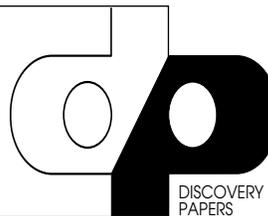


# FINDING ASSURANCE IN THE LORD

SERIES: JESUS, OUR JOY



Catalog No. 672  
Philippians 1:1-11  
First Message  
Gary Vanderet  
December 6, 1987

I was fascinated by the story of a man named Bob Edens. For fifty-one years, Bob was blind. His world was a black hall filled only with sounds and smells. He felt his way through five decades of darkness. Then one day a skilled surgeon performed a complicated operation on his eyes, and for the first time Bob Edens received sight. As you can imagine, he was overwhelmed. Listen to his words:

I would never have dreamed that yellow is so...yellow. I don't have the words. I am amazed by yellow. But red is my favorite color. I just can't believe red...I can see the shape of the moon—and I like nothing better than seeing a jet plane flying across the sky, leaving a vapor trail. And of course, sunrises and sunsets. And at night I look at the stars in the sky...you could never know how wonderful everything is.

He is correct. Those of us who have lived with vision cannot know how wonderful it is to be given sight for the first time.

But Bob Edens is not the only person who has spent a lifetime without seeing the things around him. Many people suffer from some form of blindness. We can be within reach of something for a lifetime, but unless we take time to notice it, it does not become a part of our lives. Someone may have witnessed a thousand rainbows without ever seeing the grandeur of one. He can live near a garden and fail to see the splendor of a single flower. A man can spend a lifetime with a woman and never pause to look into her soul.

My friends, a person can be all that goodness calls him to be and still never see the Author of life. Being honest, moral or even religious does not necessarily mean that we will see God. You may see what others have seen or hear what others have said about him, but until you see him for yourself, you have only caught hazy visions in shades of grey, never in color. Max Lucado in *God Came Near* writes:

Christianity, in its purest form,  
is nothing more than seeing Jesus.  
To see His majesty and to imitate him,  
That is the sum of Christianity.  
Have you caught a glimpse of his majesty?

For the next eight weeks, we will focus on the book of Philippians which will give us a glimpse of Jesus and will help us live life focused upon him. My prayer in this study is that the Divine Surgeon will use this book as a delicate surgical tool to restore your sight. In his hands, your blurry vision can become focused and your darkness will be dispersed. Your view of Christ will change from the vision of a wavy figure in a desert mirage to the touchable face of an intimate friend.

This same miracle occurred to the author of this book, Paul, on the dusty road to Damascus. The Lord Jesus appeared to him and allowed him to see his own blindness in a graphic way. Then he gave him a glimpse of his majesty. From that day forward, Paul was unable to focus on anything else. In this epistle, Paul desires to share this joy of living in Christ with his beloved friends in Philippi.

Paul wrote this letter from Rome while he was awaiting the results of his trial. Having been charged in Jerusalem, he had

appealed to Caesar as a Roman citizen and had been sent to Rome. For two years he was under house arrest which meant people were free to visit him, but he was not free to come and go for he was chained to a Roman soldier. Evidently, at this time, he was still awaiting the Emperor's decision from which there would be no appeal.

Despite his difficult circumstances, Paul's attitude throughout the book is one of joy, confidence and triumph. The secret to his attitude is the theme of this short letter. Although there are other threads woven throughout the book, the uniting factor is not a situation or an event but the person of Jesus Christ. There are around fifty references to Jesus Christ in these four chapters—seventeen in the first chapter alone.

Paul had learned what it meant to be in Christ. In Christ, we are secure and have everything we need; the peace of God patrols and guards our hearts, and his riches are laid open to meet our needs. In Christ, we become new people with new feelings. In Christ, we have a new way of looking at life, seeing his sovereign hand in all things.

Paul had founded this church over ten years before. The remarkable yet humble beginning of this church is recorded in Acts 16. The city of Philippi was located on the Western shore of the Aegean Sea in ancient Macedonia which is a province of modern Greece. In the opening verses of the book, we will see Paul's warm affection for the believers in Philippi. Although it has been over ten years since he first came to them, in many ways he had never left. He had carried them in his heart, and his memory moved him to pray.

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## In Christ, we have a new way of looking at life

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In the first eleven verses of Philippians, we will draw help for our own lives. The paragraph begins with a brief introduction which will give us insight into our identity in Christ. Then there will be a strong word of affirmation which will give us insight into our own security, and finally he will say a powerful prayer which will help us evaluate our own maturity. Let us begin by looking at verses 1 and 2 of this introduction.

### I. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION: INSIGHT INTO OUR IDENTITY 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.**

This is a typical introduction to a first century correspondence. Any letter written during that time would have followed the same formula of sender, recipient, and word of greeting. However, there are two observations Paul makes about us which will give us insight into our own identity:

### A. We have a unique role—We are saints

There is much confusion surrounding the term translated “saint” or “holy” (in the adjective form). Before I became a Christian, my image of a holy person or saint conjured up some emaciated person who looked as though he had been weaned on a dill pickle—a good frontispiece for the Book of Lamentations.

But this is not the Biblical concept of a saint. The word carries the connotation of being “separate” or “apart.” It conveys the idea of “belonging to a different order of things,” or “living in a different sphere.” Therefore, it is the Bible’s special word for describing God. “Holy” is the most intimate term for describing the divine nature. This word is also used throughout the Old Testament to describe sacred objects which are set apart. When Paul uses this same idea with regard to Christians, he is emphasizing the fact that we have been given God’s divine nature and have been set apart for a special purpose.

It would have been easy for Paul to address his letter merely to the Philippians, but this would not have suited his purpose. He was not concerned with who they were physically or politically, but with who they were by grace and in the sight of God. Politically, they were Philippians, which was no small honor, but grace had made them partakers of the divine nature, conferring on them the honor above all honors. The holy God gave them his title and his character when he called them saints.

Understanding our identity is crucial to our character development. Having worked with high school students most of my life, I am convinced that their understanding of their own identity enhances their ability to achieve greatness. We need to know who we are before we can act correctly. In *Bringing Out the Best in People*, Alan Loy McGinnis writes:

People need an atmosphere in which they can specialize, hone their skills, and discover their distinctiveness. The biographies of the great are sprinkled with accounts of how some teacher or some kindly employer looked closely enough to see a spark no one else saw and for periods, at least, believed in their ability to perfect that gift when no one else did. The Taft family...was evidently good at pushing their children to cut their own swath and to find a specialty of which to be proud. When Martha Taft was in elementary school in Cincinnati she was asked to introduce herself. She said, “My name is Martha Bowers Taft. My great-grandfather was president of the United States. My grandfather was United States senator. My daddy is Ambassador to Ireland. And I am a Brownie.”

We are saints. We are God’s chosen possession, designed to demonstrate his glory in this world. There is no higher honor in all of history.

There is a second point to be noticed in the introduction.

### B. We have a humble role—We are servants

Within the local church there was fellowship (“all the saints”) and leadership (“the bishops and the deacons”). However, the leadership was not an imposition upon the fellowship but an extension of it. For the saints were not “under” but “with” or “in company with” the bishops.

That one word “with” gives us great insight into how leadership is to be exercised. Often those who hold positions of leadership in churches want to dominate those who are in their charge. They want to be “over” them or at least go “before” them in terms of prestige and honor. But this is not how Christian leadership ought to be practiced. Paul says the leaders are to work with the rest of the believers. Peter expressed the same idea

when he exhorted the elders: “Shepherd the flock of God *among you*.”

