally means *“guardian”* and the verb form of this word means *“visitation”*. So an *“overseer”*, therefore, is one who visits someone with the purpose of *“looking after”* them. As their *“guardian”* the overseer cares for and protects the person. Guardians serve.
- The word for *“deacon”* literally is *“servant”* or *“attendant”*. The difference between the overseers and deacons was probably in how they served; overseers giving more spiritual

care in praying, teaching and counselling, whereas deacons doing more practical caring of physical needs, especially that of attending to the needs of the poor or vulnerable.

- If we look at Phil 4:2-3 we may get a clue why Paul singled out the overseers and deacons ... *“I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord ... help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers”*. It appears that Euodia and Syntyche, who were at odds with each other, were probably among the leaders. So Paul starts the greeting with *“all”* and then adds the *“including”* or *“together with”* as he anticipates his exhortation later in the letter for these women leaders along with any others dissenters within the local body, to live in harmony and unity.

... **“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”**.

Paul’s greater theological perspective is seen in this greeting. The sum total of God’s caring concern and conduct towards mankind is found in this word *“grace”*. Withholding nothing, God in mercy has extended grace to us in Christ. The sum total of the benefit we receive as recipients of God’s grace is found in the word *“peace”*. We enjoy the peace of God in Christ because of the grace of God extended to us through Christ. Peace flows out of grace and both together flow from God our Father, having been made a reality in our lives through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jack Hayford so aptly wrote:

“Virtually every clash in human relationships is due to an unwillingness to give – to forgive or to give understanding.

How soon we all forget the greatness of grace that looked beyond our faults and forgave us. How easily we fall prey to hasty judgement. How slow we are to measure the relative failure of those who violate us against the backdrop of our violations against God.

Jesus has come to bring heaven’s rule into our hearts. The forgiven are called to be forgiving – to the same degree that we have been entirely, unconditionally, and graciously forgiven!”

Pause for thought: The key to our lives in Christ in our “Philippi”, wherever it may be, is founded in our experience of *“grace and peace”*. Even as God has extended grace to us that we may live in peace, in Christ, so should we extend grace to others who offend us that we may walk in peace and harmony with them, and in doing so bring glory to Christ.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

Phil 1:3-11 ... *“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation (fellowship) in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having*

been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God”.

The importance that is stressed in this letter concerning **“fellowship”** (*“participation”*) and the numerous times the **“gospel”** is referred to cannot pass our notice. The “gospel” is the good news concerning Christ and “participation” or “fellowship in the gospel” is the embracing of the Christ-life and walking in Christ in our everyday lives, living to express Christ through our attitudes, words and actions.

Paul’s immediate focus is on their spiritual wellbeing. Material or physical matters will get some mention later, but these are subordinate to the spiritual. If a person is not well spiritually, it matters little how well off, or poor, he/she may be materially or physically. Jesus said in Matt 16:26 ... *“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”*

... *“I thank my God”* ... The pattern Paul sets in all his epistles where he starts off with prayer is that he commences with the giving of thanks (Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 1:4; Eph 1:16; Phil1:3; Col1:3; 1 Thess 1:2; 2 Thess 1:3; 2 Tim1:3; Philemon 4) . He thanks God for their fellowship in the gospel and that they are being brought to maturity (perfection) in Christ.

First of all, Paul gave thanks for their ... **“fellowship in the gospel”** with him ... *“from the first day until now”* (1:5), evidenced by their concern and prayers for him, their sharing in his ... *“struggle in the cause of the gospel”* (4:3) and their gifts sent to him for his support. Every time he thinks of them he is reminded of their lifelong fellowship with him in the gospel and with joy and gratitude he thanks God for them and the work God is doing in bringing them to completion in Christ.

Fellowship in Paul’s day did not just mean comradeship or a casual getting together of friends for a chat or cup of tea after a Sunday service as it has come to mean today; it meant a sharing **in** something – a self-sacrificing conformity to a shared vision. This “fellowship” went beyond those involved and past the activity of the moment into an all consuming communion in Christ. The Philippian believers were united, not just as friends or by social graces, but by their common commitment to Christ and resolve to walk in Christ and express His attitude in their words and actions and in doing so present the “gospel” to the unsaved. Just thinking in line with worldly standards, what would a jailer, a slave girl delivered from demon possession and a businesswoman have in common to bring them and keep them together? Socially they would have been miles apart. It was Christ – it was their oneness in Christ; the fellowship of the gospel of Christ.

If our unity with other believers is based on affluence, or poverty, on social status or on intellectual grounds we will exclude all those who do not fit our particular status or category and our witness will be tainted and limited. The effective witness of the church is our “fellowship” in the gospel of Christ.

Then, secondly, Paul’s gratitude and joy is expressed in his confidence that the work God has begun in them He will perfect (1:6).

When the Father looks at us He has the end product in mind; Christ formed in us. Like an artist who, in painting a picture, has the final picture in his mind even when the canvass only has some dull background paint and a few strokes of form and colour on it in the initial stages. It’s only the artist that knows what is going on at every stage in the process of completing the painting. Onlookers

really don't "see" what he is seeing until the painting is completed. Our heavenly Father knows what He is doing in us and His focus is on getting us there, to completion ... *"to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ"* (Eph 4:13).

Paul, with the mind of Christ, prays and gives thanks for what Christ is accomplishing in these believers (and us), now and in future ... *"until the day of Christ Jesus"* (1:6); the day when Christ will return to take us up into glory to be with Him for all eternity – when ... *"we know that when He appears, we will be like Him"* (1 Jn 3:2). Verse six is one of a number of amazing passages of scripture that speak of God's perseverance and assurance of our security in Christ. What He has begun He will complete and nothing will thwart His purposes. Just listen to these words of assurance!

John 10:27-28 ... *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand"*.

Rom 8:38-39 ... *"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"*.

2 Cor 4:8-9, 14 ... *"we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed ... knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you"*.

Heb 10:14 ... *"For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified"*.

Phil 1:6 ... *"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus"*.

Paul, the one who said in his letter to the Galatians ... *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me"*, knows that on the basis of grace, God's merciful intervention in their lives, these believers are being brought to perfection ... *"to the fullness of Christ"* and for that he gives thanks to God. His focus is the end product, not the divisions or other issues that are besetting them temporarily. While he is cognisant of the problems the Philippians face he is more sensitive to the mercy and grace of God, which promotes a heart of thankfulness in him.

Our English word "grace" comes from the Latin word "gratia". In English grace has two meanings; firstly, the unmerited favour of God, and, secondly, a meaning preserved only in the word "grace" that we say before a meal. Here "grace" is simply the "giving of thanks" or "thanksgiving". Grace is the basis and motivator of thanksgiving!

Pause for thought: In looking at ourselves or others, is our focus on the present imperfections, or the future glory? Every believer will be conformed to the image of Christ. Our spiritual maturity may be gauged against the amount of time we spend rejoicing and giving thanks to God for the spiritual blessings we have in Christ and the fact that He is at work in us to bring us to "full stature" in Christ. We can join Paul in saying ... *"it is only right for me to feel this way about you all"* (1:7).

Before leaving verse six there is something else of importance that we need to consider. It is God who began and it is God who will complete His work in us.

Eph 2:8-10 ... *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them”.*

Our salvation, sanctification, and ultimate glorification are all works of God. God comes to us, opens our eyes, gives us the gift of faith to believe, draws us to the place of believing in Christ and completed work of the cross, places His Seed (Christ) in us, gives us His Spirit to teach us how to appropriate the infinite blessings and wealth we have in Christ, and as we live by the life and faith of Christ growing in our revelation of Him, so we are conformed to that image and are finally brought to ... *“the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ”.*

God’s purpose in this process is to teach us to rely on Him. He wants us to ... *“enter His rest”* (Heb 4:10-11) and trust implicitly in Him.

Example: I have 4 daughters. When they were very young we wanted them to learn to swim so they would be safe around swimming pools. First I had to convince them that they would be safe if they jumped off the side into my out held arms. I would not let them drown. Soon they were leaping out in faith and having fun; they jumped, I caught them and dunked them in the water and then placed them back on the side of the pool. Then came the swimming lessons; they had to trust me to support them while they learned the kicking and arm actions. As they progressed I would momentarily let go and only replace my support when they began to go down. Slowly but surely this process worked until after much practice with support from dad (and their professional swimming teacher) they could swim on their own. They became fully fledged swimmers.

In a similar way, if we trust and rely on our loving heavenly Father, He will manage our growth in grace as He conforms us to the image of Christ. That’s His plan and purpose for our lives as stated in Rom 8:29 ... *“For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become **conformed to the image of His Son**, so that He would be the **firstborn among many brethren**”.* The Father’s plan as conceived from before the foundations of the world and brought about as a result of the work of the cross is to reproduce the life of His Son in millions and millions of human beings. This does **not** mean we become deities. We do not become God like Christ is God. What it means is that God takes us, creatures created by God, born in sin, and exchanges our old sin nature for His divine nature. As partakers of His divine (2 Pet 1:4) nature we show forth His character; we are conformed to the image of Christ.

Paul’s statement in verse 8 ... *“For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus”* is backed up by his actions; he had gone through beatings, shipwrecks, insults and imprisonments just so that they could receive the gospel in the first place and he was continuing to suffer on their behalf that he might continue to support and encourage them in their growth in Christ and in their fellowship in the gospel of Christ. Paul is the one who said ... *“I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel”* (1 Cor 9:16) and ... *“I am eager to preach the gospel to you”* (Rom 1:15). Paul’s revelation of Christ as his life, his salvation and his all and the commission as apostle of grace to take this gospel to nations was the driving force of love that compelled him to share Christ no matter the cost to him personally. His love and care for the

believers to see them grow in Christ and in turn to share Christ with others is unquestionable. No wonder he stands as our example!

Ongoing Prayer

Paul continues to pray for them. He prays ... *“that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God”* (1:9-11).

To understand this passage more fully we need first to pick out a few words and consider their real meaning and then put these meanings back into the passage and see what Paul was really praying.

Because they are “born again” Christ lives in them. ... *“God is love”* (1 Jn 4:16). Christ is love. He is love resident in them and He is their righteousness.

1 Cor 1:30 ... *“But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption”*.

2 Cor 5:21 ... *“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”*.

Righteousness and love are fruit (Gal 5:22-23) or the evidence of the presence of Christ in us. Love is the summation of all the fruit (1 Cor 13:4-8).

The words ... *“having been filled”* are correctly translated as the word used in the original was a perfect passive participle. If you’ve “been filled” you are “full” you can’t get any more in, you’re full!

The English word *“sincere”* is derived from two Latin words *“sine cera”* – which mean “without wax”. In days of old when very fine pottery was being made if it was not of good quality fine cracks would appear when the pot was being hardened through heat treatment in the furnace. An honest potter would throw this cracked pot away, but a dishonest merchant would fill the cracks with coloured wax to hide their presence and fool the customer. A knowledgeable customer would hold the fine pot up to the bright sunlight and if there was wax in cracks it would be seen as fine dark lines where the cracks are present. That customer would not be fooled, but other less discerning customers would be fooled into buying something flawed of no real value.

Now it is very interesting to know that the Greek word *eilikrineis* used here by Paul and that is translated “sincere” also bears a similar meaning to the Latin words *“sine cera”*. This Greek word is made up of two words – *eilé* meaning “sunshine” and *krinow* meaning “to exercise judgement upon”. In putting them together the compound word means “that which is viewed in the sunshine and judged to be clear and pure”. The “sincere” can walk in the light with confidence!

The word *“blameless”* in the original language actually has the literal meaning – *“not causing someone to stumble”*.

So if we put these meanings back into this passage, what Paul is really saying as he prays here is as follows:

“Because Christ is in you, love and righteousness are fully resident in you. The totality of Christ – the totality of His love and righteousness – was deposited in you when you were “born” again. But now these inner attributes of Christ need to become evident outwardly in your decisions and actions so that God may be glorified through you. You need to be taught by the Holy Spirit how to appropriate the love and walk in the righteousness that has been deposited in you. So my prayer”, Paul says, “is that through revelation you may really know and understand the true love that is in you in Christ and release that love of Christ in a discerning, perceptive and sensitive manner in your decision making and choice of action and speech so that you operate in absolute integrity and sincerity and don’t have an attitude or say or do anything that may cause others to be offended or stumble. In doing this today, and every day until the return of our Lord, your life will bring glory and praise to God”.

Pause for thought: We haven’t been saved just to be freed from judgement from sin so that we can go to heaven one day, but that the character and attributes of Christ may be manifest in our lives here on earth. We’re saved so that Christ may be seen in us. That’s why it is so important for us to pray daily for a revelation of Jesus Christ – that we may know Him; know love, know righteousness – so that we can express Him outwardly to others around us. When we interact with others let it be the love and righteousness of Christ that is the “fruit” we present for them to partake of and enjoy. Pray Eph 1:17-19 and Eph 3:16-19 and Col 1:9-12 every day!

Suffering for the Advancement of the Gospel

Phil 1:12- 20 ... *“Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defence of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence 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 my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death”.*

About four years has passed since Paul’s last visit to see the Philippians and now he is in prison. It is quite likely that the envious believers who Paul speaks of in verse 15 have been spreading negative rumours about him and these may have reached the Philippian folks. These rumours have most probably been to do with all the suffering Paul has faced. Like some misguided believers of our day, who teach that if you’re experiencing trouble it’s only because you have sinned and if you are experiencing blessing it’s only because you’re walking uprightly and have God’s favour on you, these rumour mongers were probably saying that Paul’s continual suffering is because he has sin in his life.

Epaphroditus no doubt would have conveyed to Paul the concern the Philippians had about him. Knowing Paul they probably would not have believed the rumours but there may have been some

who were not quite certain and were seeking clarification. So Paul writes to let them understand his present position and to put to rest any doubts concerning his integrity and passion for the gospel of Christ.

He says ... *“Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel (1:12)*. These circumstances certainly would not have been Paul’s by choice. When he started off on his missionary trips right at the outset I very much doubt that he would have been even thinking of having, let alone planning to have, a whole series of shipwrecks, beatings, insults, stonings, imprisonments and unjust treatments as a part of his itinerary. The opposition and suffering he faced was not his by choice, but in the midst of them he rejoiced because through them there were people who were being reached with the gospel that may not otherwise have been reached.

Yes, sometimes suffering is a consequence of sin and our wrongdoings, and sometimes it is for our discipline and instruction (Prov 3:11-12). Athletes suffer pain because of strenuous exercise; that’s not due to sin, it’s simply what happens due to muscle cell damage and elevated release of metabolites into the tissue around the muscles. But the reason for the suffering Paul was facing was none of these; it was purely the circumstances, situations and suffering permitted by God in order that the Gospel may be channelled and spread to those He wanted to reach for His greater and eternal purposes. This type of suffering is what Paul refers to when he talks of the ... *“fellowship of His sufferings” (3:10)*.

So we see in verse 12 and the words that follow it, Paul immediately shifts the concern the Philippians have for him away from himself and onto the far more important matter of God’s plans and means by which His purpose for the salvation of mankind is being achieved. What a wonderful example Paul is of one who constantly views the situation through the eyes of the Father’s eternal purpose rather the selfish, self centred, myopic vision of the flesh.

He was chained to a guard; a different guard for each shift, day and night for two years while he awaited trial. If nothing else, there’s a lesson to be learned here about God’s timing in His purposes! Because of this “chained” exposure to the entire Praetorian Guard over this extended time, Paul would have demonstrated in word and action the unconditional love of God towards all of these guards. He would not have viewed these men as anything other than men in need of salvation; men for whom Christ died. He would not have been thinking of his own discomfort in being chained to a guard; his thoughts would have been filled with compassion for these lost souls. He had all the time in the world to share the gospel with each and every one of them! And this is exactly what he did ... *“My imprisonment (chains) in Christ has become well known throughout the entire praetorian guard and to everyone else” (1:13)*. These guards would have been the ones that shared Paul’s attitude and experience and the message of the gospel with ... *“everyone else”*. That’s just God’s way of reaching all those Paul probably would otherwise not have reached.

Then Paul goes on to say ... *“and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear” (1:14)*. His example of joy and implicit faith and trust in Christ in the face of adversity and the results of his testimony in bringing many to Christ under these conditions was such an inspiration to others facing similar potential opposition that they cast off their fears and began preaching Christ!

Instead of the imprisonment discouraging and defeating Paul and limiting the spread of the gospel the exact opposite is the outcome: Paul is highly encouraged, the gospel spread throughout Rome and other believers in similar situations are encouraged by his example! No wonder Paul, in writing to the Romans, says in awe and admiration for God ... *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!* (Rom 11:33).

Pause for thought: When things are not going according to **our** plans and we are facing adversity in some form or another, do we stop to look through the eyes of Christ and see His greater plan and purpose in action; possibly to use us in that set of circumstances as a means by which He can reach those who would otherwise not have been reached, or, through us achieve some other not so obvious part of His eternal purpose?

We may face different “prisons” – ongoing infirmity or confined to a sickbed, home having to mind kids day and night, a desk, immobility or dependence on others due to old age, financial lack, rejection of some form, or some other “Prison”. Whatever your “prison” may be, don’t let it be a cause for discouragement. God has orchestrated the circumstances for His purpose; ask Him how you can be used in this situation. Share Christ through your attitude, words and actions with those in your “cell”. Take your thoughts off the causes of your “imprisonment”, off those who “imprisoned” you, off self, and focus them on Christ and His love for those in your “cell”. You’ll find this will change despair to joy, defeat to victory, bondage to freedom! ... and glory to God!

... *“I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but **the word of God is not imprisoned**”* (2 Tim 2:9).

There was a song we sang years ago that should be our signature tune and song of joy:

... *“let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me”* ...

Unity of Believers

Phil 1:15-18 ... *“Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. 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”*.

This statement is testament to the fact that the church in Rome was plagued with the same divisive spirit that attacks the church today ... jealousy, strife and partisanship. Believers against other believers bringing each other down instead of being united and strong and showing the world the love of Christ.

Here is Paul, in prison awaiting trial, and you would think the church around him would have been standing united with him in prayer for a favourable outcome so that he could continue with his missionary journeys and the preaching of the gospel, but instead on the outside were some believers preaching Christ out of envy and partisanship, elevating themselves and hoping to make things worse instead of better for Paul. In fact, history (Clements writings) tells us that it was this very thing, the opposition from other believers, that led to Paul’s second imprisonment and ultimately to him being martyred. They, the envious believers, preached in a manner to bring Paul into disrepute and trouble. Yet Christ said this would happen ... *“At that time many will fall away and will betray*

one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many” (Matt 24:10-11). How sad!

This very same prideful partisanship is what has led to “denominations”; different groups holding to slightly different understanding of doctrine and using this difference to divide rather than unite believers. How many combined Baptist and Catholic, or Anglican and Pentecostal gospel rallies have you seen advertised or attended! These combinations just don’t happen, or very rarely if ever. The same envy and strife that caused the trouble in Paul’s day occurs in the church today, and whether it leads to martyrdom or not (and it does in some countries), it leads to the declining impact of the gospel of Christ on our society. The opportunity to proclaim the gospel today is wide open like never before, yet in all history we have never seen the church as divided and irrelevant as it is today.

Oh that we would embrace Paul’s words in Phil 2:3-5 where he exhorts us to ... *“Do nothing from selfishness (strife , contentiousness) or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus”*. Paul exhibits this attitude when he says, *“it really does not matter if in preaching these people bring me down and are questioning my ministry, so long as the gospel is preached and people are brought to faith in Christ”*. In fact he rejoices that through the preaching of these other envious and trouble making preachers that people are being saved! This same attitude was the attitude of Christ when, on the cross facing those who had put Him there, He said, ... *“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing”* (Lu 23:34).

Before His crucifixion Jesus prayed His intercessory prayer for us and over and over repeated the plea that we would be one – united in Him – as this unity would be the undeniable evidence to the unbelievers around us of His presence in us and that Christ’s love for mankind is real.

John 17:11-23 ... *“I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that **they may be one** even as We are. While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled”*.

“But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth”.

*“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; **that they may all be one**; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me”*.

*“The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, **that they may be one**, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, **that they may be perfected in unity**, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me”.*

This is the mind of Christ, the gospel mindset, which can look at a believer who is being obnoxious, dogmatic or indifferent and giving you hassles and see them not as an arrogant, unkind or pathetic enemy to be shunned but regard them highly as they are containers of Christ, they are God’s workmanship being conformed into the image of Christ, ones who the Father dearly loves and in whom He is patiently working and perfecting. That’s how Christ views each one of us, no matter how imperfect we may be at any point in time, and He lives in us and wants us to operate by His mind. So this is how we are to see others – through His eyes and attitude. That does not mean we have to agree with their point of view, or have to accept their insults or unkindness, it just means we must look past these things and see them as God’s work in progress and love them as He loves them. This is the attitude of Christ, the attitude of love, as defined in 1 Corinthians:

1 Cor 13:4-8 ... *“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails”.*

Embracing the mind and attitude of Christ at all times and under all circumstances is the way believers are strengthened and united, the gospel spread as the world around us sees our love and unity, and Christ glorified.

Christ Magnified

Phil 1:19-20 ... *“For I know that this (the proclamation of Christ) will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death”.*

In the natural everything was going against Paul, but he knew beyond doubt that God is faithful and that His purpose in and through Paul’s life would be established, whether he was released or put to death. His focus was not whether he would be released or whether he would die a painless death, his focus was on the fact that he knew that through the work of Christ in and through him, now and throughout eternity, he would stand unashamed before God. Paul knew beyond a shadow of doubt that the ... *“provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ”*, the very life of Christ in him, had been the Source and the One who had been expressed in all Paul’s attitudes, words and actions that had led to his imprisonment and that whatever the outcome of the trial turned out to be he knew that Christ would not be put to shame but instead would be exalted through Paul’s life and ministry in sharing Christ with others. Paul knew he had been called to preach the gospel and that it was Christ in him, the gospel of Christ, that was under attack, not him, and he knew the power of the gospel ... *“for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”* (Rom 1:16).

Paul, through the answers to the prayers of the Philippian believers that cared for him and the ever fresh revelation of Christ as his all, stood ... *“strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man”* ... rejoicing and confident in ... *“Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power (Christ) that works within us”* ... (Eph 3:16, 20). He knew that he could stand unashamed of his testimony of the gospel of Christ.

Paul had only one driving force and ambition, that Christ Himself should be exalted and magnified in Paul’s testimony whether by life or by death. No matter what it would cost him personally by way of suffering, his desire is that the One who is his Lord, his life, his all, is honoured and exalted. His attitude was ... *“He must increase, I must decrease”* (John 3:30).

This mind so focused on the exultation of Christ, this utter absence of self-seeking is the humble servant attitude of Christ that dominated Paul’s mind and is the gospel mindset that is characteristic of the true servant of Christ.

Pause for thought: If we look at an object through a magnifying glass it looks bigger, clearer and closer than it did without the magnification. Does our life serve as a “magnifying glass” to those around us to bring Christ closer and clearer to them?

One further thought: even the mighty apostle Paul relied on the supporting prayers of his fellow believers against the onslaught of the enemy. Are we standing in prayer support of those who God is using as leaders in the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ?

To Live is Christ

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

As believers while we live in this world we have to work to earn money to live, while at the same as citizens of heaven and are involved in the things pertaining to that realm. In order to live and work in this world we need things like an education so we can work, a car so we can get to work and go shopping to buy food and clothing, we need to keep fit and so on. As Christians we worship, study the word, pray, preach, evangelise either individually or corporately.

For some believers these activities are compartmentalised into two areas labelled either “secular” or “spiritual”. For instance: work in an office, factory, sales yard, farm or wherever they are employed from 9:00am – 5:00pm each day, sport of all kinds, school or university studies, gardening, shopping, washing the car and reading the daily paper are considered to be “secular” activities. Sunday services, home life groups, prayer meetings, youth meetings, “quiet times”, choir and praise and worship practice, praying, reading the bible, evangelising, preaching and teaching the word are considered to be “spiritual” activities. For these people there is little connection between the activities of the two compartments.

Because these believers have to be at work by a certain time each day and only leave after say 8 hours, and then go home to the pressure of food preparation, helping children do homework, pulling the ubiquitous ever flourishing weeds out of the garden, and all the other daily pressures they have to attend to, they find that what they consider the “spiritual” activities have to occupy only the “corners” of their busy lives and attend to them where and when they can.

But then, at the same time, because these believers know the depths of sin from which they have been saved and the great needs of the unsaved to hear the gospel they have a “pull” within them to want to be “doing” something to further the spread of the gospel. This “pull” makes them think that they are wasting time being employed in “secular” activities and want to throw it all in and focus only on “spiritual” things like going out as a “missionary” to some distant land. These believers think that God is only honoured through their regular attendance of “meetings”, going out as a “missionary”, having their “quiet time”.

However, Paul’s words to us, the “saints”, are ... *“for me to live is Christ”* ...

As “saints” – “ones that have been separated unto God in Christ Jesus”, as children of God, we are called to live every moment of our life by the Life He has placed in us for His glory.

For the true believer there is no division or compartmentalising of “secular” from “spiritual”. We are “spiritual” beings living in this “secular” world. Who we are is Christ in us everywhere we go, whatever we do and whatever time of day or night is happens to be. Our mission field is the office, the school, the sports club, our home or wherever we go and where we spend our time. The only Christ the people in those places will see is the Christ presented to them living in the believers that are there.

Jesus said, ... *“for I **always** do the things that are pleasing to Him”* (John 8:29). Everywhere He went, everything He said or did, at all times, was directed to the purpose of pleasing His Father.

We are called to live **every** moment of our lives in the presence of our heavenly Father doing and saying **all things** to His glory.

1 Cor 1:30 ... *“Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”*.

Col 3:17, 23 ... *“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father ... Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men”*

1 Pet 4:11 ... *“Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ”*.

So if I am at work in the office, at home caring for the children, on the golf course, in the shopping mall, at school, serving in an orphanage in Cambodia, in a fellowship group somewhere or wherever I am and whatever I am doing, it is Christ in me as me in action. Christ is not divided into “secular” and “spiritual”.

Let us for once and for all put to death the misnomer of “part-time” service and “full-time” service that has been bred by the compartmentalisation of “secular” from “spiritual”. If you work as a lawyer, builder, doctor, mechanic, teacher, student, pastor, retiree or whatever, it is Christ in you as you doing in that function. You are a full time Christian (Christ-person) in employment as a doctor, builder, teacher, student, evangelist, mother, pastor, or whatever. Everything you do, do all to the glory of God.

In Paul's words ... *"for me to live is Christ and to die is gain"* ... means exactly that; if you are alive, no matter where you are and what you are doing, it's by His life and His faith that you live (Gal 2:20 KJV), and you live for and to His honour in everything you say and do, and if you are dead, then you're in His presence worshipping and honouring Him for eternity. Either way, our entire being and everything we are involved in day and night should be a life lived to His honour and glory.

What an incredible influence for change we can be in the marketplace, or in our "prisons" if we grasp the reality of Christ in us as us sharing His love, kindness, forgiveness, tolerance, concern, diligence, honesty, integrity, wisdom, discernment and grace with those with whom we are employed or with whom we share our "cell".

This is what Paul had in mind when he said, ... *"present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship"* (Rom 12:1) and ... *"Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased"* (Heb 13:15-16).

This is the normal Christian life, where Christ permeates everything we do and wherever we go. Christ is a person, in us, and His presence in us makes us Christ-persons (Christ-ians).

Gal 2:20 KJV ... *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"*

Nothing about Christianity and our life as a Christian will function according to the Fathers plan or be correctly understood unless we have grasped the fact that the only life we have is Christ and to live unto His glory is to live by His life and His faith in all we do and say.

Ours is a life centred in Christ, sourced in Christ, empowered by Christ, for the purpose of presenting Christ.

Christ is our all, in all we are, in all we do, all we say and wherever we go. With Paul let us cry the consecratory words ... *"for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"*!

Pause for thought: If Christ is all, then death is no enemy. To live means the opportunity to manifest Christ while we are here on earth; to die is to be with Christ in glory and what could be greater than that?

Living for Others

Phil 1:21-26 ... *"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again"*.

... *"to die is gain"* ... what assurance these words bring to a believer! The hope we have in Christ and the assurance of an eternity in His loving presence free forever from sin, shame, suffering, the

hassles of the world and this corrupt body! What an amazing prize – when being seated with him in heavenly places will take on a new and eternal dimension! Day and night in His loving presence!

Paul is thinking about this glorious future as he expresses those words ... *“to die is gain”*.

But the very same principle of self denial that was at the heart of our Lord, as expressed by John, is found in Paul.

John 12:24 ... *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”*.

Paul looks around and his thoughts go off from himself and what he desires to the needs of the Philippians and others around him. He knows they need him to stay on and continue to be ... *“in labor until Christ is formed in them”* (Gal 4:19). They needed his prayer support and encouragement in Christ; that they may ... *“know Him”* (3:10) ... that they may ... *“gain Christ”* (3:8).

... *“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith”* (1:25). Paul knows without doubt the choice he must make. His deep passion for the well being of others, emanating from Christ within him, rises to the fore and over-rides his own desires for himself and his personal well-being, even though he’s probably has enough of suffering and pain and would really like go on to be with Christ in heaven.

This is the gospel mind, one that puts the well being of others ahead of all else; this is the mind of Christ, the mind of the servant.

Matt 20:28 ... *“just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”*.

Paul’s concern was their ... *“joy in the faith”*. He wanted to see them established in Christ, as overcomers walking in the joy of the Lord. He knew he had to stay on in this world to be an encourager of their faith and life in Christ.

Pause for thought: It is good for us to know and contemplate the joys that await us in heaven; but if we see these in their right perspective we will turn unselfishly and focus on those for whom our life in Christ and our testimony in Christ are needed.