Notice also that Paul even subordinates his own position of apostleship by referring to himself as a servant. Maybe that seems strange to you. Perhaps, you might have expected to read “Saint Paul to the servants” not “Servant Paul to the saints.” This understanding is critical in the life of the body. The saints must be servants.

Unless we understand that we are servants, slaves of Jesus Christ, then we will not understand what it means to be a Christian or understand Christian leadership. This kind of servant leadership springs from a clear understanding of our role as servants before the Lord. This is our identity—unique yet humble.

In the next paragraph, Paul remembers his time with the church. His memories are filled with tenderness and love. In these short verses, there is a wealth of insight into our security in Christ.

Look at verses 3 through 7.

## II. A STRONG AFFIRMATION: INSIGHT INTO OUR SECURITY 1:3-7

**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 in the gospel from the first day unto 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 defense and confirmation of the gospel, you are all partakers of grace with me.**

As we move into the letter, Paul thanks God for the fellowship of the saints in Philippi. In fact, this little book is essentially a “thank you” note expressing his appreciation for their financial support. Paul had left on his second missionary journey without knowing who would support him. At times, he worked at his trade of tent-making, but more often he was dependent on his fellow believers. When he left Philippi and travelled south to Greece, they supported him not just once but often, without him asking.

While he is filled with thanksgiving for their gifts, his mind focuses on the reason for their love—God’s work in them. Paul’s focus in these verses is on what God has done and is doing in his children. Verse 6 is the pivot upon which this passage turns. The thanksgiving and supplication of verses 3 through 5 rest on the conviction of this verse while this conviction rests on the evidence found in verse 7. There are two principles that we can draw from this passage. The first one is:

### A. Our salvation has a divine basis—it is secure

Verse 6 is one of the most powerful Bible verses in terms of assurance. Its message can bring hope to the despairing heart, for it reveals that no other agent is at work but God alone. He covers the beginning, continuation, and completion of our Christian experience.

First, God *began* the work. Only used twice in the New Testament, this verb means “to inaugurate,” implying a decisive and deliberate act. Here was something planned and executed to perfection. The Philippian woman Lydia, the first convert in the church, is a good example of this truth. Paul probably said to her what he said to the Philippian jailer: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.” No doubt Lydia could remember

the date of her conversion and often shared about how she had put her trust in Jesus. But when her story was told in Acts, it was not recorded in those terms. Rather, we read, “The Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.” God began the good work in her.

Every conversion is the work of God begun before the foundation of the world when he chose us in Christ. C.S. Lewis acknowledges this about his own conversion, for he was a brilliant British scholar and a committed agnostic when God chose him. In his autobiography *Surprised By Joy*, Lewis described his conversion in this way:

In the trinity Term of 1939 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal Son, at least, walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape.

C. S. Lewis discovered that salvation is of God. He ran, but God successfully pursued him.

I remember the night in a college dorm when I submitted my will to Jesus Christ. Even though I had read the New Testament and was convinced that Jesus was who he said he was, I had not committed my life to him. God had to bring two men who almost dragged me to another room and ask me, “What is preventing you from committing your life to Christ?” It was at that point that I had to give in and acknowledge that there was no reason for me not to submit to him.

Salvation would be unsure if it depended upon our choosing Christ. There is nothing in our nature that predisposes us to choose God. Not one can claim that he is seeking God. The human will blows hot and cold offering no security of tenure. But the will of God is the ground of our salvation.

Second, the one who inaugurates our Christian life is also the one who undertakes to continue it. Paul says, “He *will perfect* it.” One scholar translates this, “He will evermore put his finishing touches to it.” The verb used implies a process in which God never gives up. He will take responsibility for its progress. He is the one at work in our circumstances “putting the finishing touches” on our salvation. What an assurance! Everything has a purpose—bad news, difficulties, blessings, unexpected happiness or trouble. It all is being used to conform our character to the image of Jesus Christ.

Third, the outcome is guaranteed. God is working according to schedule, and the *day of Christ Jesus* is fixed in his diary. When that day comes, everything and everyone will be ready for it. There will be no last minute rush (as when we prepare for Christmas). Our salvation is as sure as the coming of that day, for as believers we are his saints, the objects of his good work, who must be made ready, conformed to his image.

This is the source of our confidence and assurance. Our salvation can no more be forfeited than the Father break his pledged word to glorify his Son. It is no wonder Paul uses the words of a man who has no doubts: “I am sure.” The perseverance of the saints rests upon the perseverance of God with the saints. Our salvation has a divine basis. It is secure.

Second, we must notice:

### **B. Our salvation has a human basis—it is visible**

When Paul made such important claims on behalf of the Philippians, he was moved by observable facts more than by

loving intuition. It was his recollection of their partnership in the gospel that moved him to express certainty about their eternal state. In other words, his assurance arose from observable facts which evidenced that these people were children of God.

There are three separate strands of evidence that Paul mentions, but they all intertwine around the truth, the common theme of the gospel.

The first thing Paul mentions is their *unanimous submission* to truth. He speaks of their “partnership in the gospel” in verse 5 and of their work in the “defense and confirmation of the gospel” in verse 7. This common oneness of doctrine is the basis of their fellowship and is evidence that they belong to Christ. In fact, the word partnership means “joint-ownership” or “participation in a common purpose.” Second, he speaks about their concern to *spread the truth*. Those who truly possess the gospel also propagate it. The truth is not to be hidden away but passed along. Third, Paul saw a *perseverance in the truth*. Their fellowship had continued “from the first day until now.” Their association with truth was not transient; it did not depend upon favorable circumstances. They stood for the truth even when it could involve imprisonment.

Their lives provided human evidence upon which their assurance was well based. Our salvation has a human basis. It is visible in our lives.

Paul moves on to pray, giving us insight into what maturity looks like. Let us read verses 8 through 11.

## **III. A POWERFUL PRAYER: INSIGHT INTO OUR**

### **MATURITY 1:8-11**

**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.**

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### **Love is the very essence of our new nature**

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Like all of Paul’s recorded prayers, this one is concerned with their spiritual progress. In particular, this is a prayer about growth and uses imagery from agriculture. You can see this imagery in verse 9 when he says “*abound* still more and more” and again in verse 11 “*fruit* of righteousness.” Thus, we are given an ordered picture of the developing Christian life. There is a growing point from which the young plant thrusts out its shoots. These then bear the blossoms and yield the fruit. Two observations flow from this prayer.

#### **A. The growing point of the Christian life is Love**

Love is the seed from which comes vigorous growth. Paul does not mention any object towards which their love is to be directed; he speaks rather of the virtue of love which is to pervade their character and which will then prompt and affect every attitude and action.

Paul understood this kind of love in his own life. Before he reveals he is praying about the place love should have in their experience, he opens his own loving heart to them. Notice some of the qualities of Paul’s love. First, his love for them was real. It

was not a facade, a good show for the benefit of others. In fact, he does not hesitate to call upon God as his witness, the One who knows the heart. Second, his love is intense. He says, "I long for you all."

But the third feature is the most powerful and revealing. Paul's love is like the love of Christ, for he says he loves them "with the affection of Christ Jesus." Certainly this goes beyond merely modelling his love after Christ's. The expression he uses demands more than that. Paul is saying that his heart and Christ's are beating as one. The greater heart, Christ's, has taken over the heart of the servant. The love of Christ had become the center of Paul's character.

When you hear this, you are probably thinking as the Philippians did that you could never love as though the heart of Jesus had taken over. This just seems too remote from the fickleness we customarily experience. But Paul does not speak to them as people who lack love and need to ask for it. Rather, he addresses them as people who possess love and need to make it grow: "...that your love may abound still more." Love is the very essence of the new nature given to every believer.