Our Conduct

Phil 1:27-28 ... *“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God.*

First, we look at a word Paul uses here that plays on the specific social and political context of the Philippian environment. The words *“conduct yourselves in a manner worthy”* are the English translation of one Greek word *“politeuesthe”*. It is a word that is complicated and is best translated with an explanation of its hidden meaning. This word is related to the noun *“polis”* which means *“city”*. In the days in which Paul was writing this word meant more than a city, it was a large political

unit or state in which people lived and to which they belonged. This unit or state is something like what we call a “shire”. So the noun refers more fully to citizenship and the verb from Paul uses means “to conduct oneself in a worthy manner as a citizen of the city or shire”.

As a Greek person in those days their life revolved around their “polis”. They were loyal citizens of their “polis”. If the “polis” demanded their absolute loyalty, they willingly gave that loyalty. Further to this, Philippi was a Roman colony and the Philippians were loyal citizens of Rome.

Based on these facts Pauls uses this word knowing that the Philippian believers would have had a full understanding of the true meaning of this word. He knew that as proud citizens of their “shire” and of Rome their loyalty was reflected in their adherence to the laws and customs of the land, and permeated their daily manner of life. So when Paul uses this word to the believers whose ... *“citizenship is in heaven”* (3:20) they understand that, as citizens of heaven, they are to conduct their lives in a manner befitting of loyal citizens adhering to the “laws and customs” (the gospel) of that realm. He is appealing to their loyalty to Christ and the gospel and to live in accordance with the life, example and teachings of Christ.

Our “conduct” speaks of the whole manner of life we live. This conduct should be in accordance with the gospel of Christ. Paul is now turning to address the matter of disunity, which is not in line with the gospel of Christ, which has crept into the Philippian assembly.

As we read earlier in John 17:11-23 it’s is by our unity that the world will see and know Christ’s love and experience salvation.

Paul’s encouragement concerning our manner of conduct focuses on the power of unity. Love expressed in unity releases the power that overcomes all our differences and the opposition from without. Paul would have had the words of the Psalmist ringing in his ears when he made his plea for unity.

Ps 133:1, 3 ... *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!
... for there the Lord commanded the blessing— life forever”*.

God’s desire is that through our unity and striving together for the gospel that His blessing will reach the lost.

Rev 12:11 ... *“And they overcame him (Satan – the accuser of the brethren) because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death”*.

The word (logos) of their testimony. Christ is the “Logos” – he is the word of our testimony. As our life of unity gives testament to the One whose blood was shed to bring us to life and victory, we walk triumphant over the divisions and oppressions incited by the devil.

The call is to **“strive together for the faith of the gospel”**. The literal translation is “side by side cooperating vigorously”. Paul **implores** the believers in Ephesus us to walk unity as this is how the world will know Christ’s love and that is the gospel for which we are striving.

Eph 4:1-3 ... *“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with*

patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”

The statement in Phil 1:28 ... *“in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God ...* simply means that if we who are united in Christ ... *“take no account of wrongs suffered”* (1 Cor 13:5) and respond to our oppressors with an attitude of humility, patience and gentleness steadfast in the strength of Christ knowing His love never fails, and operate with the attitude that for me to live is Christ and to die is gain, our opponents will have no power over us to bring us down. If we live, the power of the gospel unto salvation will operate in us and on our behalf, if we die, we will be rejoicing in Christ in heaven. Either way we win! And Christ is glorified!

Phil 1:29-30 ... *“For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me”.*

A gracious gift from God is the privilege of suffering for Christ. It is our flesh and self interest that will find it hard to accept the *“fellowship of His sufferings”* and cross-bearing as a gracious gift we are to embrace. Jesus said, ... *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me”* (Mark 8:34). Why did He say that?

In the day this was written *“taking up your cross”* meant placing on your shoulders the heavy rough cross pole to which you would be nailed and staggering under its weight to the place where your crucifixion would take place and there be put to death in an agonizing, slow and humiliating manner. Once a convicted criminal had the cross piece placed on his shoulders there was no going back; you were on a *“final”* journey. As a believer this means once you have *“taken up your cross”* you are beyond all possible reprieve, you are past the point of no return, you will not be able to once again pursue your own self-interests; you are heading down a one way street with a dead end, where self will die a dishonourable death.

Then how is this in any way a gracious privilege given us from God? Think of it this way. Pride is the sin of making self our god. Selfishness, self interest and pride are the enemies of the cross and enemies of the gospel of Christ. These are the enemies of our souls. These are the attitudes and attributes that retard our growth in Christ. They are the source of disunity that taints and nullifies the witness of the church in the world. As these are placed on the cross and put to death and stripped away from us, that which is hidden deep within us, Christ and His spirit of humility, love, forgiveness and tolerance are free to come forth.

Another way to illustrate this is as follows: if we want to enjoy the sweet juicy fruit of an orange we have to cut the peel and strip it off to get to the edible part. Similarly, to eat and benefit from the nutritional white and yolk of an egg, we first have to crack and peel off the shell. The cross and suffering are the mechanisms God has graciously given to us to crack and strip off the hard shell of self and self-interest that holds back the beauty of Jesus from being seen in us.

It is our pride, our self interest that causes us to be at odds with others. It is these insidious attributes that God graciously strips off from us by means of the cross. We ... *“suffer for His sake”* ... our self is denied, so that His life may come forth and through the sharing of His love others receive

the salvation His suffering and death provided. It is only the flesh and self that will not see this as a gracious privilege we have been given.

“He is . . . a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3).

We are not “acquainted with grief” in the same way our Lord was acquainted with it. We endure it and live through it, but we do not become intimate with it. At the beginning of our lives we do not bring ourselves to the point of dealing with the reality of sin. We look at life through the eyes of reason and say that if a person will control his instincts, and educate himself, he can produce a life that will slowly evolve into the life of God. But as we continue on through life, we find the presence of something which we have not yet taken into account, namely, sin—and it upsets all of our thinking and our plans. Sin has made the foundation of our thinking unpredictable, uncontrollable, and irrational.

We have to recognize that sin is a fact of life, not just a shortcoming. Sin is blatant mutiny against God, and either sin or God must die in my life. The New Testament brings us right down to this one issue—if sin rules in me, God’s life in me will be killed; if God rules in me, sin in me will be killed. There is nothing more fundamental than that. The culmination of sin was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and what was true in the history of God on earth will also be true in your history and in mine—that is, sin will kill the life of God in us. We must mentally bring ourselves to terms with this fact of sin. It is the only explanation why Jesus Christ came to earth, and it is the explanation of the grief and sorrow of life.

(Oswald Chambers)

2 Cor 1:9-10 ... *“we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us”*.

... *“Who delivered us”* ... speaks of when we were born again and made new in spirit – a work that is complete; ... *“and will deliver us”* ... speaks of the renewing of our minds and being conformed to His image – the current and ongoing work of salvation of our soul; ... *“He will yet deliver us”* ... speaks of the future exchange of this body of corruption for a new body of incorruption – salvation of our body, putting on immortality, at the coming of the Lord.

It’s the salvation of soul – the current work of renewing of the mind and “putting on Christ”, or “gaining Christ” – which the cross and suffering graciously brings about in us here and now, that Paul discusses in addressing the Philippians.

John 15:2 ... *“every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit”*.

As we face insults, opposition, conflicts let us give thanks to our loving Father that He sees us precious and worth bringing to completion in Christ. Let us thank Him for the cross and its pruning away of all the dead and unfruitful branches of self, so that the fruit of the Spirit, the attributes of the Christ life, may flourish in our words, deeds and attitudes.

Pause for thought: ... *“unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”*. The cross and suffering is the gracious tool given to us by which we put to death pride and self interest so that the fruit of the Spirit may come forth and bless others.

Lesson 3 Christ Our Example

Humility and Lowliness of Mind

Phil 2:1-4 ... *“Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others”*.

The major portion of chapter one concerns placing Christ first. Then we see a transition, in the last few verses of chapter one and the first few verses of chapter two, to the focus on unity which is achieved by putting others before ourselves. The focus here is on “others” and walking in unity with them.

Matt 20:28 ... *“the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”*.

Unity is important for two main reasons.

- Firstly, in our battle against the forces of darkness – forces that find a way to work from both “outside” and “inside” – it is either united we stand, or divided we fall. Phil 1:17 says we are to stand ... *“firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel”*.
- Secondly, it is by our unity that the world will know the love of Christ and come to Him (John 17:23).

In our communities today, as it would have been in Philippi at the time of Paul’s writing to them, there are people of disparate origins, customs and temperaments having to get along with each other. Unity in these situations is possible only if we look to Christ, as the basis for Christian unity is found in Christ.

1. The encouragement we have in Christ;
2. the comfort or consolation of love we have in Christ;
3. the fellowship we have in Christ; and,
4. the compassion and mercy we experience in Christ.

As believers we are “containers” of Christ and if we, with the help of the Holy Spirit, set our minds upon Christ, submit to Him and allow Him to be the source of encouragement, love, fellowship, compassion and mercy through us, then the evidence of these attributes of Christ functioning in our lives will be that we will be ... *“of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose”* (2:2).

1. **Encouragement:** ... *“if there is any **encouragement** in Christ”*.

The word encouragement – *paraklēsis* – is a compound word from *para* meaning “beside” or “along side” (from which we get our English word parallel) and *klēsis* meaning a “call” or “invitation”. Together, and in the context of this passage, these words mean to “draw alongside a person to

present Christ, not in a forceful or commanding way, but gently inviting and exhorting them to receive His encouragement and consolation”.

Rom 15:1-6 ... “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbour for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.” For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”.

1 Thess 5:11, 14 ... “encourage one another and build up one another ... encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone”.

Heb 10:24-25 ... “and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near”

Pause for thought: When we’ve just blown it and failed miserably in some way, its encouragement, not criticism, acceptance, not rejection and forgiveness, not hatred, which we want and need to get us back on track. So when we face someone who has failed us, let us give them what we would like to receive if we were in their shoes – encouragement in Christ.

2. **Love:** ... “if there is any **consolation of love**”.

The word consolation – *paramuthion* – is a compound word from *para* meaning “beside” or “along side” and *muthos* meaning a “word” or “speech”. Together and in the context of this passage these words mean “to draw along side of a person to exercise a gentle consoling influence by words or speech couched in love”.

John 15:12-13 ... “This is My commandment, that you love one another, **just as I have loved you**. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends”

We can love like this because the Source of Love, Christ, lives in us and wants to be expressed through our words, deeds and attitudes. As we give attention to obedience, even in the smallest way of sharing love, all of the omnipotent power of the grace of God is backing us up.

John 13:35 ...“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”.

John 17:22-23 ... “that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me”.

The love we express to one another and the unity that this invokes is **visible** – it is love expressed in our words, actions and attitudes – something unbelievers can see and witness that draws them to believe in Jesus, and is that which believers see and receive that encourages unity.

1 Cor 13:4-8 ... “Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails”.

Pause for thought: Unconditional love is the bond that unites believers and is evangelisms most powerful tool.

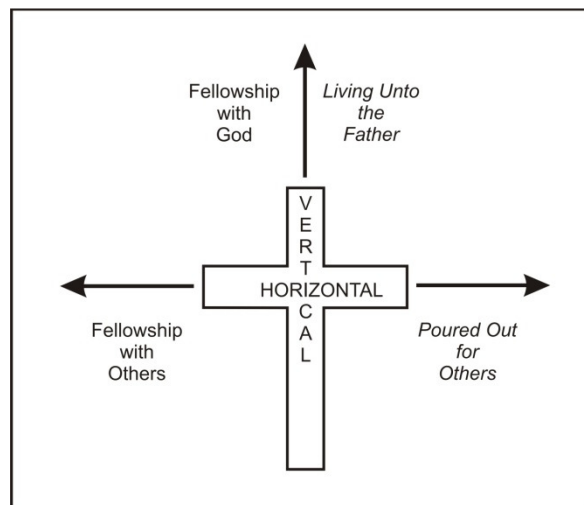
3. **Fellowship:** ... “if there is any **fellowship** of the Spirit”.

Quite clearly this is not just man-centred or a couple of friends getting together fellowship. This is fellowship of the Spirit; a Christ-centred fellowship that has two dimensions.

We have been saved for the two fold purpose of *living unto the Father*, and *poured out unto others*; that they may see Christ in us and receive His love and encouragement through us, with the goal that they also may know Him and live in victory and unity. This is how we will bring glory to the Father.

1 John 1:3 ... “what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ”.

Have a look at the Cross – part is **vertical**, part is **horizontal**, part reaches up, part reaches out. We have received life from above that it may be poured outwards to others.



We, the sons and daughters of the Father, the body of Christ and the temples of the Holy Spirit, receive the *vertical* outpouring from heaven (He who is Life has been poured into us), in order that there may be a *horizontal* out-moving or out-working of Christ through us, His vessels, into the world around us; the world of both sinners and saints – the unsaved and the saved. The unsaved need the light and life of Christ, the brethren need edification, exhortation and encouragement of Christ.

So there are two dimensions to our fellowship in the Spirit:

- a *vertical* love relationship with God, and

- a *horizontal* love relationship with those around us.

The latter flows out of the former and you cannot claim to have one if you don't also have the other.

1 John 1:6-7 ... *"If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin"*.

True fellowship of the Spirit, with its vertical and horizontal dimensions, will always result in members of the body of Christ ... *"being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose"* (2:2).

Pause for thought: This outpouring to others – sharing the life we have in Christ with others – is part of the "out-working" or "working-out" of the salvation (Christ) within us. True fellowship is the sharing of Christ with one another.

4. **Compassion:** ... *"if any affection and compassion"*

Mercy and compassion are attributes of Christ. As believers we have been recipients of God's mercy and compassion, now it's up to us to share this mercy and compassion with others in order to encourage unity. Peter (2 Pet 1:4-10) tells us that as we are partakers of the divine nature we are to be diligent in exercising the attributes of love, tenderness, kindness and compassion. Our responsibility is to share the divine provision we have in Christ to build others up and maintain unity.

Luke 6:36 ... *"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful"*.

Prov 14:31 ... *"He who who is gracious to the needy honours His Maker"*.

God's mercy and compassion have delivered us from death into life – therefore how can we do anything but show compassion and mercy to others, especially believers, who may have offended us in some way?

The pathway to unity is paved with encouragement in Christ, consoling love, true fellowship and mercy and compassion.

The little poem from Warren Wiersbe's book sums it up rather well:

*"You are writing a Gospel,
A chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do
And the words that you say.
Men read what you write,
Whether faithful or true:
Just what is the Gospel
According to you?"*
(source unknown)

2 Cor 3:3 ... *"you are a letter of Christ"*

Not “if” but “since”

Phil 2:1-4 ... *“Therefore if (since) there is any encouragement in Christ, if (since) there is any consolation of love, if (since) there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if (since) any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others”.*

The little Greek conjunction *ei* means “if”, “since”, “whether” or “that”. In this case the better translation is “since”. It is not a question of “if” there is encouragement, love, fellowship or compassion to be found in Christ, but rather, “since” – it is an established fact – these attributes are found in Christ. Christ lives in us and Paul is therefore saying, in the face of adversity and differences, **since** Christ is in you, give expression in your words, actions and attitudes to these attributes of encouragement, love, consoling fellowship and compassion that come from Christ within and this will resolve your differences and result in unity.

This takes humility, an attitude or mind of submission, and a desire to put the interests of others ahead of your interests. Selfish ambition, conceit and pride have to be put on the cross and eradicated, that the Spirit, love and life of Christ can come forth from within and be a healing balm. This is the principle of taking up one’s cross and dying to self-interest for the sake of others. With this in mind, Paul goes on in the next few verses to show this is a matter of “attitude” – having and expressing the attitude or mind of Christ.

The Supreme Example – Servant Saviour

Phil 2:5-11 ... *“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the ²form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess (acknowledge) that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”.*

In these few simple verses we see God’s eternal plan for our salvation through His Son as He sweeps from eternity past to Calvary and beyond to eternity future. This statement contains the most important items of the Christian creed; the divinity of Christ, His pre-existence, His equality with the Father, His incarnation in the flesh, His voluntary death on the cross, the guarantee of His ultimate triumph over all evil, and the permanence of His eternal reign.

Col 1:16-20 ... *“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold*

² “Form” means outward expression of the inward nature.

together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven".

John 1:1, 3, 14 ... *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being ... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth".*

The three passages above all confirm that Christ's deity is unquestionable. He is God. He is Creator. He is ... *"the alpha and omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end"* (Rev 22:13). The passage in Philippians 2:5-11 presents what theologians call the doctrine of Kénōsis. The Greek word κένωσις (kénōsis) means "emptiness", or the verb form κενώω (kenōō) means "to empty". The doctrine of kénōsis concerns the 'self-emptying' of one's own will and becoming entirely receptive to God's divine will.

This is the principle of the "dying seed" – death is the path to the "much fruit" of resurrection life:

John 12:24 ... *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit".*

2 Cor 8:9 ... *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich".*

The eternal Son, equal with God chose voluntarily to empty Himself, divest Himself of all prerogatives of His sublime status and glory ... *"the glory which I (Christ) had with Thee (the Father) before the world was"* (Jn 17:5) and to step down to become incarnate in the flesh, become a man, and not only a man but a servant who took our place on a cross, in order to carry out the Father's will according to His eternal plan. This is humility personified. His entire life and mission here on earth was characterised by self-denial; He lived to give, to serve and to bless. He lived and died for others, that they might have life.

The divine was clothed with humanity so that humanity could partake of the divine nature. When Christ entered this world in which we live, when he was born as a baby in Bethlehem, He entered into a permanent union with humanity; He came to give us His eternal life. He of His own free will humbled Himself to give His own life that we may be lifted out of sin and shame to live by His life, now and throughout all eternity. He emptied Himself so that we might be filled!

In contrast, Lucifer, a created being, sought "reputation" and aspired to elevate himself and put on deity and for his impiety was cast down from the archangel's throne, eternally condemned (Isa 14:12-15).

Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, equal with God, emptied Himself of His divine prerogatives, humbled Himself and became a man in submission to the will of the Father and in return was

elevated to the name above all names and highest position of authority. He showed us that the way up, is down; put self last and others first – that is the path to eternal and lasting blessings.

Matt 23:11-12 ... *“But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted”*.

This statement of Jesus contains active and passive parts; whoever exalts himself (active verb) shall be humbled (passive verb), whoever humbles himself (active verb) shall be exalted (passive verb). Christ was not forced to humble Himself; He chose and acted to do this on our behalf and for our good. He acted and humbled Himself. The result was that He was exalted (passive verb) by the Father to a position and name above every name. **He** ... *“did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped”* ... **“He** ... *“emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant”*... ... **“He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death”** ... all actions on Christ’s part ... and therefore ... **“God highly exalted Him”**. The choice to humble Himself was action on Christ’s part; the result, Christ’s exaltation, finds Christ passive and the Father active in rewarding Him.

This attitude or mind that was in Christ, the submissive mind, the mind of humility and lowliness, a **total** emptying of self-interest (not holding back or catering to anything of self) should characterise everyone who is a believer. We are called to live to give, to serve and to bless others. Why? Because Christ lives in us and He has not changed His attitude and wants to give expression to this mind of humility through us. ... *“Let your bearing towards one another arise out of your life in Christ Jesus”* (Phil 2:5 New English Bible).

Mic 6:8 ... *“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God”?*

If we embrace this attitude of humility and lowliness of mind found in Christ, and esteem others better than ourselves, it will be impossible for strife and contention to gain a footing and bring division. Also, the result of our choice to act on the behalf of Christ in unselfish devotion for the wellbeing and uplift of others will be that God will cause us to experience true joy and fulfilment in Christ. Our concern is to look out for others; God’s concern is to look after us.

The person of humble and lowly attitude embraces the cross, no matter the cost of the sacrifice, because he or she knows that this is what brings glory to God, blessing to others, and their own ultimate liberty. This is the paradox of the Christ life; the more we sacrifice the more God releases blessings, the more we give the more we receive. The more we put self aside, the more we “gain Christ” (3:8). Sacrifice and service ultimately leads to joy and fulfilment for everyone concerned.

Pause for thought: Consider the enormity of grace, mercy, encouragement, love, fellowship and compassion you have received both from God and others, and weigh this up against the amount you are passing on to others around you and ask yourself ... “How am I doing? Is the attitude of Christ fully functional in and through me”? We are called to live to give and bless others. The Lord’s cross cost Him everything; how much does mine cost me? If it costs nothing it will accomplish nothing; if it costs much it will accomplish much.

Name Above all Names

The Son of God was not given the name “Jesus” at His exaltation; the name “Jesus” was given to the Virgin Mary’s child at birth.

Matt 1:20 ... *“She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins”.*

“Jesus” was the name on the inscription above His head when He was on the cross (Jn 19:19).

Jesus is the English translation of “Jehoshua” which means “Jehovah is salvation”. Similarly “Christ” is the English version of “Mashiach”, which means the “anointed”. So from childhood through to manhood during His walk on earth, the incarnate Son of God was referred to as Jehoshua Mashiach or Jesus Christ. He was known as Jesus the Anointed One. The name He was given at His exaltation, the name above every name, was not just Jesus Christ, but to this was added the name “LORD”.

The name “Lord” (lower case) is from the Hebrew word “adon” or “adonay”. The name “Lord” or “God” is also from Hebrew “el” or “elohim” meaning “divine”, “divine being” or “master”. Elohim is the plural form, as God is triune; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But it is also the word used for pagan gods ... *“you shall have no other gods (elohim) before Me”* (Ex 20:3). Apart from “Adonay”, “Elohim” and other combinations of El (El-Shaddai “God Almighty”, El Elyon “Supreme God” or “God Most High”) all the names of God found in the scriptures, with one exception, are derived from His works. They are compound names. For instance, Jehoveh-Jireh (the Lord our provider), Jehovah-Rophe (the Lord our Healer), Jehovah-Shalom (the Lord our Peace) and so on. The exception is the name “Jehovah”. This name, which the Jews do not pronounce and do not use because it is considered too sacred, is from the Hebrew “YHVH”. When they see this word they say “Adonai” because they insert the vowels from aDoNay and pronounce these only – YaHoVaH – from which we get the name “Jehovah”. It is from the root word “hvh”, “to be”, “to exist”, or “being”. The cognate root “chyh” means “live”, “life”, or “give life”. There is a direct connection between “being” and “life”. So “Jehovah” (LORD) is the Being who is absolutely self-existent, the One who is Life, the Source of Life, the permanently existent One who is eternal and unchangeable, the One who is before any other. There is none higher than Him.

Is 43:10-11 ... *“I am He. Before Me there was no God (“El”) formed, and there will be none after Me. I, even I, am the LORD (“YaHoVaH”), and there is no savior besides Me”.*

YaHoVaH (LORD) is the name that is above every other name. This is the name to which every knee will bow (Isa 45:20-25). When Jesus Christ was exalted by the Father, when he was restored to the glory which He had before the world was, to His name was added this name (YaHoVaH), so he was called Jehoshua Yahovah – that is above every other name. Every knee will Bow before Jesus and acknowledge He is LORD (The redeemed in honour, praise and thanksgiving; and, the subjugated in horror and final recognition of their fate because of the reality of Who He is). In Him is eternal life – there is no other Saviour besides Him. He is THE WAY, THE TRUTH and THE LIFE (Jn 14:6). The ONLY Way, Truth and Life.

Rom 11:36 amplifies this wonderful truth ... *“For **of Him and through Him and unto Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever”.***

Pause for thought: The **Truth** is His **Life** provides and shows us the only **Way** to live!

Now here is the mind blowing and amazing thing; He, the Source of life, the Saviour, the self-existent and eternal One, the One who is above all others, chose to humble Himself and give up His life in our place on the cross so that we could have His life and live by His life and His faith! (Gal 2:20). When we were born again, the very “seed” of His life was placed in us (1 Pet 1:23) and our spirit and His became one ... “*the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit*” (1 Cor 6:17).

And now all He wants of us is that we live by His abundant life and His faith. Let that Life that is in our spirit be comprehended by, and flow into, our soul (mind, will and emotions) and out through our words and actions, that Christ may be seen in us. He has given us the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ who is within us to us so that we may “know Him”, that we may have the “mind of Christ” and that we may submit to Him and let Him live through us His way – the “servant heart” way, the “humble” way, the way that seeks the best for others. He wants us to “work out” or “bring out” the Salvation, Christ, who is within us so He can be “worn on our sleeves” in our daily words and actions and attitudes – “*holding forth (presenting) the word of life*” (2:16). That’s why it is so important for us daily to pray Eph 1:17 ... “*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him*”. Oh that we may know Him and give expression of Him in our lives – may the servant heart of our Saviour be seen in and through us.

The Out-Working

Phil 2:12-18 ... “*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 salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me’.*

The statement ... “*just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out*” ... is an important reminder that **character is who we are when no one is watching!**

Some people may think that just because they have read and understood what the Bible says about salvation that that’s all there is to it and that from here on they will automatically live a successful Christian life. They are like the person that thinks that just because they have read the book on how to drive a car that they can automatically drive. Well what a surprise they are in for when they get behind the wheel! In reality, to drive they need the theory but more importantly they need to get into a car and get into the thick of the traffic and learn the practical operation of a car on the road. Similarly we learn the Christ life not just from book knowledge or hearing preachers preach, but more importantly by living it out in the midst of a ... “*crooked and perverse generation*”. We don’t hide from the world, we face it and allow Christ to shine through us into the darkness – and let the light of Christ displace the darkness.

This out working of our salvation involves sacrifice and service. It involves submission to Him who is at work within us, yielding to His will; having the attitude of Christ whereby we ... “do all things without grumbling or disputing”; and, ... “holding forth (or presenting) the Word of life” ... “in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation”.

We do not manufacture our “cross” or “suffering” – God orchestrates the circumstances and situations in our lives. We do not choose how and when adversity or opposition of insults, persecution or trials will hit us. But when it comes it is our responsibility, and our choice, to submit to the way of the cross and demonstrate the humble attitude of Christ in the situation. The price of our suffering for Christ’s sake is not ours to determine; ours is to humbly submit and let Christ be seen in us, whatever the cost. When we submit in love and say ... “not my will, but Thine be done” (Lu 22:42)... this is when we see ... “Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us” (Eph 3:20) turn that which was meant for evil into blessing, hard hearts softened, unity restored and our Heavenly Father glorified. That’s the “out working” of our salvation in action.

God is at work in us ... “He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (1:6) and He is at work in us ... “both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (2:13). All He asks of us is our cooperation in the process. First there must be the alignment of our will with His, so that the outworking is an expression of Christ and not of self. We are to **work out** that which He is **working in** us. Let our obedience be driven by His transforming power at work within us. Submit to doing things *His* way. Let Him align our will with His. Like pliable clay in a potter’s hands, yield to His “working” in us to bring about “His good pleasure”.

It’s when we connect the negative terminal to the positive terminal that the power flows to “start the engine” or “turn on the light”. By adopting the attitude of submission and humility that is in Christ we take the “negative” circumstances and situations we face and connect them to the “positive” power of Christ within us and see His Light and Life flow and displace the “darkness”. We see the release of the “love that never fails” (1 Cor 13:8) into the situation we face and see Light and Life displace the “darkness”.

This is not a matter of *imitation* – me trying to be “like Christ”. This is a matter of *incarnation* – “Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20) and so “for me to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21). What God has placed *in* us, we are to **work out**. The word translated “work out” has a fuller meaning – it means, “work until a result is achieved”, or “work to completion”. This is an ongoing process until a result is obtained. This is not just a now and again thing, it is a constant, day by day, moment by moment out working of the life of Christ that is within us until the “*the day of Christ*”. It can be likened to when you work out a mathematical problem; you work on the solution until you have the final correct answer.

“Working out” our salvation is the process of allowing every hindrance of self to be cast aside and put to death and the release of the life, love and light of Christ that is within us in a manner that brings blessing to those around us whether they are friend or foe. When we reach in and take that which has been deposited in us ... “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3) and with an attitude of humility use these blessings to encourage, love, comfort and uplift others we will see healing of relationships, unity and glory brought to our heavenly Father. As Paul said to the Athenians on Mars Hill, ... “for in him we live, and move, and have our being ... for we are also His offspring” (Acts 17:28). So we are to ... *hold forth (present) the Word of life*” – present Christ. In the

end, even if it has cost us a lot in terms of self-denial, we will feel much better for having adopted the “attitude of Christ” and presenting Him and not self.

As we humble ourselves and do this God will exalt us because the more we ... “*put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh*” (Rom 13:14) and do this until it becomes “second nature” to live and act like this, the more we will “*gain Christ*” (3:8) and the closer we will be to becoming ... “*a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ*” (Eph 4:13). That’s what He wants; He who is the Name above all names, He who is Salvation, who lives in us wants to be seen and heard through us so He can bring the way, the truth and the life to those with whom we come in contact and through this bring unity with one another in Christ and encouragement and fulfilment to us.

Rom 8:12-19 ... “*So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God*”.

Being ... “*conformed to the image of His Son*” (Rom 8:29) is what the out working or working out of our salvation is all about.

Pause for thought: We are incapable of living out the kind of life God requires of us, but Christ is capable of living out His life through us if we lay aside all of self effort and yield totally to Him and let Him have His way in and through us.

United “out working”

While we can take this passage concerning “working out our salvation” and apply it to ourselves as individuals for our growth in Christ, Paul’s focus is the well-being of the church as a whole, the **unity** by which we as a body or assembly of believers ... “*appear as lights in the world*”, so believers are **all** encouraged to work out their salvation with fear and trembling for the **common good**, not just for the good of the individual themselves. The maintenance of love and harmony in the church ... “*without grumbling or disputing*” is the evidence of salvation being “worked out” in the assembly by all the members. This is a reflection through them of the character of Christ ... “*blameless and innocent ... above reproach*”.

Light in Dark Places

We live in a wicked and ungodly world ... “*in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation*” (2:15). We are not to withdraw and become isolated self righteous bigots like the Pharisees, or monks in their monasteries, but to face the issues, needs and circumstances of life head on living the Christ life, being ... “*kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other*” (Eph 4:32), shining as ...

“Lights in the world”. Let the perfect life of Christ come forth and bring light and life to this imperfect world.

We do not have to be concerned about the harshness and unfriendliness of the world and all the adversity it throws at us, because so long as we ... *“hold forth (present, exhibit, display) the Word of life”* (2:16) we will see that He is ... *“able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power (His power) that works within us”* (Eph3:20).