This was true at Philippi. No sooner had Lydia become a Christian than she begged Paul and his company to be her house-guests. No sooner had the jailer become a Christian than, having fastened Paul's feet in stocks earlier, he began to bathe his wounds. When the hostility of the people forced Paul to leave Philippi, the church sent him financial help more than once. Love was their new nature in Christ.

This is the New Testament claim for the Christian. When Paul says in 2 Corinthians that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation," he is saying that God has done for us everything that needs to be done. We have become partakers of the divine nature. Our earthly life is merely an outworking of what God has already worked inside. We are called to become what we are. In this context, we are called to live out the love that has been shed abroad in our hearts. Love is the growing point of the Christian life.

There is a second observation which naturally follows this.

### **B. The nourishment for this growth is truth**

In what ways does this seed of love need to grow? The growth of love is controlled and directed by knowledge and discernment.

The word "knowledge" occurs twenty times in the New Testament and always refers to knowledge of the things of God--religious, spiritual, theological knowledge. It often has the idea of seeing to the heart of a matter and grasping something completely. Therefore, love grows as our knowledge of Scripture grows. This should give us insight into what love is. It primarily is not an emotion but an act of our will, choosing to consider the highest good of another, to care for his very best. Our love will never grow until our knowledge of the Scriptures grows.

However, not only do we need to know the Scripture, we also need to apply that truth. "Discernment" conveys the idea of perceiving something well enough to be able to make accurate decisions and wise choices. If we merely gather all kinds of knowledge, as we would on a computer and never press the "enter" key, then we have accomplished nothing. I just lost information this morning when the electricity went off because I had not saved any of it. All that knowledge I typed in is lost. We need to make a choice to allow this truth to seep down past our

brains and into our hearts so we can learn how to make wise choices in every situation we face.

Both knowledge and discernment are basic to the task of living the Christian life. We need knowledge to know what to love, and we need discernment to know how to love. This love is learned from the Scriptures.

And the result is the harvest. There is fruit. This seed of love will grow into something greater than itself, a life that is different than we ever thought possible. In verse 10, Paul says that we will "approve the things that are excellent." The word translated "approve" means "to test out and experience," and the word "excellent" refers to things that really matter.

Do you want to invest your life in things that really matter? Do you want your life to count for something? This comes through understanding and submitting to the principles in Scripture. Get to know the word and how to apply it to your life. Then you will find yourself doing the things that are important.

Not only will our priorities change, but so will our character. We will be "sincere and blameless." The word "sincere" means "tested by the sun." There were unscrupulous pottery merchants in Paul's day who frequently disguised their broken wares through devious means. If a vase was cracked, they would fill the cracks with wax and paint over them so that the vase appeared to be perfect. However, the Good Housekeeping people of their day could test these pots by putting them out in the sun. When the heat of the sun melted the wax, the pot would be found to be insincere, impure. In fact, our word "sincere" comes from the Latin word *sincerus* which means "without wax." Paul says that we will be found to be sincere as we continue to grow in grace and knowledge. We will be tested and shown to be without wax.

We will also be "blameless," meaning "giving no offense." That is, we will not cause others to stumble. We will make decisions which are loving, gracious and helpful. In other words, we will not offend others unnecessarily and thereby cause problems.

Obviously Paul is not talking about a sudden transformation or a traumatic, final decision. He is describing a patient progression of growth reflected in our deciding to examine the issues of life in light of Scripture and steadily following the will of God. Our obedience and discipline are not insignificant, nor are they optional.

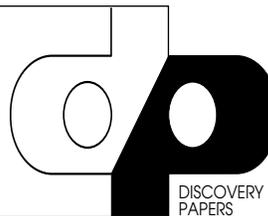
But we also need to notice, just as the farmer acknowledges, that something else energizes the growth. The Father is ceaselessly at work for the glory of the Son, doing everything to conform us to the image of Christ. Though our work remains difficult, it is not fruitless. Though we are often neglectful, frequently failing and often inadequate, remember that our end is secure. God is at work causing our love to grow as he feeds and nourishes us in the truth.

What a wonderful assurance is ours—a unique identity, an eternal security, and a visible maturity. I pray that this Christmas season this assurance will be yours. Christmas should be more than merely warm reflections on the frailty of a baby or the beauty of motherhood. I pray that you will know the Lord of life in all his majesty and experience the deep joy that comes from that relationship.

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# DISCOVERING PURPOSE IN THE LORD

SERIES: JESUS, OUR JOY



Catalog No. 673  
Philippians 1:12-26  
Second Message  
Gary Vanderet  
December 13, 1987

As Christmas draws closer, I am sure the pace around your home is speeding up. I also imagine that your Christmas is not as Currier and Ives had pictured and that you celebrate Christmas differently than the Ingalls in *Little House on the Prairie*. This is why I was recently attracted to a new book entitled *Little House on the Freeway*. Walnut Grove has changed since they added the Pizza Hut, 7-11, and video arcade. Simple lives with home-spun ways have given way to off-ramps, automatic teller machines, and Quarter-pounders with cheese.

In a "Peanuts" cartoon I read recently, Lucy offered one of her unsolicited observations to Charlie Brown: "Life is like a deck chair. Some place it so they can see where they are going. Some place it so they can see where they have been. And some place it so they can see where they are at present." Charlie Brown replied, "I can't even get mine unfolded!" Maybe this is how you feel. You cannot get your life unfolded. With all the worry and hurry around us, it is sometimes difficult to get an honest perspective on life.

Though Paul's world did not resemble ours, his lifestyle did not look like that of the Ingalls' family either. In Philippians 1:12-26, we will get a glimpse of Paul's deck chair which was positioned to have a clear view of where he had been, where he was presently, and where he was headed. I hope as a result of the truth we learn in Philippians that we will allow God to rearrange the furniture in our lives so that we will be able to better evaluate our past, cope with the present, and prepare for the future.

Paul knew that the Philippians were concerned about him in his imprisonment. Having greeted them and thanked God for them with prayerful concern in the first eleven verses, he now tells them about himself. These verses are a window not only into Paul's experiences but also into his mind. This passage contains more than mere extracts from the diary of a fascinating man. It gives an example of true Christian living, the correct perspective with which to order our lives.

These verses, filled with "I" and "me," are Paul's personal testimony. In the opening verse, Paul looks back on the past. In verses 13 to 18, he looks at his present circumstances. And finally he probes into the future in verses 19 to 26. In each of these three sections, Paul gives his perspective on life, the common thread woven throughout the passage. I have rephrased Paul's perspectives into three exhortations to help us understand God's purpose in our own lives. Let us begin with verse 12.

## I. VIEW YOUR PAST SUFFERING AS

### PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY 1:12

**Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,...**

Before Paul begins, he lets his readers know that what he is

about to say is important. Paul always used the expression "I want you to know, brethren..." as an introduction to something significant. In other words, this is not merely an update on his circumstances. He wants them to know something important about his past.

His review of the past can be summarized in one sentence: "The things that have happened to me have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel." Although Paul does not give us any details, they are recorded in the latter chapters of Acts. In Jerusalem a few years prior to the writing of this letter, Paul was falsely accused of bringing a Gentile into the Temple. As a result, he was dragged into the street and nearly lynched by a religious mob. He was then put in prison and narrowly escaped a flogging by pleading Roman citizenship. His case was a mockery of justice! Forty Jews even took a vow that they would not eat until Paul was dead. Eventually he was taken to Caesarea where he spent two years waiting in prison. Because of his appeal to Caesar, he was put on a ship and sent to Rome. On that journey, he was shipwrecked, bitten by a snake, and forced to spend the winter on the island of Malta. When he finally reached Rome, his entry was far from triumphant. He came in the company of the condemned, bound by chains and awaiting the uncertain decision of an earthly king.