The Libation

... *“But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all”* (2:17).

The “drink offering” refers to the “libation” or pouring out of wine, oil, wine and oil, or a mixture of flour, wine and oil that accompanied the burnt offering and the peace offering (Ex 29:38-42; Nu 28:3-8). These were consecrationary or free-will offerings. The burnt offering was given this name because it was to be wholly consumed and rise in smoke as a fragrant aroma towards heaven. It symbolised the entire surrender to God of the individual or congregation. This offering was offered up daily. Accompanying the offering up of a slaughtered animal for the burnt offering was a “drink offering” – the wine, oil, wine and oil, or flour, wine and oil mixture. This was poured on the altar with the burnt offering and also fully consumed by the fire and ascended in a fragrant aroma heavenward. The peace offering was a similar voluntary offering of a slaughtered animal given in thanks to God on festive occasions, also accompanied by a “libation” or “drink offering”. The three elements of the libation (Ps 104:15) symbolised the main support of life (flour), richness (oil) and vigour, refreshment and gladness (wine) and were dedicated to God in recognition of His sovereignty and the bountiful blessing He has bestowed on His people. The libation was an accompaniment to the main burnt or peace offering.

So Paul was saying that as the Philippians daily and voluntarily surrendered themselves to Christ and to the out working of their salvation in their ... *“sacrifice and service of faith”* and through this prove themselves to be ... *“blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation”*, he rejoiced that he had not ... *“run in vain nor toiled in vain”* and that he gladly offered up his suffering and service on their behalf as a “drink offering” to accompany their greater sacrifice.

Again, through this we see in Paul the beautiful attitude of self-abnegation that rejoiced in the labour and success of others. So often today we see jealousy between labourers in God’s harvest, a vying to be “one up” on other ministers and envy of other people’s successes. But not so with Paul; he rejoiced in what God was doing in and through others and rejoiced that he could have done something as a little “add-on” to make their sacrifice an even more pleasing aroma to the Lord. His goal was to glorify God. If that meant he had to pour out his life for others, his demise for their increase, so that they could “succeed” in Christ and bring glory to God, then he rejoiced in the privilege of being able to do so. He also went on to encourage them to be of the same mind and do this for others with whom they interacted.

Like-minded Co-labourers

Phil 2:19-30 ... *“But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father. Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly. But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me”.*

Paul was in prison but the gospel God had given him to share was not imprisoned. He could not go personally so he sent Timothy and Epaphroditus in his place. These were men of kindred spirit, who would, like Paul, lay down everything in order that the Philippian believers may be encouraged. They were men whose lives were lived for “others”.

There are not many who will make the costly personal sacrifices for the welfare of others, like Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus were prepared to do and Paul encourages the Philippians to ... *“hold men like these in high regard”.*

Note Paul’s description of Epaphroditus:

- *“Brother”* – Paul was speaking to a highly polarised community consisting of Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, Romans and Greeks, aristocrats and slaves, soldier and civilian, amongst whom “unity” and “brotherhood” was something previously unheard of and difficult to grasp. The gospel of Christ changed this; Paul was a Jew and Epaphroditus a Gentile, but they were “brothers” in Christ because they had the same heavenly Father that had given birth to the life of Christ in them. For in Christ ... *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Gal 3:28). As “brothers” they served together ... *“for the furtherance of the gospel”*. Likewise, as “family”, we are to be found ... *“standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel”*
- *“Fellow-worker”* – he was prepared to lay down everything for the work of Christ coming ... *“close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in”* the service of the Philippians to Paul. Jesus said, ... *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it”* (Lu 9:23-24).

- *“Fellow-soldier”* – Epaphroditus was one who knew that ... *“our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places”* and Paul knew he was dependable against the forces of darkness, as he was prepared to ... *“Suffer hardship with Paul, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus”*. Epaphroditus knew and displayed by his example that ... *“no soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier”* (2 Tim 2:3-4). Paul is also using military terminology because Philippi was a Roman colony under the command of the Roman military. The Philippians would have understood that soldiers obey the instructions of their superiors without questioning or hesitation. Soldiers in those days also walked into battle side by side with shields interlocked as one impenetrable wall. Working out our salvation involves unquestioning obedience and devotion to our Lord and working together ... *“in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel”*.
- *“Messenger”* – he was not only one who conducted himself ... *“in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”*, but also one who strived together with others ... *“for the faith of the gospel”*. He was a faithful messenger who ... *“came close to death for the work of Christ”* (2:30) in carrying the gift from the Philippian church to Paul and in letting Paul know the state of affairs of the church in Philippi. Paul ... *“having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent”* (4:18) encouraged the Philippians to ... *“hold men like him in high regard”* (2:29).
- *“Minister”* – he was the one to whom Paul was referring (4:3) when he said, ... *“Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women (Euodia and Syntyche) who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life”*. He was like Tychicus who Paul sent to the Colossian church ... *“For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts”* (Col 4:8). As ministers of Christ we are to ... *“encourage one another and build up one another”* 1 Thess 5:11) and we are to ... *“preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction”* (2 Tim 4:2).

Epaphroditus means “lovely”. He truly is a “lovely” example of a person whose outworking of his salvation is one in which we see the Christ life displayed in action; one worth emulating.

Pause for thought: As brothers or sisters in Christ, as fellow-workers, fellow-soldiers, messengers and ministers of the gospel of Christ, we are to respond in faith and obedience to a continual working out of our salvation. “Wearing Christ on our sleeves” will be characterised by our contentment to deny self, and joyfully serve in a manner that encourages and builds up others and endorses the selfless outpouring of those mature leaders who have gone ahead of us.

Lesson 4 Christ Our Object

Steadfast or Determined Mind

Phil 3:1-3 ... *“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh”*.

When we get to chapter 3 it appears that Paul comes to a rather abrupt ending of what he wants to say to the Philippians, concerning suffering for the gospel and the resultant joy this brings, when he says ... *“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord”* ... and then it's as if he has suddenly remembered something else he wanted to say to them when he starts off on a completely different subject. What happens here is he inserts a new topic in parentheses between chapter 3:4 and chapter 4:7, after which he gates back to his concluding remarks ... *“Finally, brethren, whatever is true”*... and finished his letter. This style of writing is a fairly common trait of Paul as seen in his other epistles.

We can be most grateful to the Holy Spirit for prompting Paul to write this new section that he inserts as we would have lost something extremely valuable had he not done so. But before looking at the new topic we first briefly consider these first three verses of chapter 3.

Paul starts by reminding us that we need to be reminded over and over to put Christ first and keep our eyes and hearts fixed on Him through thick and thin, as He is our life and our all. This is what is implied by the words ... *“rejoice in the Lord”*.

He then gives a stern warning against false teachers, whose teaching and example we are not to follow. Then, in keeping with the first part of this letter, he encourages the Philippians, and us, to lay aside everything of self and the flesh and allow Christ to come forth and be glorified through them.

...*“Beware of the dogs”*. In those days the Jews referred to the Gentiles as “dogs”, but quite clearly this is not the meaning implied here. If we recall the account given in Acts chapter 16 we know that the church at Philippi were in the vast majority gentiles, and Paul would not be using this derogatory term when talking to his gentile brothers and sisters in the Lord. “Dogs” as used here by Paul finds its definition in Isaiah.

Isa 56:10-11 ... *“His watchmen are blind, all of them know nothing. All of them are mute **dogs** unable to bark, dreamers lying down, who love to slumber; and the **dogs** are greedy, they are not satisfied. And they are shepherds who have no understanding; they have all turned to their own way, each one to his unjust gain, to the last one”*.

These were probably the same type of people who Paul referred to earlier (1:15-17). Self indulgent, self-serving preachers whose interest is not the unity and building up of the body of Christ. They may preach Christ but certainly don't live the Christ life.

... *“beware of the evil workers”*. While the “evil workers” may also include the “dogs”, it is possible they are the false teachers, “wolves in sheep's clothing” and the Judaisers that followed Paul's ministry teaching a mixture of law and grace, which Paul called “another gospel” (Gal 1:6-9).

... *“beware of the false circumcision”*. Legalists, ritualists, those who teach and preach a commingled gospel – a gospel of law and grace; a gospel in which grace aided by self effort. Such is *“anathema”* (Gal 1:6-9).

In contrast, verse (3:3) reveals the marks of a person that truly belongs to the Lord, the true circumcision:

- They are worshippers ... *“who worship in the Spirit of God”*. Worship means placing *“worth”* in God and His will and submitting unconditionally to Him.
- They rejoice in Christ ... *“who”* ... *“glory in Christ Jesus”*. Their boast is in the Lord not in anything they have done or achieved. Christ is their all and their heart cry is ... *“for me to live is Christ”*.
- They lay aside everything of self ... *“put no confidence in the flesh”*. Like John they say ... *“He must increase, but I must decrease”* (Jn 3:30). Regeneration is not the old made new; it is impossible to *“improve”* the fleshly nature. Regeneration is an exchange of natures; the *“old”* out and the new *“in”*. The new nature of Christ that is birthed in us is complete and perfect and does not require improvement. In Christ, who is our new life and our all, alone can we have complete confidence ... *“For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace”* (Rom 8:6).

No Confidence in the Flesh

Phil 3:4-7 ... *“although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ”*.

In terms of the natural Paul had a pedigree second to none. He came from the *“right side of town”*, from the *“right”* lineage; he knew the scriptures inside out; he observed the law to the *nth* degree; he was more zealous in his work than any other person. In the natural he was *“Mr Perfect”*.

But on that day on the road to Damascus he had a divine encounter. *“Mr Perfect”* came face to face with the glorified Christ and in an instant he came to the revelation of the truth of Isaiah’s words ... *“For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment”* (Isa 64:6). Everything upon which he had build his reputation, his fame and his hopes – everything that up to that point was reckoned to him as being *“gain”* – suddenly became in his Spirit opened eyes, utterly worthless rubbish and only worth being thrown away never to be picked up again, to be replaced by that which is priceless – Christ. As so in joy he exclaims ... *“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ”*.

This was not just an exchange of religions – one set of doctrines or rituals for another more superior one. This was an encounter with a Person. The revelation that the once crucified now glorified Christ had, in His mercy and grace, come to take up residence in him and be his life and his all. Paul came to see that Christ is the way, the truth and the life. The one who said, ... *‘I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do*

nothing” (Jn 15:5). Paul came to the realization that by resting in Christ and His sufficiency, confidence in the flesh is once and for all at an end.

Knowing Christ

Phil 3:8-11 ... *“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of the faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead”.*

When Paul considered Christ, the all sufficient One who was his life and his all, all that he could do was take everything he formerly was and had achieved, which was considered to be an asset by the world’s or the religious system’s standards, and place it in the liabilities or debit column of his life’s balance sheet, where he reckoned it to be an absolute loss. The only thing he had standing in the asset or credit column, the One he considered to be of “surpassing value” or “gain”, was Jesus Christ.

Paul saw that everything this world had to offer, every human attainment possible, brought no fulfilment or lasting satisfaction and that his fulfilment was found in Christ alone. His desire and heart cry is to “know” Christ, to “gain” Christ and to be “found in Him”. By this he is not saying that the “knowing”, “gaining” or “being found” was something he had to “do” by way of attainment, or something he was to “earn” by self-abnegation, he is just letting us know his deep down feelings and inner knowing that ever since his revelation of Christ as His life and His all (³Gal 1:11-17) that there is nothing else worth living for and nothing else has any “value” compared to Christ. All Paul wants is to be intimately and personally acquainted with Christ and identified with Him, no matter what it costs. He wants to intimately know Christ so that his life can be an outward living and demonstration to others of the righteousness of Christ in him.

Paul had previously gained much head knowledge, he knew the scriptures from cover to cover, he knew much *about* Christ, but all that he throws aside for the far better option of personally and intimately “knowing” Christ who has taken up residence in him. In his letter to the Colossians Paul says that these laws, rituals, and all the things he had previously learned ... *“are a mere **shadow** of what is to come; but the **substance** belongs to Christ”* (Col2:17).

³ Gal 1:11-17 ... *“For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but **I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ**. For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was **pleased to reveal His Son in me** so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus”.*

In verse 9, ... *“not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of the faith”*, which really is just a mini summary of the book of Romans, Paul gets to the heart of salvation. Here he highlights the two kinds of righteousness – the righteousness that comes from man and the righteousness that comes from God.

The righteousness that comes from man is best described by Isaiah ... *“For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment”* (Isa 64:6). God cannot be satisfied with the righteousness that comes from man. No matter how much of human righteousness a person accumulates, no matter how diligent and “good” they are, this will never qualify them for heaven. James Boice puts it really well:

... *“The accumulation of human righteousness is a bit like playing Monopoly. The game has colourful money and is enjoyable to play, but only a fool would take Monopoly money and go into town to buy groceries. A different kind of currency is used in the real world. It is the same spiritually. There are people who think they are collecting assets before God when they are only collecting human righteousness. God tells them that they must leave the play currency to deal in His goodness. Our goodness has no value in heaven”*.

The only righteousness that is acceptable to God is that which comes from Him. The righteousness of God is an aspect of His character, it's part of who He is, and is related to His purity, integrity, perfection and holiness. Impressions of His righteousness can be seen in the Law, but mostly His righteousness is revealed in Christ. His righteousness is difficult to understand ... *“a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised”* (1 Cor 2:14) and is only understood and known by revelation of the Holy Spirit. That's why Paul's cry is ... *“to be found **in Him**”* and ... *“to **know Him**”*.

To understand the contents of verse 9 a little better we need to consider a few scriptures relating to our salvation and righteousness in Christ.

Gal 2:20 says ... *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me**; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me”*.

1 Cor 1:30 says. ... *“But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, **who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption**”*.

2 Cor 5:21 ... *“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that **we might become the righteousness of God in Him**”*.

The word of God shows us that when we were “born again” our old sinful nature was removed and replaced with the nature of Christ; the Person, Christ, was birthed in us. From that point on the life in us is Christ ... *“it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me**”*. As the “born again” the only life we have is Christ. To function properly in His kingdom we need to stop trying to live by the old “Monopoly-money-life” and live by His life, His faith and His righteousness. All that He is ... love, righteousness, peace, joy ... (the real or authentic) He is in us. He is love in you and me; He is righteousness in you and me; He is peace in you and me; He is joy in you and me ... and so on.

When Christ went to the cross we (our old sinful nature) went with Him ... *“I have been crucified with Christ”* (Gal2:20). When He went to the cross He took all our sin and shame and unrighteousness and died in our place and on our behalf ... *“and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness”* (1 Pet 2:24). That’s when He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf (2 Cor 5:21), and it was then that **He** was the one who exercised faith that He would be raised from the dead and that in Him we would be raised from the dead in the newness of His life and His righteousness – to live by His life, His righteousness, His Joy, His peace in this life and for all eternity. Christ is ... *“the author and perfecter of the faith”* (Heb 12:2). The Greek text has the definite article “the” before the word “faith”. Author and perfecter means what he has started he will complete. Our responsibility is set out simply as ... *“fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of the faith”*.