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## Our past suffering can prepare us to serve others more effectively

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Still imprisoned, chained and uncertain, he cried, "Why is this happening to me? If I had just stayed home that day in Jerusalem, this would have never happened!" No, those were not his words. That is what we would have said. Paul was not depressed, nor did he feel frustrated in any way. He did not think that God had put him on a shelf. He does not show us his bruises and ask for sympathy. Instead, he says that his suffering and imprisonment were far from being a negative experience. He exclaims, "What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel!"

Paul viewed his past as preparation for ministry. One controlling factor was the truth he shared in verse 6: "He who began this good work in us will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." God rules. The pressures in our lives are created by the hands of the Potter who is also our Father. Paul knew that the fires of life he experienced were ignited by the Refiner. God does not abandon the perfecting process to others; nor is he ever knocked off course by the wickedness of evil men or the weakness of good men.

Have you learned this truth? Have your dreams lost their clarity? Maybe you know tears where there once was laughter, misunderstanding where there once was affirmation. Viewed from a human perspective, your circumstances seem to have prevented rather than prepared you for ministry. Remember

Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 1:3-6:

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation;...**

If we will allow God to work, all of our past suffering can prepare us to serve others more effectively. The very circumstances we would have changed and from which we longed to be freed are preparing us for who we want to be.

Three weeks ago, I spoke at the memorial service for a Silicon Valley executive and his 5-year-old son. Facing a disintegrating marriage, this man had committed suicide. Unable to leave his son behind, he killed him before he took his own life. The faith of the widow and mother of that child has been a tremendous encouragement to my own life. This week, she said to me, "Gary, there are so many people I have come across who have had similar experiences and know deep pain, but there aren't many groups ministering to their needs. Maybe the Lord wants me to do something." In the midst of tremendous anguish and days of numbness, she is already learning that her past suffering is preparation for ministry.

I want you to notice the word "really" which is included in verse 12 in the Revised Standard Version. Paul says that these circumstances "have really turned out for the progress" even though it does not look that way from a human perspective. Contrary to their surface appearance, the events of Paul's imprisonment had progressed the gospel.

All of our past sufferings are preparation for ministry. If Paul's memory had been focused on pleasant circumstances, there would have been no need to say that they "really" promoted the gospel. He purposely stresses the dark threads which the recent years had woven into the pattern of his life—the animosities, the physical pain, the lies, the injustices, the chains and the mental turmoil, the nearness of death and the continued suppression of the truth. Paul invites us to look directly at these sufferings, for they had resulted in the progress of the gospel.

After viewing the past, Paul then turns to the present to tell us how the gospel has progressed. Far from being negative, his imprisonment was a positive influence. There is a second exhortation in this passage. Look at verses 13 through 18.

## **II. ALLOW YOUR PRESENT RESTRICTIONS TO BE A PLATFORM FOR MINISTRY 1:13-18**

**...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 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.**

As we have mentioned earlier, Paul does not elaborate on his own discomfort. When discussing his imprisonment, his desire is not that we stare at his chained wrists, but that we look through the links of those chains to the effect those bonds had on others. Paul constantly saw his restrictions as a platform for ministry.

First, he says those bonds were a testimony to the world. Verse 13 says, "...so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well-known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else." The Praetorian guard was a hand-picked division of Roman troops, the cream of the crop of soldiers. Membership was valued because of the numerous benefits including higher wages and living in the Emperor's palace. These soldiers were the future "movers and shakers" of the Roman Empire. We can infer from this passage that one of their duties was to guard prisoners awaiting trial before Caesar.

One by one these men took turns being chained to the apostle for four-hour shifts. Can you imagine what this must have been like? What a captive audience! I am sure that after awhile one wondered which man was the prisoner. These soldiers watched as Paul penned this letter along with those to the Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon. They listened as Paul talked to friends. They sat in wonder as leading Jews came to inquire about Paul's faith.

Interesting things began to happen. There is a reference in chapter 4 which Paul inserted as a delightful encouragement to the Philippians. He wrote, "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." That was the praetorian guard! Those young men were simply trying to live their pagan lives, minding their own business, but one by one they were coming to know Christ.

Now, who would have thought of this plan? Who would have appointed Caesar as Chairman of the committee to evangelize the Roman Empire? We certainly would not have thought of that. Paul's imprisonment, his limiting circumstance, gave him access to this elite group of men whom he would have never met in any other way.

Do you view your present restrictions as opportunities for spreading the gospel? Your prison may be a boring job or an illness that limits you. Perhaps you feel trapped being the mother of young children. You may be chained to a group of obnoxious associates. Maybe you are chained to an unbelieving coach. You wonder why you practice with the team day in and day out and never get to play in the game. There are no circumstances which cannot provide an opportunity for the spread of the gospel. Far from being a hindrance, your present obstacle can be an opportunity for God to display himself in great power through you.

Not only was the gospel spreading among the praetorian guard, but many Christians took the obstacle of Paul's imprisonment as an opportunity to speak out. Initially, the Christians were probably discouraged by Paul's imprisonment and may have been hesitant to share Christ, realizing the risk

they faced. But when they heard what was happening because of his imprisonment, many were infused with new courage. If God could use Paul in his circumstances, then he certainly could use them also.

The proclamation of Christ determined Paul's present decisions. He had even learned to view personal attack from this perspective. As Paul viewed the scene from his prison cell, he knew that all was not rosy in the church. Paul knew people whose hearts were at war with their testimony.

The preachers in the Philippian church were in two camps differentiated by their attitude toward Paul. One group consisted of those who loved Paul and viewed his ministry as God-given. There were others who were jealous of him and sought to cause him distress.

We are not told what Paul knew about those who were jealous of him. They appear to be Christians because Paul approved of their message. He would never have rejoiced in an impure gospel. Perhaps they were people who saw Paul's imprisonment as an opportunity to gain advancement for themselves. Now that he was locked away from the church, they thought they could gain positions of power and authority with their preaching. Paul does not fill in the details for us. All we know is that they presented the truth in such a way as to express their animosity toward him. To his credit, he was as reticent to talk about their sins as he was about his own suffering.

Paul did not even react to this personal animosity with rejection or excommunication. Our tendency is to judge the motives of other people's ministries too hastily. Paul's attitude caused me to wonder if there is any such thing as a pure presentation of the gospel. At times, I do not even know my own motives. Only God can judge the motives. We are to rejoice that the truth is proclaimed and allow God to deal with wrong motives.

Differences will remain in the body of Christ—different tastes, different stages of maturity, different ideas regarding the will of God. In Paul's mind, all these are secondary to the grand truth of our redemption through the blood of Christ and our acceptance by God in Christ. This saving truth controlled Paul's mind as he made decisions. Paul saw that the principle that governed all of history and his past had to govern his present decisions. God turns all events and people to advance the gospel.

This theme ought to dominate our thoughts as well. The proclamation of Christ and the advancement of his kingdom must be preeminent in all our present decisions. View your restrictions as a platform for ministry.

There is one more exhortation. Look at verse 19 through 26.

### III. SUBMIT YOUR FUTURE CONCERNS TO THE ONE GOAL OF HONORING CHRIST 1:19-26

**For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.**

**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 labor 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. And convinced of this, I know that I shall 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.**

As you can see, the same controlling interest that governed Paul's evaluation of his past and his present circumstances holds true for the future as well. These verses are characterized by both certainty and uncertainty. Paul faced the same possibilities we all do—to live or die. His certainty involved his ambition and purpose; his uncertainty dealt with how everything would be worked out.