In Exodus 12 we read how God spoke to the Israelites and told them that if they put the blood of the lamb on the lintel and door posts that the angel of death would bypass them and they would be spared to live. He also told them to eat the roasted lamb which would give them strength and health for the journey. They acted on His word and it all happened just as He said it would happen. They were saved from the death plague, they were delivered from Pharaoh, they went through the wilderness and not one was sick or weak. He delivered them and He kept them strong.

It was not contingent on how much blood they splashed on the door posts ... so don’t say, “I wonder if I have put enough blood there, I wonder if I have pleaded the blood over the situation enough”. It was not contingent upon whether they had fasted and prayed enough to make certain it would happen as God had said ... so don’t say, “I wonder if I have enough faith, or I wonder if my fear is going to negate the passing over of the angel of death”. God did not say, “When I see the blood, plus your understanding, your efforts in faith and obedience and your refusal to submit to fear, then I will pass over you and spare your life”. It’s the blood of Jesus that saves, heals and delivers you. It’s His life that is your life. It’s His righteousness that is your righteousness. It’s His faith that is your faith. If you think that it’s because of *your* faith you will forever be wondering whether you have enough faith. When God looks at you what He sees is the blood of Jesus, the life of Jesus, the righteousness of Jesus and the faith of Jesus – alive and active in you!

Each day when you go to work you get into a car, start it, drive to work and on your way you may cross a bridge. Then you may use a lift to get up to the level to reach your office. Now think about it. When you get into your car do you first have a long session of “building your faith” that the car will start, that the wheels will not fall off on the way, that the engine and transmission will work and not fail along the way, or do you just “know” that the car is a good one and you don’t even have to think through those matters because you just know it will get you there. Similarly, you don’t stop before the bridge and question whether you have enough faith to go across safely and you don’t have a faith build up session before entering the lift to go up to your office. You know the constructors of the bridge and the elevator system are credible engineers and you don’t even have to think “I’m crossing and bridge” or “I’m getting into a lift”. You just do it. You are at complete rest and peace. You “know” the car manufacturer and construction engineers are credible and produce things that work and are safe. Similarly, the grape vine does not grunt and squirm and work up faith so that it may be fruitful. It simply abides in the vine and fruit “appears”. The vine does the work of manufacturing the sap and getting it to the branch where it is converted into “fruit”.

God wants it settled in you for once and for all that the salvation, the life, the righteousness which is in you is yours in Christ and is based on *His* faith and is not in any way dependent on you or what you have done or can do. If you think it is dependent in any way on your faith or your understanding or your “doing”, you will not have the assurance of peace in your heart. When you know that it is Christ’s blood alone that saves, His life that is your sufficiency, His righteousness that has made you righteous, and His faith that has brought this to you and will carry you on, then you will have unshakable peace and joy. Jesus said, ... “*it is finished*”. He has done it. It’s complete. All you need to do is enter His rest. That’s all God wants; our trust in His finished work. He wants us to believe Him; to rest in Him. His is the only word in the entire universe that is true and dependable. What He has said and done is settled forever. It is sure, it is certain. Rest in Him. Fix your eyes on Him and get to “know” Him because the more you do that the more you will know His word is certain.

That’s why Paul says, ... “*not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of the faith*” (3:9) and he immediately follows this with ... “*that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead*” (3:10-11).

Paul lists three things that he desires to “know”:

- To “know” Christ intimately and experientially
- To “know” His resurrection power
- To “know” the fellowship of His sufferings

and the outcome this “knowing” will bring:

- To walk in a manner that is a preview of life as it will be throughout eternity.

1. The experiential knowledge of Christ: Paul’s heart cry, which should be our main goal in life, is to “know” Christ, personally, intimately and experientially. We can know *about* someone, through hearsay, papers, books, magazines, news reports or conversations with others, but until we get close to the person themselves and interact directly and intimately with them for a considerable period of time and get to know them personally and experientially we can’t say we “know” them.

Here is the person who had had the encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus road (Acts 9), where he was called and appointed to share the true gospel of Christ, the “mystery” (Col 1:27) which had been hidden down through the ages and was unknown until it was revealed to Paul, the person who under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit had written numerous epistles from which we have learned everything we know about Christ, the man whose rabbinical and historical knowledge was second to none, and he is crying out, oh ... “*that I may know Him*”. Why?

Paul is not just seeking to increase the contents of his brain. He does not want to know more *about* Christ, he wants to deepen his intimate, personal experiential knowledge of Christ. When you love someone you want to get to know them more and more. Paul probably knew Christ better than anyone else but He wanted to deepen this experiential knowledge more and more because he wanted it to affect his daily life. He wanted to be transformed more and more by Christ who was his

life, his righteousness and his all. He wanted to be a reflection of the Christ within him. Paul wanted to ... “gain Christ” and be ... “found in Him”.

Pause for Thought: When folks are looking around where will they “find” you? Will your conversation and actions be a reflection of Christ to the point they say, “Oh, there you are ... hidden in Christ”?

2. The resurrection power: ... “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection” is better translated ... “that I may know Him **in** the power of His resurrection”.

Paul knew all about the war that was going on within him and every other believer in Christ – the war between spirit, which in Christ dwells, and the flesh, which is still corrupted by sin.

Rom 8:10 ... “If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness”.

Because of this difference there is a war going on – the flesh pulling the mind, will and emotions toward sinful lusts and the ways of the world, and the spirit pulling the mind, will and emotions toward the righteousness which is ours in Christ.

Rom 7:18-24 ... “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?”

But Paul also knows and provides the answer to this question:

Rom 7:25 ... “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord”!

Paul knows that it is the very same resurrection power that raised Christ from the dead is that power that overcomes the power of sin that is at work in our flesh. So he cries out ... “that I may **know Him in the power of His resurrection**”.

Resurrection power is the power that overcomes sin. Paul longed for deliverance from the power of sin that was at work in his flesh. Paul’s heart cry was to experientially know the resurrection power of Jesus Christ over sin daily as he strived to live the Christ life before God and the people around him.

We hear this cry in the prayer Paul prayed for us in Ephesians. He prayed:

Eph 1:17-21 ... “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the **knowledge** of Him (Christ). I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will **know** what is ... **the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe...** Which is ... in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He

raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come”.

Resurrection power is the power that overcomes sin.

Rom 8:12-13 ... *“So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live”.*

By the resurrection power of Christ we are freed from the bondages of Satan – the pulls of the flesh.

3. The fellowship of His suffering: The third thing Pauls sought to enter into through the intimate and experiential knowledge of Christ was ... *“the fellowship of His sufferings”.*

Only Christ, the sinless substitute, qualified to suffer and die to liberate mankind from sin. So this is not the suffering Paul seeks. Paul seeks to enter into the sufferings of Christ for a different reason. He knew that Christ in him was the target of Satan’s persecution and attacks and so he wanted to be inseparably united, in abiding fellowship, with Christ so that he would be able to respond to the suffering in the strength of His might. All Paul wanted was that Christ would come forth and be demonstrated in his life as a result of the “breaking” of suffering. He wanted to embrace Christ’s suffering that everything of self and the flesh would be broken off so that the beauty of Christ would be released from within him to be seen in his attitude, conversation and actions.

As believers we too are guaranteed this type of suffering.

2 Tim 3:12 ... *“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”.*

1 Pet 4:12-13 ... *“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation”.*

The more we endure the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings the closer we will be drawn to Him. The closer we get to Him the more we will “know” Him. The more we “know” Him the more Christ will be seen in our lives. The more He is seen in us the more we have reason to rejoice!

After Paul says ... *“that I may know Him in the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings”*... he adds the statement, ... ***“being conformed to His death”***.

If we recall the words from chapter 2:5-11, this will help us understand what Pauls means by this statement. In Chapter 2 he points us to Christ’s unconditional submission and obedience to the will of the Father to the point of laying down His life and sets this up as the pattern we are to follow. Pauls shows us that the price tag of the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings is this extreme price of total, unconditional obedience.

Pause for Thought: If we are to be “found in Him”, if we are to “gain Christ”, if we are to “know Christ” it will come at the price of unconditional and total obedience to Him.

4. Resurrection life: The statement in verse 11 ... *“in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead”* (3:11) tells us why Paul wanted to ... *“know Him in the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death”* (3:10).

This statement of Paul has nothing to do with a fear concerning his eternal security. He is not trying to “do” something in order to ensure that he will be raised from the dead to live in heaven for eternity. For just a few verses back in chapter 1 he has assuredly stated that ... *“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus”* (1:6).

In this statement what Paul is saying is he desired to experientially “know” Christ and his resurrection power and to participate in the fellowship of His sufferings, in absolute and unconditional obedience no matter the cost, in order that in and through this intimate union and knowledge Christ and Christ alone may be seen in him. His desire is to live the Christ life in a manner that will be a preview of the life he will live in heaven when he has put on “perfection”. He knows that in this body of corruption he will not attain to that “perfection” but he wants to have his mind renewed as much as possible to get as close to “perfection” as possible. His driving desire is that ... *“He must increase and I must decrease”* (Jn 3:20).

We can add to our understanding of what Paul means by ... *“that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead”* if we compare the two words used in the Greek text that are translated into the one common word “resurrection” in our English text.

In verse 10 the word for resurrection is *anastaseōs*. It means “to stand up”, “raising up”, “resurrection”. In the Greek mind the living were “**standing up**” and the dead were “lying down”.

In verse 11 the word used for resurrection is *exanastasin*. Basically the same root word (*anastasis*) is used in both verses but to the one in verse 11 a prefix (*ex*) is added. This little prefix means “out”, or “out of”. Now this is the only place this word (*exanastasin*) is used in the entire Bible. So Paul is very likely playing on words here for emphasis. The “out of” is being emphasised.

In 2:12 he has told us to “work **out**” or “**out** work” our salvation. By this he means that the salvation, Christ who is in us, must be **brought out** and “worn on our sleeve”, or seen in our attitudes, words and actions. Christ must be brought out and made visible. Here in 3:10, 11 he reinforces this thought by his word play. Here he is saying, ‘I don’t want to plod along in life living in a manner that cannot be distinguished from those who are “dead”. I want to “know” Christ, His resurrection power, fellowshiping with Him in His sufferings being conformed to His death to such a degree that every bit of deadness and self is eradicated, that nothing of me can be seen and that His life and power operating in and through me cause me to **stand out** so different, so pure, as if it were Christ Himself with whom you were interacting’.

Pause for thought: The Father’s purpose in saving us is that we exhibit the resurrection life – the **outstandingly** pure, holy, loving life of Christ. Is Christ in His purity, holiness and love being seen in me?

Compared to all eternity, the time allotted to us here on earth is brief. Soon it will be forever too late to suffer for and with Christ. What a mistake it is to fritter away the precious moments in things that are of no lasting value.

Press On

Phil 3:12 ... *“Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus”.*

Many may think what Paul is presenting in the last few verses is an unattainable goal. They may say, oh that’s nice and then just brush it off to one side and carry on their life as “normal”. But he immediately counters this wrong attitude and thinking by saying that while he is fully aware that he is not yet “perfect” he sees the “finishing line” and it’s not too far away now. His heart’s desire, every fibre of his being, is directed towards the goal of “finishing” this race. He so wants Christ to be seen in him in everything he thinks, says and does. Through his life’s hard experiences he has come to know Christ and his power to deliver. He has fallen in love with his Saviour and seen the power of Christ’s life and love flowing out of him and transforming his enemies as well as the unsaved. The more he has entered into the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings the deeper has been his revelation of Christ and His unfailing love and this has driven him on to know Him even more. So Paul knows nothing else but to ... *“press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus”.*

Paul was called and appointed (Gal 1:1) to bring us the message of the “new birth”, the “*gospel ... not according to man ... but received ... through a revelation of Jesus Christ*” (Gal 1:11-12). He was the one not only to share the revelation of the “mystery”, ... *“Christ in you, the hope of glory”* (Col1:27) but he was the one who declared ... *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me**”* and that’s the life he lived and shared and desired it to be the only life he lived and shared. His inner motivation was to “press on” with undivided attention, following closely, like a hunter following his prey – until he had laid hold of the prize.

Phil 3:13-14 ... *“Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”.*

In his pursuit of the prize of attaining to ... *“the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ”* (Eph 4:13), which status he says he has not yet achieved but that he has the finishing line in view, Paul says there is one thing he has attained – he has learned to put the past aside and to focus on what is ahead. He knows that there is nothing we can do to alter the past but there’s everything we can do to make the most of the future.

Whether the past represents successes or failures, our focus must only be on what lies ahead. Yesterdays grace and mercy was for yesterday. We should never be satisfied with yesterdays grace and should not stand on past triumphs; we are to press on – seek fresh grace for the day and seek to grow more in our knowledge of Christ. If we have experienced a past of failures we are not to look back in condemnation for ... *“there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”.* We cannot progress without this proper forgetting.

Paul was a vicious persecutor of Christians and an accomplice to murder in his past, Peter had denied Christ at His crucifixion, David had a past of adultery and murder – yet look what they went on to be; standouts and great examples of the faith. They repented, which means they did a 180°

turn around. They put the past behind them, turned around and pressed on forward in fresh grace and mercy towards ... *“the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”*.

Failures occur when self rises to the fore. Paul is saying, as we progress in life we should not waste time looking back and stalling on past failure but rather press on, fix our eyes on Christ and draw near to Him and learn Christ, let the fellowship of His sufferings deal a death blow to self, let His resurrection power be the liberating force at work within us, so that He, Christ, and not self, is who we present outwardly to our audience – and all the more as we continually move forward in Christ.

Don't look back and try not to look too far into the future or you will miss the more immediate blessings we have and are to experience in Christ.

Pause for thought: The best testimony we can bear is not so much what Christ has done in the past in our lives, but the beauty of our current and growing knowledge and expression of Him.

Phil 3:15 ... *“let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you”*.

“Perfect” refers to our spirit, the “new man” – Christ in us is perfect. It's our unrenewed mind (soul) and bodies that are not perfect due to the corruption of sin.

The “attitude” or “mind” Paul speaks of that we are to have is one which forgives ourselves and others for past failures, one which does not waste time proudly preening on past successes, but one which forgets the past and presses on in Christ to the attainment of all He is and has for us and wants to be through us.

Because the nature of the God we serve is gracious and merciful, if we have a “different” attitude right now, in due course, provided our hearts are sincere before the Lord, He will graciously “open our eyes” and cause us to walk in His will. If we want to know and walk in God's will for our lives He will He will reveal Himself and His purposes to us.

Ps 32:8 ... *“I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you”*.

What is required of us is to keep our eyes fixed on Christ so that we can follow His counsel.

Heb 12:1-2 ... *“let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **fixing our eyes on Jesus**, the author and perfecter of the faith”*.

Pause for thought: If we are serious about knowing Christ and walking in His ways then we must be prepared for Him to guide us into new ways.

Emulate the Mature in Christ

Phil 3:16-19 ... *“however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction,*

whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things”.

Paul lived what he taught. He is not being prideful here in calling for the saints to follow his example – he was an example in life and doctrine to all of us who would follow him.