Paul's confidence concerning the future rested on the assurance of God working in his life. The word translated "deliverance" in verse 19 should be translated "salvation". He is not referring to being delivered from prison. Rather he was confident that God was using all of the circumstances in his life to produce a greater manifestation of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, it did not matter whether he was free or remained in prison, whether he lived or died.

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## There are no circumstances which cannot provide an opportunity to spread the gospel

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What principle guided his future? What mattered to Paul the most? The answer is found in verse 20: "...that Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." The future could bring anything, but Christ would always be honored. That word "honored" is better translated "magnified." Paul's purpose was not to carry a snapshot of Christ in his wallet to share occasionally with certain people. He wanted to show an enlarged, life-size Christ to all who cared to look—a Christ displayed in every area of his life. His desire was to be a telescopic lens, an instrument used to bring a hazy Jesus Christ into clear focus. As Paul's circumstances crushed and weakened him, taking away the areas of human strength upon which he would normally depend, he was able to take hold of the life of Christ. As a result, Christ's life could be seen in him.

Thus, Paul says the gospel was not only making progress in the world, it was making progress in him. The majesty of Jesus Christ was being manifested in his life. In fact Paul says, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Living is Christ—experiencing his life, drawing upon his strength, gaining his wisdom, and proclaiming his name.

Death simply meant having more of the same! In fact, Paul viewed death as a departure. The term translated "to die" was a camping metaphor taken from his tent-making vocation meaning "to take down a tent." What a beautiful picture! Death for the Christian is the end of camping and transitory living. It is the opportunity to go home, leaving behind all of our uncertainties and dangers. Although there is more to be

understood about life after death, one thing is certain: death is to be with Christ.

When he pondered the future, Paul was “hard pressed.” To die was glorious—possessing Christ. To live was also glorious—bearing fruit. This presented a tough choice, but the choice was not his to make. Somehow God had revealed to Paul that his ministry was still needed and that he would remain on this earth for a time. What a wonderful confidence Paul had! He knew that the Roman Empire could not touch him as long as God desired to use him. Augustine said, “Man is immortal, until his work is done.”

Do you know this assurance? Death cannot touch you until God is through with the work he is performing in and through you. There are no untimely deaths among Christians. Paul’s view of life was ministry. When that ministry was done and his work completed, he knew it would be time to go home.

In all three areas of Paul’s life—past, present and future, the Lord Jesus Christ was the controlling factor in his mind. Paul had a single purpose which brought unity to all of life. He had only one goal, and that was to honor Christ. Christ put meaning into every area of his life—making sense of the past, giving opportunity to the present, and bringing hope for the future.

The same is true for us. Jesus Christ is the key to all of history, and he is the key to our personal histories. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said:

We shall understand Christ only when we are prepared to decide about Him in harsh either/or. He did not go to the cross to decorate or beautify our life... We shall not understand Him if we make room for Him in one sphere of our life only; we shall understand Him rather, if we orient our life by Him alone... The religion of Christ is not a delicacy served after the bread, it is the bread itself or nothing at all.

We were reminded in the first eleven verses that God is working toward the day of Christ. Whether or not they appear to be doing so, all of our circumstances are preparing us for that day. The advancement of Christ’s gospel and its proclamation deserve preeminence in our mind.

Paul says, “Now as always Christ will be honored.” It is my prayer that the word “now” will be etched into your mind and heart. We must honor Christ *now*. Never again will we have

the opportunity to live for him in this moment, to please him in our present circumstances, to trust him with all the suffering we bear. Now is the time to live for Christ.

In *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity*, Charles R. Swindoll shares a letter which he received from a man who finally understood his purpose in life:

I have attended this church for about two months. I’ve reached a pivotal point in my 40 year life...I married at 18, had three sons by age 21 and spent years in drug and alcohol abuse. At age 25 I gave my life to the Lord but slipped back a couple of times.

A year ago I had a 23-foot sailboat, a beautiful car, a beautiful van, a beautiful home, etc. At that time I was with a new company and my boss said he would get health insurance but lied about that and other things.

Last February my wife had a brain aneurysm and almost died, but with prayer and surgery she lived. I lost everything but my family.

I drive an old car about to break down. I am broke financially and my new boss emotionally destroys me, but I need the job. I said it with my mouth that the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh, blessed is the Lord, but my heart was still bitter. In your message I could relate very much with King Nebuchadnezzar, and you ended with a story that hit my heart. I walked to my car with tears streaming down my cheeks and a pain in my throat. I came home and my wife and I cried and talked and prayed. At that time I gave it all to the Lord.

I know I will struggle in my life, but I see everything differently now. I am under-educated, but very talented. I will work as unto the Lord. I need a church home for me and my family and believe I have found where I belong.

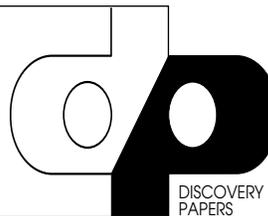
Here is a man who is learning to view his past suffering as preparation for what he is to do now. His present life is a platform for ministry with a future hope of honoring Christ.

Perhaps you need to let God rearrange the furniture in your heart. As you do, it is my prayer that the Lord Jesus Christ will have preeminence in your life—providing meaning for the past, wisdom for the present, and hope for the future...

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# EXPERIENCING UNITY IN THE LORD

SERIES: JESUS, OUR JOY



Catalog No. 674  
Philippians 1:27-2:11  
Third Message  
Gary Vanderet  
December 20, 1987

I enjoy reading to my children. One reason I love Christmas so much is that I have the opportunity to read one of our favorite books, *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, by Barbara Robinson. Every time we go through it, I laugh so hard I can hardly read. The book tells the story of a peculiar family which decides to participate in the town's annual Christmas pageant. Unpredictable yet wonderful things happen as a result. Listen to the description of the family:

The Herdmans were absolutely the worst kids in the history of the world. They lied and stole and smoked cigars (even the girls) and talked dirty and hit little kids and cussed their teachers and took the name of the Lord in vain...They were just so all around awful you could hardly believe they were real: Ralph, Imogene, Claude, Ollie, and Gladys—six skinny, stringy-haired kids all alike except for having different black and blue places where they clonked each other.

They lived over a garage at the bottom of Sproul Hill. Nobody used the garage anymore, but the Herdmans used to bang the door up and down just as fast as they could and try to squash one another—that was their idea of a game. Where other people had grass in their front yard, the Herdmans had rocks. Where other people had hydrangea bushes, the Herdmans had poison ivy.

There was also a sign in the yard that said "Beware Of The Cat." New kids always laughed about that till they got a look at the cat. It was the meanest looking animal I ever saw. It had one short leg and a broken tail and one missing eye, and the mailman wouldn't deliver anything to the Herdman's because of it...

The Herdmans moved from grade to grade through the Woodrow Wilson School like those South American fish that strip your bodies clean in three minutes flat...which is about what they did to one teacher after another.

But they never, never, got kept back in a grade. When it came time for Claude Herman to pass on to the second grade he didn't know his ABC's or his numbers or his colors or his shapes or his "Three Bears" or how to get along with anybody. But Mrs. Brandel passed him any way. For one thing, she knew she'd have Ollie Herdman the next year.

We figured they were headed straight for Hell, by way of the state penitentiary...until they got mixed up with the church, and my mother, and our Christmas pageant.

We all know some Herdmans. In fact, if we were honest, we would have to admit there is some Herdman blood in us as well. We were all headed for hell—until we got mixed up with the church, and ultimately the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why the Lord Jesus came—to transform us from the image of a Herdman to that of the Shepherd, Jesus Christ himself.

This is Paul's purpose as well in the book of Philippians.

He longed to proclaim this life-changing message. As we learned in Philippians 1:12-26, he saw the interests of the gospel as the key to his past, the furtherance of the gospel as preeminent in his present decisions, and the exalting of Christ as the focus of his future.

Remember Paul was writing from his Roman imprisonment. His assurance that he would be acquitted before Caesar fell short of absolute certainty. Therefore, he desired to prepare the church for the outcome, whether it be his death or his life. We can sum up his instructions in the exhortation found in verse 27: "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

With this statement, Paul used an appealing exhortation for the Philippians. He literally said, "Exercise your citizenship worthy of the gospel of Christ." That is, he was calling them to behave as citizens. The Philippians would have understood this imagery for Philippi was a Roman "colony," a title coveted in the Roman Empire. Colonial status meant that the people were recognized as Roman citizens and that their names were on the rolls at Rome. Thus, the Philippians had the same legal position and privileges as Roman citizens. They were a homeland in miniature.

Paul's exhortation reminded them that this was also true spiritually. Grace had made them citizens of a heavenly city. They were a heavenly homeland in miniature. Heaven's laws were their laws, and heaven's privileges their privileges. Thus, he was exhorting them to live out the name of Jesus Christ in the world—to make the truth incarnate. They were to live as citizens of the kingdom of God in a pagan world which desperately need to see the truth embodied.

The philosopher Nietzsche once said, "Show me your redeemed life, and I will be inclined to believe in your Redeemer." This is Paul's word to us as well. Our friends, neighbors and co-workers are seeking a demonstration not an explanation of the gospel. Paul wants us to live out that life.

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## Those who stand united become an invincible force through whom God does His greatest work

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In Philippians 1:27 through 2:11, Paul describes this worthy life. What does it look like? If a foreign citizen came upon these heavenly citizens, what qualities would he see? Out of all the things Paul could have picked, he focuses on one attribute and persuades us of its importance. The quality is unity. Paul develops his theme by revealing three important facts about our unity. It is my prayer that as a result of letting this word seep into our hearts and minds, we will have a greater understanding of the need to be one with each other.

The first fact is found in verses 27 through 30.

## I. OUR STRENGTH AND EFFECTIVE WITNESS IS BASED ON OUR UNITY 27-30

**Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may 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. 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.**

Paul uses language from warfare to express himself in this paragraph. In other words, he sees this worthy life being lived out in the midst of a hostile world. We are to be participants in a battle.

As we have already seen in this book, this worthy life is not to be lived in some holy huddle. God longs for this life to be lived out in the midst of a pagan world. We are to live insulated not isolated lives. The Christian life is meant to be exposed and vulnerable. Most of us know that only too well, for we carry around with us our battle scars. Paul’s desire is that the Philippians be steadfast under attack.

What I want you to notice in these verses is that our steadfastness is grounded in our unity. Though being steadfast under attack requires some individual strength, it is primarily a corporate matter. Notice the phrases Paul uses in describing this steadfastness: “...standing firm in one Spirit,...striving together for the faith of the gospel.” The Greek phrase “striving *together*” attaches a preposition to the verb in order to emphasize unity. This word carries the idea of marching in unison. Moffat translates it, “fighting side by side.” Being chained up to a Roman guard, Paul uses military metaphors freely. In fact, “striving together” possibly pictures the Greek or Roman military formation known as the Phalanx. In regard to this image, David Roper wrote:

It was this particular military formation (the Phalanx) which Alexander the Great used to bring Persia to its knees. The Roman army had adopted this formation in its own warfare. They took about 250 soldiers and formed them into a block with close files and deep ranks. The first five ranks extended their spears, which were fourteen feet long, and the others rested their spears on the shoulders of the men in front of them. The opposing array of weaponry moved in unison against the enemy, and it was overwhelming. It would take the heart out of anyone who saw the Phalanx coming.

Paul’s point is that we are to walk together as a unit in our proclamation of the gospel. We are to stand fast, for those who stand united become an invincible force through whom God does his greatest work. The secret is closed ranks and open relationships. Our unity is designed to bring strength in our lives.

Paul is faithful to remind us that this unity comes from the Spirit of God. We are to stand firm in one Spirit. “Spirit” in verse 27 should be capitalized. This is the same expression used in 4:1 where he tells us to “stand firm in the Lord.” We do not create this unity. It is already there, for we are Christ’s

possession. We do not have many spirits, we have one Spirit. We do not have many lords, we have one Lord. The seed of love for this unity was planted in our lives at the moment of salvation. Therefore, we now belong to the Spirit of God, and as that seed grows through our understanding and obedience to the truth we are drawn closer to one another.

But let me add that our unity is not uniformity. We are not called to think alike about all things, raise our children in the same manner, or read the same books. Unity is not loving the same things, but possessing the same love—the love that was planted in our hearts by the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we will see in a moment, the oneness of mind refers to the mindset of learning to humbly care for one another. The discovery of this truth came about in my own life when I developed a close friendship with some Christian brothers. Even today, I still live out my Christian life with them. There is no greater strength in all the world than the strength that comes from our unity in Christ.

Not only does our unity provide strength, but it is also the key to being an effective witness. Paul says a unified church is capable of taking a stand against even the most terrifying opposition. We are to be “in no way alarmed by our opponents,” says Paul. The word translated “alarmed” denotes “the uncontrollable stampede of startled horses.” In spite of strong opposition, there is incredible confidence. In fact, Paul uses a double negative for emphasis: “...in no way...not in anything.”

When people outside of the church observe Christians living in this manner—standing for Christ in the midst of pain and suffering, remaining united in the midst of loss—they are forced to come face to face with their own spiritual state. Why? The normal human response to oppression and conflict is the disintegration of relationships. They may remain united for a brief period, but soon bitterness and resentment seep in and destroy the unity. Eventually, the group will splinter as those emotions which were directed toward the opposition begin to turn inward. Only Christians can avoid this downward spiral.

This is why Jesus prayed the night before he was crucified, not only for his disciples, but also for those who were yet to believe (including us). In John 17:21-23, he prayed for our unity:

**...that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us; that the world may believe that you did send Me. And 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, that the world may know that You did send Me, and did love them, even as you did love Me.**

This is what Paul is saying to the Philippians. When a group of believers stands together and allows the Spirit of God to work out their unity, this shows the world that there is something supernatural working in their lives. When we are not united in the midst of suffering, non-Christians simply think, “That’s just what I thought! There is nothing to Christianity. They act just like me!”

Evangelism is not entrusted to individuals. It is a task given to the body of Christ. When the body operates in love and

unity, the world is forced to take notice. In fact, Paul says our unity is a clear sign to them of their ultimate destruction, for it is the visible demonstration of a living God in a fragmented world. When the world begins to see that which only God can produce—the uniting of people from different ethnic backgrounds, political viewpoints, and economic status, then it will believe in the existence of a living God. Apart from our united stand, the world will never know.

Maybe this is why your friends and neighbors struggle with the reality of Jesus Christ. How are your relationships? Is it possible that your closed, isolated Christian life is the reason you feel anemic in the battle? Maybe you need to open up and ask God to help you live out this unity in your family and in this body of believers. If the people around us do not see the oneness and love in our lives, they may never stay long enough to be introduced to the Savior.

How are we to express this kind of love? How can we live in this manner? Paul reveals the answer in verses 1 through 4 of chapter 2.

## II. OUR UNITY IS EXPERIENCED THROUGH OUR HUMILITY 2:1-4

**If therefore 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 let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.**

Paul tells us that unity is not just a necessary tool used as protection against a hostile world and as a demonstration causing the world to believe. It is the very essence of the Christian life. This is how we display outwardly what the gospel means to us. Our unity is the display of a living God at work in individual lives, bringing humility to arrogant hearts.