The very same Holy Spirit who, long ages ago, worked in Paul to bring him a revelation of Christ as his life and his all, will work in you and me today to bring us the very same revelation if we have a willingness and sanctified determination to follow Paul on the uncompromising path of devotion and obedience to Christ.

Our walk reveals our character. Our walk in Christ should reveal the true nature of His calling.

We are to emulate those who are growing in Christ and not those who are stagnating. Let us not be among those who are “enemies of the cross” but rather be those who embrace the cross of Christ and allow it to deal a death blow to all of our “appetites” for shame and earthly things, things of no eternal value, so that Christ who lives in us may be liberated and seen and heard in our lives.

Let us “*set our minds on the things above*” (Col 3:2), on Christ, and not “*on earthly things*” (3:19). Like a watch ‘set’ on the GMT time standard, which ensures we have the ‘right time’, we must ‘set’ our minds on Christ so that His life may be seen in us.

Phil 3:20-21 ... *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself”.*

The Roman citizens’ allegiance was to the Emperor and his or her responsibility was to abide by the laws of the empire. Similarly, the Christians allegiance is to Christ and his or her conduct is to be regulated by His Word.

Our efforts are to be directed towards the growth in Christ that Paul has spoken of in the main part of chapter 3 and all the more as the day of Christ’s return draws near. Unfortunately, many have allowed the return of Christ to take us up to be with him in heaven for all eternity to fade into being a distant and neglected doctrine rather than an imminent reality about which we should be excited and continually motivated. The reality of the imminent return of Christ should have an acute influence on our life and conduct. It should press us on to the attainment of purity and perfection in our expression of Christ – to the attainment of ... *“the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ”* (Eph 4:13).

1 John 3:2-3 ... *“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure”.*

Paul also reminds us here that the struggle against our flesh and corrupted minds will end at the return of Christ. The day in which He ... *“will transform the body of our humble state into conformity*

with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (3:21). The day our transformation is completed! What a day that will be!

Lesson 5 Christ Our Strength and Supply

Confident Mind

Phil 4:1 ... *“Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved”.*

“Therefore ... in this way stand firm in the Lord”. The “therefore” is transitional – it tells us to look back and consider all Paul’s encouragements and exhortations to ...

- Embrace the gospel mind, put Christ first, have the motivation that ... *“for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”.*
- Embrace the humble and lowly mindset that is found in Christ, live for others, work out your salvation – let Christ be “worn on your sleeves”.
- Embrace the steadfast mindset with the mind fixed on Christ, know Him, be found in Him, know His resurrection power and the fellowship of His sufferings, letting the cross have its way in you.
- Emulate those who are walking steadfastly in Christ.
- Press on and never give up, live in Christ as a worthy citizen of heaven with the expectancy that His return is imminent, at which our transformation will be completed.

... so that, ... *“in this way”*, we can stand firm in the sufficiency of Christ as we look ahead, no matter what we face, to function in unity and stability, fostering perseverance and endurance with absolute confidence in Christ who is our strength and supply – our all in all.

We are not *marching* into battle to conquer. Christ has won the victory and He is the victorious One who lives in us. We **stand** in the victory Christ has gained for us. We maintain, consolidate and enforce the victory that has already been won.

The resurrection power that won the battle against sin and raised Christ from the dead is the power that works in us and enables us to stand firm against all hostilities and all divisions. He is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (1 Cor 1:30).

Phil 4:2-3 ... *“I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life”.*

Paul does not elaborate on the discord that has reared its head, he doesn’t even reprove those who are party to this issue, he simply calls them to walk in unity in Christ. His focus is on the answer, not the problem. Prior to this in the letter, Paul has dealt at length with the attitude of humility and servitude ... *“the ... attitude that was in Christ Jesus”* which fosters unity and here gently speaks to the two main offenders whose differences are bringing division and encourages them to ... *“live in harmony in the Lord”*. His appeal to them is for them to embrace Christ and the “gospel mindset”. In humility and lowliness of mind they are to find their “common ground” in Christ. He points them to Christ.

While writing this letter, with Epaphroditus at his side possibly even doing the writing for Paul, a letter to be delivered by Epaphroditus, Paul includes in writing his verbal instruction to Epaphroditus ... *“to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel”* in the letter.

Pause for Thought: When facing divisions or strife, focus not on the trouble or the person causing the grief – but rather, take it to the Lord in prayer. There’s a song, written by Joseph Scriven, which is so appropriate:

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.
Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh, what needless pain we bear.
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations, is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour still our refuge; take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer
In His arms He’ll take and shield thee; thou will find a solace there.

Rejoice in Christ!

Euodia and Syntyche are examples of believers who, if they chose to occupy their minds with the defects and shortcomings of one another rather than to see one another as a “work in progress” and believing the best of one another, will establish a breach in fellowship and an alienation that will not only affect their relationship but also that of others in the body of believers around them. Hence Paul quickly moves on to provide a solution to this type of problem.

So he then goes on to give a few imperatives as he encourages the believers to embrace integrity in relationships, unwavering trust and confidence in God, and purity and wholesomeness in thought with a mind set on the Spirit. These are the practical things Paul which knows will help the believers to ... *“stand firm in the Lord”*.

Phil 4:4-7 ... *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for 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 comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”*.

When Paul encourages us to ... *“rejoice in the Lord always”*, he is not writing about something he has not experienced personally, for Paul demonstrated this virtue when he and Silas were arrested and thrown into prison soon after his first visit to Philippi (Acts 16:23-25) ... *“When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison ... and fastened their feet in the stocks. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God”*. And now Paul is again in prison in Rome, continuing to face unjust adversity – yet with an attitude of joy and contentment in Christ in the fact that ... *“my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel”* (1:12). That’s why he could say ... *“Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who*

walk according to the pattern you have in us” (3:17). His joy was based in his trust in God and in no way tainted by the circumstances he faced.

“Rejoice” comes from the same root as “joy”. Joy is supernatural; it is a fruit of the Spirit. Joy is of the Spirit whereas happiness is circumstantial and based on the emotions. Joy is the thermostat; happiness is the thermometer. Joy is a choice; happiness is a reaction. In the midst of adversity, if Christ is overflowing out of us the evidence will be joy or joyfulness. Even in the face of things about which we are not happy, we can have joy!

When Christ was in Gethsemane and on the cross he was not *happy* at all. That’s why He asked that if possible the cup of suffering could be taken away. But in submitting to the Father’s will He went to the cross and ... “for the **joy** set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb 12:2) because He knew He would be raised in victory over sin and that we would be set free. That impending victory to be brought about by His suffering gave Him reason to rejoice.

As our walk in Christ is constant and continual, so our joy is to be constant and continual ... “rejoice in the Lord **always**” (4:1) ... “Through Him then, let us **continually** offer up a sacrifice of praise to God” (Heb 13:15).

... “Let your gentleness (forbearance) be known to all” (4:5). The word translated here as “gentle spirit” or “gentleness” has in its meaning “forbearance”, “magnanimity”, “peace-loving”, “open to reason”, “rich in mercy”. It is the opposite of being contentious and self seeking. It means that you are to be seen as one who is not insistent on your own rights. It means to be “self-effacing” and seen as one who is satisfied with less than your due, and one who does this joyfully. We can rejoice with an attitude of humility knowing that the seed that falls into the ground and dies will rise up and bear much fruit! (John 12:24).

... “the Lord is near” (4:5). First of all, Christ is in you and is your strength to be able to live this in this forbearing manner joyfully, for ... “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh 8:10).

Secondly, He is near in the sense that He is continually watching your attitude and actions and is ever present to help you if you will ... “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16).

Thirdly, He is near refers to His imminent return to take us up to be with Him for all eternity, which gives us good reason to live joyfully and magnanimously in the face of pressures from those “outside” as well as “internal” divisions and free from the worries and cares of this world. ... “everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3)

... “Be anxious for nothing” (4:6) ... The Greek word for anxiety (*merimna*) has to do with the “dividing of the mind”. Anxiety is the opposite of joy. Anxiety pulls the mind away from joy. James tells us that the person with a divided or double mind is ... “unstable in all his ways” (Jas 1:8). Anxiety strangles joy.

Paul is not minimising the struggles the Philippians face. He is fully aware of the external pressures and internal struggles and differences they are facing. He is simply drawing their attention to the fact that their focus should not be on unreasonable anxiety over that for which they have little or no

control but rather on God, who is far greater than all their troubles and the One in whom they will find strength and peace in the midst of the storms of life.

In this exhortation he speaks out of personal experience gained in the school of adverse circumstances from a heart that is fixed in Christ. Remember, this is the man who had a deadly viper bite him on the hand yet he shook it off and giving it no further thought and refusing any foothold for anxiety (Acts 27 and 28)! The result was God intervened and no harm resulted to Paul from the snake bite.

It's all about where we are focussed ... *"casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you"* (1 Pet 5:7) ... *"For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace"* (Rom 8:6). It's a call to ... *"enter His rest"* – the state in which His peace prevails.

Thanksgiving

Anxiety and worry are the thieves that steal your joy and peace. So Paul gives them the alternate or antidote to worrying – ... *"by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God"* (4:6).

God knows everything about us, all our concerns, before we bring them to His attention. So in bowing before Him in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to bring Him our requests we are not so much informing Him of something He knows nothing about, but we are expressing our absolute trust in Him, who knows everything about us, to bring us to a place of absolute peace in the midst of the storms of life. The key here is *"thanksgiving"*. It comes from the inner acknowledgement of Jesus' words ... *"apart from Me you can do nothing"* (John 15:5) and it is an outward statement of an inward trust and confidence that He is... *"able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think"* (Eph 3:20). The focus of our attention is not on the trouble that confronts us but in Christ who is our peace. Our rejoicing and thanksgiving is not a matter of how we rejoice but in whom we rejoice ... *"rejoice in the Lord"* (4:1).

Paul points us to the overarching power of thankfulness directed to God. Giving of thanks releases God's supernatural power to intervene. Good examples are:

- The feeding of the five thousand. John 6:11 ... *"Jesus then took the loaves, and **having given thanks**, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted"*. The miracle of multiplication came as a result of the thanks given to the Father for His provision.
- The raising of Lazarus from the dead. John 11:41-44 ... *"Jesus ... said, 'Father, **I thank You** that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.' When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth.' The man who had died came forth"*. His thanks released the miracle of resurrection.

In both instances, and there are many more similar cases in the scriptures (i.e. 2 Chr 20:21-22) in the giving of thanks Jesus was acknowledging to His Father that He had heard and understood the Father's will for the situation and that He knew the Father's power to perform His will and was acknowledging this with gratitude. He was then in a position to carry out the will of the Father and to speak into being the Father's will. His thanks was directed to the Father ... *"who gives life to the*

dead and calls into being that which does not exist” (Rom 4:17). Remember Jesus said, in John 14:10 and in other places, that He only did what He saw the Father doing and said only that which He had heard from the Father. His trust, confidence and gratitude were in the Father.

So when anxiety presents itself, Paul encourages us to take the matter to the Lord in prayer with thanksgiving. He says that the way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything. ... *“always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father” (Eph 5:20) and ... “in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess 5:18). Giving of thanks opens the way for God to demonstrate His love and power over the situation at hand – whether that means He stills the “storm”, or gives you the grace and peace to walk through the “storm” at rest knowing you are safe in Him.*

Thanksgiving is particularly important in times when we have to press in over long periods of time in supplicatory prayer and where it seems like no answer is imminent, because **seeds of discouragement and anxiety cannot gain root in a heart of gratitude.**

Psalm 95:1-8 ... *“O come, let us sing for joy to the Lord, let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with **thanksgiving**, let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods, in whose hand are the depths of the earth, the peaks of the mountains are His also. The sea is His, for it was He who made it, and His hands formed the dry land. Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would hear His voice, do not harden your hearts”...*

The words of the Psalmist are echoed in the letter to the Hebrew believers:

Heb 4:7 ... *“Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest”.*

This is an exhortation to cease trusting in our own works, our own ability to resolve our crises, and to begin to place our trust in God. Thanksgiving rests in the finished work of Christ.

God may not change the adverse circumstances that face you but He will give you peace and assurance that He is in control and that ultimately ... *“God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom 8:28-29). Conforming us to the image of His Son is God’s primary goal and He will use tough circumstances if necessary to bring us to “learn Christ”, to “gain Christ”, to “be found in Him”. When we “find” our identity in Christ and rest in Him and His completed work we will be at perfect peace in the midst of any storm – for if we are “found in Him” we will be “found in Peace”.*

Christ is the ... *“Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6). Christ is in you to be your peace in the midst of life’s storms as you rest in Him and embrace Him as your all. Jesus said, ... “Peace I leave with you; My*

peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful”.

Rejoicing and being thankful when the going gets tough is not easy on the flesh. As the writer to the Hebrews puts it, it is a **sacrifice**, putting self and the flesh to the cross ... *“Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name”* (Heb 13:15). But it is the pathway to being established in peace ... *“Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever”* (Heb 13:20-21).

Psalm 23:4 ... *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me”.*

“Rod” is from the Hebrew root word *shebet* which means “control” and one of the cognates of this root means “stop work”. “Staff” is from the Hebrew root word *shaan* which means “to rely on”, “provide balance and support” and one of the cognates of this root means “quiet”. So putting these meanings back into this verse we get the following: Even when we are going through tough times and anxiety wants to set in, we need not fear because we can walk through the crisis with the assurance and confidence in our Lord that He is not only with us, but in us, to “control” us or guide us away from our works and self reliance and tendency to try on our own to find a solution to our problem, to “relying in” Him totally to the point of absolute rest in Him, and that in doing so He will bring us through the darkness in “quietness and peace” – ... *“and the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”* (Phil 4:7).

In verse 7 Paul is using a military term, “guard”, which the people of Philippi would understand being under Roman military rule. It means that the peace of God shall guard, as with an impenetrable military garrison or an impenetrable military fort, your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. This is the means by which we take ... *“every thought captive to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Cor 10:5) and entering into a peace beyond natural human comprehension. God may not necessarily remove the problem, but He will garrison our minds and hearts with His supernatural peace. Calm will replace anxiety in our minds and thoughts.

The statement “peace **of** God” only occurs here in this 7th verse and nowhere else in the New Testament. It is not the “peace **with** God” a person has as a result of justification and neither is it “peace **from** God” referring to a parcel of peace given to someone who doesn’t have any peace and needs some. What Paul is referring to here is the peace and tranquillity of God’s own eternal being; that which is part of His very nature. This nature of quietness, tranquillity and calmness, personified by Christ, we enter into and share as a part of the divine nature that is ours in Christ. Peace is a Person – Christ – and, as the born again, Christ is in us. When we choose to look straight through, past and beyond, the turmoil in the natural and into the heart of Christ with whom we are one in spirit (1 Cor 6:17), laying aside anxiety and seeing Christ in full control, which fact we express through our thanks and praise for Him in prayer, we come to that place where we have “gained Christ” and are “found in Christ” and stand in His nature – which is inclusive of peace. We find ourselves at rest in Him and see and express only His tranquillity, calmness and peace. In this we experience the truth of 2 Cor 4:18 ... *“we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are*

eternal” and the truth of Rom 8:6 ... *“for the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace”*. This is what it truly means to “walk in Christ”. This is what it means to “enter His rest”.