Unity and humility are like Siamese twins; they are perpetually connected. We have all seen occasions when our pride has won out, even though we did not call it that, and how quickly harmony has faded. Paul gives us two insights into how to experience this unity through humility. His first point is brought out in verses 1 and 2. We must humble ourselves before God.

The conjunction “if” would be better translated “since.” Paul is saying, “If these things are true (and they are!), then...” The beginning point of our behavior is the recognition of all we have been given. This requires a humility toward God. Our treatment of others is always a measure of our sense of having been blessed by God.

Paul recalls four things that are true of our Christian life as a result of our salvation, and they form the fountain from which we draw as we seek to live out this humility toward each other. First, in Christ we have experienced true encouragement. We have known the loving concern of one who reached out to us when we were needy, encouraging us into a new life. Second, in the Father’s love, we have found true consolation, the gentle

voice speaking to our sorrows and the strong hand healing our hurts. Third, through the Holy Spirit we experience true fellowship for the first time. Finally, Paul even reminds us that our salvation has made us new creatures with new hearts and sensitivity. We have the capacity for inner affection and outer compassion. These four blessings encourage us to be to each other what God in Christ has been to us.

Jesus made the same appeal to Simon, the arrogant Pharisee who could not understand why he would allow a prostitute to minister to him. In Luke 7, he said, “He who is forgiven little loves little.” To the degree that we understand our own need and all that has been done for us in our salvation, we will be able to humble ourselves before one another.

Not only are we to humble ourselves before God, Paul says in verses 3 and 4 that our humility is to also flow in another direction. We are to humble ourselves before one another.

We have revealed in these two verses a clear definition of the problem: it is our pride. An incorrect attitude exists in the realm of our ambition. Paul calls it “selfishness” or self-seeking. In the realm of personal assessment, the incorrect attitude is called “empty conceit.” The correct attitude for our ambition is “looking out for the interests of others.” For personal assessment, it is “humility.” Paul puts the issue of our unity within our personal responsibility. Notice the word “each.” Steadfastness depends on unity, and unity depends on me.

Paul isolates the virus which does more damage to the health of the body than any other: “looking out for your own interests.” This is the self-seeking spirit that insists on having its own way, its own rights. We catch this virus in our homes, at church and at work. When we deal with our pride and selfishness, the body of Christ will return to health.

The secret to living in harmony is not found in pursuing our own interests, but in looking out for the interests of others. Unity is only possible through humility, as we deal with our tendency to enthrone ourselves and to pursue our own selfish advantage. I am always amused by the story of one man’s attempt to live in harmony. After being married for over fifty years, he revealed the secret to his success: “Well, the wife and I had this agreement when we first got married. When she was bothered about somethin’, she jus’ tell me and git it off her chest. And if I was mad about somethin’, I was to take a long walk. I s’ppose you could attribute our happy marriage to the fact that I have largely led an outdoor life.” This man was committed to unity!

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## Jesus revealed to us that Self is something to be poured out

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Paul introduces a third fact in exhorting us to experience this unity in the life of humility. He now makes the highest appeal possible.

## III. HUMILITY IS UNDERSTOOD THROUGH THE LIFE OF CHRIST 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. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

This is profound section of Scripture. The message of the cross of Christ is found throughout the gospels, and its meaning is the predominant theme of all the epistles. But in these verses, we see the cross through the eyes of the one crucified. We are allowed into the mind of Christ and therefore are on holy ground.

I want you to remember as we seek to understand this passage that Paul is not composing a treatise on theology but rather illustrating what it means to be humble and unselfish. Alec Motyer writes: "We do well to remember that we are privileged to enter into the mind of Christ not for the satisfaction of our curiosity but for the reformation of our lives."

The revelation of the mind of Christ is presented here as the story of a great change. We begin with one who was in the form of God. That is, he possessed inwardly and displayed outwardly the very nature of God himself. Yet he changed so drastically that we find in verse 8 he became "obedient unto death." As Wesley says, "Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!" How it could happen we do not know; that it did happen we are assured.

This great change is noted in two stages expressed in two parallel phrases: "He emptied Himself...He humbled Himself..." In the first stage, the eternal God became incarnate: "He emptied Himself." This is what we are celebrating this week-Christmas. The greatest mystery of all is contained in the Creator of life being created—God as a fetus. He who sustained the world with a word became dependent upon the nourishment of a young girl. Holiness sleeping in a womb, God...with us.

Paul says, "He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." Jesus did not cling to his rights to act independently as God. Rather, he chose to become dependent on the Father, just as you and I are dependent upon him. His

were the eternal glories, both by nature and by right, but he never used them as a platform for self-display or self-advancement. Jesus revealed to us that self is something to pour out.

Secondly, the incarnate God became a curse: "He humbled Himself." He chose to take upon himself death, the one thing which had no power against him without his consent. Furthermore, his obedience to the Father was to such an extent that he died on a cross. He could have died in bed surrounded by his family and friends. Instead, he died on a tree in the midst of his enemies. He who was in the form of God came down to earth, down to the cross, down to the curse. As Paul writes, "Christ redeemed us from the curse...having become a curse for us." E. H. Swinstead says:

Though he was rich, so rich,  
Yet for our sakes, how poor he became!  
Even his garments they parted  
When he hung on the cross of shame.  
All that he had he gave for me,  
That I might be rich through eternity.

My friends, this is the mind of Christ. He denied himself so that he might give himself for us. To put on the mind of Christ, to have this attitude, is to abandon what is most desirable to us in the interests of a more cherished purpose. Humility is to give up our rights, for the Lord Jesus gave up the ultimate right. In his humility, he gave up his right as God for me and you. This is the message of Christmas.

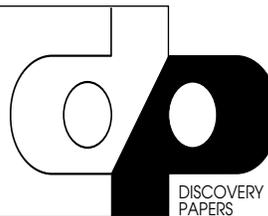
I hope these thoughts will linger in your minds during this season. Humble yourself before God and let him exalt you. Verses 9 through 11 assure us that God will honor us as he did his own Son in making his name great. The world desperately needs to see Christians loving one another, to see unity in the midst of a fragmented world. This unity will only come as we humble ourselves before God and before one another.

I pray that your neighbors will see a more loving, united family as you begin to give up your rights to which you are clinging and allow God to meet your needs in his own way and in his own time.

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# PURSUING MATURITY IN THE LORD

SERIES: JESUS, OUR JOY



Catalog No. 675  
Philippians 3:1-11  
Fourth Message  
Gary Vanderet  
December 27, 1987

Have you ever ignored a warning? What about those little red lights on the dashboard of your car? Perhaps you have said to yourself, "I don't need to pay attention to the light. I'll keep going until tomorrow." But tomorrow never seems to become today. We always have so many other things to do. Warnings, red lights that signal impending danger, exist in all areas of life. Regardless of how they work, warnings come with the same purpose—to alert us to danger.

Unfortunately, we do not always heed them. All of us have learned to close our eyes or cover our ears in order to tune them out. They can be as blunt as sledgehammers, and we still turn our heads and whistle them away. We believe that we are the proverbial "exception to the rule." It is as if there is a miniature receptionist in our brain instructed to intercept all warnings and deflect them. Warnings flash about us unheeded as we doze in our canoes, floating down the Niagara River to the Falls.

Philippians 3:1-11 is a warning. It is a red light! Failure to heed this warning has far more serious implications than car troubles. The issues at stake are personal and eternal. Therefore, give your mental receptionist an extended coffee break and respond to the warning you are about to hear. Some of you might be dangerously close to the rough waters.