As Christ is Peace and just as light dispels and eradicates darkness so anxiety and unrest cannot exist in His presence. When we “walk in Christ” anxiety must flee and cannot continue to exist. ... *“It was for freedom that Christ set us free!”* (Gal 5:1).

Isa 26:3 ... *“You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You”*.

Pause for Thought: Like David, knowing that God knows our every thought, our constant position and plea before God should be: ... *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way”* (Psalm 139:23-24).

The Secure Mind

Phil 4:8-9 ... *“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, **dwell on these things**. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, **practice these things**, and the God of peace will be with you”*.

“Finally”, designates the last of the imperatives Paul is giving in this part of his letter where he discusses the detail of how we are to ... *“so stand firm in the Lord”* (4:1).

The word translated “dwell on” more literally means to “recon, calculate, take into account”, implying that we must “intently focus, carefully consider and take into and keep in our minds” the wholesome things listed.

We are presented with two concluding imperatives that will assist us in the process of renewing of our minds to align with the mind of Christ and be established in His peace. As we diligently align with these imperatives we will see all divisions, like the differences between Euodia and Syntyche, dissolve and be replaced with harmony and peace in our relationships with one another.

The penultimate imperatives is:

Constantly dwell on, or focus your mind upon the following things:

- *Whatever is true*
- *Whatever is honourable or honest*
- *Whatever is right or just*
- *Whatever is pure*
- *Whatever is lovely*
- *Whatever is of good repute*
- *The things of moral excellence, virtue or uprightness*
- *The things which are worthy of praise*

This is what Jesus had in mind when He was praying for us just prior to facing Calvary for us:

John 17:17 ... *“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”*

The only way the reality of He who has ... *“become to us ... sanctification”* (1 Cor 1:30) is evidenced in our lives, is as we constantly and unreservedly submit our minds to Him and “put on the mind of Christ”. This takes a turning away from conformity to the ways, thoughts, actions and words of the world and being ... *“transformed by the renewing of our minds”* (Rom 12:2).

Pause for Thought: We would do well to meditate a while on the words of the two opening verses of the hymn “May the mind of Christ, My Saviour” written by Kate Barclay Wilkinson:

May the mind of Christ, my Saviour,
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say.

May the Word of God dwell richly
In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph
Only through His power.

The final imperative is:

Continually put into practice the following things:

- *The truths you have learned from me*
- *The truths you received from me*
- *The truths you heard from me and about me*
- *The truths you have seen in me*

In verse 8 the word **“whatever** things which” (a quantitative relative pronoun) is used – it is general as Paul is encouraging the believers to embrace all possible things which are true, honest, right, pure and so on. However, in verse 9 a definite relative pronoun is used **“those** things which”, as Paul is not referring to general matters now but rather the specific things he has taught the Philippians and the specific things they have seen in him and learned from him.

The word *parelabete* that Paul uses – translated *“you received”* – is more than just receiving the truth; here it has the deeper meaning of receiving the truth for the purpose of acting upon it and handing on to others in its whole and complete form just as you received it. In using this word Paul has in mind for the Philippians the same thing he said to Timothy ... *“The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also”* (2 Tim 2:2).

When we read through all the epistles of Paul and through the accounts of his missionary journeys in the book of Acts we see a person who, more than anyone else, certainly lived the Christ-life to the full. His life was a testament to that which he preached. He walked the talk. He left behind an amazing legacy – a life that expressed Christ in attitude, word and action regardless of the situation

or circumstances he faced. He was a role model to other believers and wanted them to “gain Christ” and advance to maturity in Christ so that they in turn could be an example to others.

Paul wanted the Philippian believers to be established in Peace. He is saying to them if you fix your mind on the Spirit and keep before your mind the pure, holy, lovely things and walk in the truths he has passed on, they would walk in unshakable peace and confidence in the midst of whatever pressures they were facing. In doing this they would also be great examples to those around them.

Pause for Thought: Have we so embraced Christ and are hidden in Him to the point that our life is an example for others to follow, so that, like Paul, we can confidently say to others ... “*the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you?*”

The Secret of Contentment

Phil 4:10 ... “*But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.*”

Paul is about to conclude his letter and he has saved his word of thanks to the Philippians for their gift and concern for his well being until last.

The fact that Paul uses the adverb *megalōs* “greatly” or “immensely”, which appears only in this verse and nowhere else in the New Testament, magnifies the intensity of his joy. But note that towards which his joy is focused – his joy is not in the gift he has received but in the Lord. He has immense joy in the Lord because of the work the Lord has done in the Philippian believers to bring them to this point of maturity in their conduct and concern for others. Paul’s joy in the Lord is not for the gift itself that they sent him, but for their care and concern and determination to help him and his ministry abound. By directing his praise and joy to the Lord Paul has emphasized that their generosity and concern for his well being has come from their union with Christ. Their expression of generosity is an outflow of the love of Christ within them. Right throughout his teaching and personal example Paul has emphasized that Christ is our life and our all and that He is at work in us” ... “*to will and to work for His good pleasure*” (2:13).

The verb *phronein* translated “concern” in 4:10 is a key word throughout the epistle. It has to do with “thinking” but is much more than that. It includes thinking that “understands”, is “considerate”, shows “concern”, has “feeling” and has to do with “attitude” or “intent”. This word appears in:

1:7 ... “*it is only right for me to **feel** this way about you all*”

2:2 ... “*make my joy complete by being of the same **mind**, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, **intent** on one purpose*”.

2:5 ... “*Have this **attitude** in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus*”.

3:15 ... “*Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this **attitude**; and if in anything you have a different **attitude**, God will reveal that also to you*”.

3:19 ... “*whose glory is in their shame, who set their **minds** on earthly things*”

4:2 ... “*I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to **live** in harmony (be of the same mind) in the Lord*”.

4:10 ... *“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your **concern** for me; indeed, you were **concerned** before, but you lacked opportunity”.*

They all along had the right “attitude”, “concern”, “intent” and desire to be a blessing and had Paul’s welfare in mind, but they lacked the opportunity because for a long period of time they were out of contact with Paul. But their deep concern for his welfare and desire to bless was evidenced by the great efforts to which Epaphroditus had gone on their behalf, nearly costing him his life, to find Paul and to give him their love gift.

In writing to the Corinthian church Paul spoke to them about the liberality and sacrificial giving of the Philippian church:

2 Cor 8:2-3, 5 ... *“that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord ... and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God”.*

So Paul’s joy in the Lord was in recognition and affirmation of their act of worship to God in giving unto Him and His work. He rejoices in the Lord that they are true worshippers. Their giving was sacrificial and unto the Lord.

Paul’s eyes are never on the gift itself as he makes clear in the passage that follows – for, gift or no gift, he has learned ... *“to be content in whatever circumstances”* he found himself. His “sufficiency” or “contentment” comes from the All Sufficient One, Christ, who lives in him.

Phil 4:11-13 ... *“Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be **content** in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have **learned the secret** of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things **through Him** who strengthens me”.*

In these verses Paul makes it very clear that his joyfulness for their generosity and gift was not a result of him being in a place of need at the time the gift was given to him. His joy had nothing to do with his needs but only to do with praise to God for their genuine love and willingness to give. He is appreciative for the gift and commends the Philippians but assures them that he is not doing this in the hopes it will stir them up to give him more gifts.

He was able to say this because he had *personally* learned to be content in all situations and circumstances. He had *personally* learned that Christ was his strength and his sufficiency to draw upon at all times. That’s why he says, in the literal translation ... *“I, I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am”*. He had been through the school of adverse situations and circumstances (2 Cor 11:23-29) and had learned to place his trust in Christ and Christ alone to be his strength, supply and peace at all times bringing him to the place of complete contentment in Christ. He had mastered this lesson. He spoke from experience. His contentment was utterly independent of circumstances, whether good or bad.

He echoes similar words elsewhere to Timothy and to the Corinthian church:

1 Tim 6:6-10, 17 ... “But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by **contentment**. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be **content**. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” ... “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy”.

2 Cor 9:8 ... “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having **all sufficiency** in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed”.

A big lesson Paul had learned and mastered in the school of adversity was not to depend on people or things but only upon God. Christ was the All Sufficient One in him – and in Him and Him alone he rested and depended. The word translated “content” (*autarkēs*) in Phil 4:11, “contentment” (*autarkeias*) in 1 Tim 6:6 and “sufficiency” (*autarkeian*) in 2 Cor 9:8 is a compound word made up of two words meaning “self” and “sufficient”. Paul’s “self sufficiency” was not independence based on worldly pride, but independence from the pride and ways of the world and a total dependence upon God. The secret of Paul’s independence was his dependence in Christ.

Contentment and dependence in Christ has to be learned. It does not come naturally. Selfishness, greed, devious means of gaining wealth, dependence in having money or things and discontent all come naturally. These have to be unlearned. We have to learn to walk in Christ, depending completely upon Him at all times.

Then Paul proceeds to explain what he means by having ... “learned to be content in **whatever circumstances**” he was in – in humble means, in prosperity, in being full and in going hungry, in having abundance or in suffering need – ... “in **any and every circumstance** I have **learned the secret**”...

In this discourse Paul uses an interesting word *memuēmai* which is translated here as “learned the secret” which more literally means “to initiate into the sacred mysteries”. The reason Paul has learned to cope with whatever circumstances in which he found himself was that he had come to the *revelation*, the *uncovering of the mystery*, that Christ who was His life (Gal 2:20) was the absolute and only source of his strength and power in *all* things and at *all* times – his total sufficiency, his contentment, flowed up from Christ within him. He knew beyond doubt that there was no one or nowhere else to look in times of need but to Christ who was within him and to rest in His sufficiency.

That’s why he goes on to say the words of verse 13; a word for word literal rendition of which is as follows ... “in all these things, the good and bad things, I have power and ability in the One empowering me” or alternatively ... “I can do all things **in Him** who strengthens me”.

This is a very powerful statement of the “in Christ” position that Paul adopts, lives and teaches. Because he was in union with Christ, abiding in Christ, he was a “conduit” through which the power and sufficiency of Christ could flow out from within him to face off or handle whatever it was that he was facing – the good and the bad, the lack and the abundance.

This power from Christ within is also what he was referring to when he spoke to the church at Ephesus:

Eph 3:20 ... *“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to **the power that works within us**”.*

He also had this in mind when he wrote to the Corinthian church:

2 Cor 12:9-10 ... *“And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong”.*

Pause for Thought: The gospel Paul lived and preached was the revelation of the mystery ... *“Christ in you, the hope of glory”* (Col 1:27). God’s plan for us, the “born again”, is that we, like Paul, come to this revelation that Christ resides in you and he is the only life and source of strength and sufficiency you have and that you embrace Him as your all in your journey through life.

Learn to draw upon the One within you who continually infuses you with His strength and become independent of outward circumstances. Embracing Christ as our all means living above circumstances, utterly content in Christ.

What would be your response if the Lord led you to give away all, or at least a substantial part of all that you owned? Is your giving sacrificial?

Generosity Commended

Phil 4:14 – 18 ... *“Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.”*

Having made clear his “sufficiency in Christ in all circumstances” statement, Paul is quick to avert any misconceptions they might have concerning his attitude towards their generosity towards him by going on to say ... *“Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction”*. He commends them for their generosity, which is evidence of their willing ... *“participation in the gospel”* (1:4). Right from the start, the Philippian believers were constantly looking for ways to be supportive of the spread of the gospel through Paul and his team. They had in motion the principle of Gal 6:6 ... *“The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him”*. Paul commends them for this.

He assures them that the gifts are well received and most importantly that they are ... *“a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God”*. This statement is also an encouragement to

them that as they have done unto him they have done unto their Master (Matt 25:35-40; Eph 6:7; Col 3:23) and in doing so they have brought Him pleasure.

Heb 13:16 ... *“And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased”.*

Having expressed the fact that His needs have been amply met, Pauls goes on to talk about their needs.

Phil 4:19 ... *“And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus”.*

This is not referring to their spiritual needs or something that will happen when they go one day to be with God in glory. These needs are material as we recall from 2 Cor 8:2 ... *“that in a **great ordeal of affliction** their abundance of joy and **their deep poverty** overflowed in the wealth of their liberality”.* So Paul is assuring the Philippians that God will gloriously and abundantly supply their present material needs. He is also pointing them to the fact that the riches, the sufficiency, the supply, are found “in Christ”.

“And” links this verse to the last few verses, linking their sacrificial giving to the blessings they are assured in return. This is a strong affirmation to generous givers, especially when that giving is sacrificial.

Paul’s use of *“according to His riches in glory”* is simply to emphasis the inexhaustible supply that is ours in Christ. It is not **out of** His riches in glory but **according to** His riches in glory. An example will show the difference. If I needed some money to start a business and went to a billionaire relative to ask for financial assistance and his response was a cheque for a mere \$10,000, he would have given to me **out of** his wealth. On the other hand, if he gave me a whole lot of signed blank cheques and said, “Use as much as you like”, he would have given me **according to** his wealth. God’s provision is inexhaustible and it is available to those who trust in Him and Him alone and who are good stewards of His provision.

So Paul is really saying to them that as they have given liberally, willingly and sacrificially as an act of worship to God and in participation in the gospel out of their *“deep poverty”*, so God will pour out of His abundance upon them and see to their needs. He’s saying to them ... *“You’ve done well, you’ve shared even when you had so little and now even as you have given so God will give back to you abundantly according to His riches and not according to your need”.*

Luke 6:38 ... *“Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return”.*

The Doxology

Phil 4:20-23 ... *“Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”*

Having discussed the limitless resources that are ours in Christ, Paul cannot refrain from this joyous outburst and attribute to God the praise and glory due to Him who is our loving caring Father.

In the same manner Paul opened this letter,

... *“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”*.

so he closes it.

... *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit”*.

For by God’s grace we have been saved and enter into life in Christ and by His grace the eyes of our understanding are opened that we may *“know Him”, “gain Christ”* and *“be found in Him”*. It is by grace that we like Paul can cry out in joy ...*“for me to live is Christ and to die is gain”* and by His grace we can ... *“conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”*.

The letter begins with Christ and ends with Christ – He is our all in all.

Lesson 6 Conclusion

No matter what Paul was facing, whether good times or bad, he preached Christ and presented Christ in all his thoughts, words and actions and encouraged his readers to find their solace and strength in Christ and to steadfastly express Him in their relationships with both friend and foe.

He encourages us to have the same consuming passion which was his and which is summed up in his words ... *“for me to live is Christ”*. Through his exhortation he gives us every reason why our minds should be fixed on Christ, that we should abide in Him and that our heart cry, as his, should be to *“know Christ”*, to *“gain Christ”* and to be *“found in Him”*.

So let us embrace Christ as our all and stand firm in Him as we journey through this life and have as our theme song the one written many years ago:

*Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.
Mould me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting, yielded and still.*

*Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Search me and try me, Master, today!
Whiter than snow, Lord, wash me just now,
As in Thy presence humbly I bow.*

*Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Hold o'er my being absolute sway!
Fill with thy Spirit till all shall see
Christ only, always, living in me!*

(Adelaide Pollard)

You are the container, Christ is the contents; let Him spill out of you!

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