Because I want to finish our study of this book in this series of messages, we are going to bypass the second half of chapter 2. In those verses, Paul reinforced his exhortation on the importance of unity by looking at three people who modelled this truth. Remember we looked at the illustration of Christ who gave up his rights as God in the first half of the chapter. The three lives he looked at were his own, Timothy's, and Epaphroditus'. I encourage you to study and apply those verses on your own.

Chapter 3 begins with a command which is a safeguard for the warning. Then in verses 2 and 3, Paul gives the warning. He tells us how he personally came to the knowledge of that truth in verses 4 through 8. Finally, having heeded the warning himself, Paul gives us his desire for the future which can be formulated into a goal for our own lives.

Let us begin in verse 1 with the command.

## I. A COMMAND WORTH REPEATING

**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.**

The key phrase is "*in the Lord.*" We are to rejoice in the Lord. Paul's point is that we should let the Lord make us happy. We are not to look to any other source for joy.

This has been Paul's message throughout the letter. Remember in chapter 1 Paul wrote that we are to rejoice in the preaching of the gospel. The heart of Philippians is Jesus Christ as our life. Thus, this command is the key to this passage, bridging what Paul has said before to what he is

about to teach. As we saw in chapter 2, Jesus has been glorified as our God, Savior, example, and Lord. Now he is revealed as our pride, choicest possession, pattern, possessor, and coming Savior. Should we not then rejoice in the Lord?

But this command is also a safeguard. There is danger ahead, temptations from within and without that will try to rob of us of this joy by convincing us to look elsewhere for it. Paul says if we can remember this one truth then the red light will not have to flash. Let the Lord be your source of joy. This is the truth this warning is designed to show us.

The warning itself is found in verses 2 and 3.

## II. A WARNING WORTH HEEDING

**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,...**

Paul warns the Philippians, "Be careful to discern true Christianity." In doing so, he uses harsh terms. This might seem out of character for Paul, for we have already seen how he was reticent to discuss the sins of others. Instead, he was tender and compassionate when dealing with their weakness or failure. But Paul would not tolerate a distorted gospel, teaching that was perverted and thus robbed of power.

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## To the Christian, Jesus is our obsession

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He is referring to a group of men called Judaizers who were preaching a false gospel to the church. These men followed Paul from city to city, harassing him and debating his teaching. In fact, he is in prison because they accused him of violating the temple. Their message is summarized in Acts 15:1, "Unless you are circumcised according to the law of Moses, you cannot be saved." Although they preached Christ, they added something else. Their view of salvation not only required belief in Christ, it also required personal works of righteousness. Their gospel was Christ plus the law or Christ plus circumcision. Paul could not tolerate this, for man cannot rejoice in the Lord and the law at the same time. The two are incompatible.

In reference to these men, Paul uses three titles. First, he calls them "dogs." The dogs in Palestine were not your Benji or Lassie types; they were not warm and cuddly. They were wild scavengers to be feared and hated. To call someone a dog was as low as one could go. In fact, the Jews called the Gentiles dogs because they were outcasts. But Paul uses this term with regard to the Judaizers.

The reason Paul refers to them in this manner is revealed in

his second title “evil-workers,” or more accurately “evil advocates of works.” These men put a “+” sign after Christ in their teaching about salvation. They proposed a system of works instead of grace through faith.

Lastly, he calls them the “false circumcision.” In fact, Paul does not even use the term “circumcision” which is a title they would have enjoyed. With a graphic word play, he gets his point across. The word for circumcision is *peritome* which means “to cut around.” But Paul calls them *keritome* which means “to chop into little pieces.” Do you get his point? He sees these men as mutilators destroying believers. Paul desires to lead believers into joy in the Lord and nothing else. Anything which detracts from the glory due Christ and the sufficiency of his saving work is the object of Paul’s holy anger.

With deliberate emphasis, Paul affirms, “We are the true circumcision.” Paul could not have chosen a more suitable or instructive word. He means that we are the covenant people of God. Circumcision was introduced into Abraham’s family and passed on to Israel as a sign of the special relationship which God had established with them. The covenant theme is one the unifying themes of the Bible because the covenant is God’s promise to bring salvation to the earth. He started with one individual, Abram, and promised to make him into a great nation and to give him a seed and a land. Thus, through Abraham and his seed, God was going to bless the earth. He reiterated this covenant to Moses: “I will be your God, and you will be my people.” It was the act of circumcision which symbolized that one had entered into this covenant relationship with God.

Paul applies all of this to us and declares emphatically that we are the chosen recipients of the promises of God. We are the true circumcision. This phrase is even stronger in the Greek for “true” is not there. Paul says, “We are not the true as opposed to the false circumcision. We are the only circumcision.” In other words, we are the only Israel, the sons of Abraham, the children of the covenant. We are God’s treasured possession. We are the kingdom of priests and the holy nation.

How can such a glorious claim be true? How can we be sure that we are partakers of these promises. To encourage our confidence, Paul adds three characteristics as defining marks of membership. As we mention each one, think of them in terms of your own life, for they are warning lights. They can help you discern whether or not you have true Christianity in your life.

### A. An Internal Spiritual Reality

Paul says the first identifying characteristic is “worshipping in the Spirit of God.” The dominant characteristic of our worship is that it is internal not external, spiritual not physical. We have experienced a relationship with God through the Holy Spirit which is not tied to any special place or time. Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah spoke of this new covenant when they prophesied, “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you...I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes...I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.”

Our worship involves a new birth—a new life regenerated by the Holy Spirit. This is why Paul refers to holiness in the

Christian life as the “fruit of the Spirit.” These are the qualities the Holy Spirit produces within us from the inside. The Christian life resembles a fruit tree, not a Christmas tree, with fruit growing on it rather than decorations attached to it.

Paul faced the same struggle with these Judaizers that Jesus had with the Pharisees whose religion was also external. Worship in the Spirit of God demands a heart that is right with God. It involves the daily offering of our bodies as a living sacrifice. Then all of life becomes worship. True Christianity is prompted and controlled by God’s Spirit. This is internal spiritual reality.

Now let us look at the second mark of true Christianity.

### B. A Correct Attitude Toward Jesus Christ

Paul says, “...who glory in Christ Jesus.” There is no exact English translation for the word “glory.” It has various meanings such as “boast in, glory in, trust in, rejoice in, revel in, or live for.” The object of our boasting and glorying is that which fills our horizons, engrosses our attention, and absorbs our time and energy. In a word, our glory is our obsession. To Christians, Jesus is our obsession. We rejoice in him alone. We enthusiastically appreciate who he is and what he has done, and we acknowledge him as the only one worthy of praise. His work is sufficient.

There are many among us who would add to his sufficiency. They say nice things about him, but they do not consider him to be sufficient. Therefore, they add other requirements for salvation, saying, “You need to join our sect” or “You need to have an additional experience with the Holy Spirit.” The second mark of true Christianity is a correct attitude toward Jesus Christ.

The third mark is an obvious conclusion to the first two.

### C. A Refusal To Rely On Yourself

Paul says, “...who put no confidence in the flesh.” Our salvation began with God who reached down from heaven to call a people to Himself. He animated us by giving us life through His Spirit, and he has displayed before us the beauty and worth of his Son. Before this life-giving Spirit and exalted Son, we become aware of our own unworthiness. “Flesh” describes what a person is apart from the grace of Christ—unregenerated humanity.

These are the elements of true Christianity: an internal spiritual reality, a correct attitude toward Christ, and a refusal to rely on ourselves. Paul now demonstrates how he discovered this truth in his own life, how he learned not to put any confidence in his flesh. Look at his example in verses 4 through 8.

## III. AN EXAMPLE WORTH PONDERING

**...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. 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 in order that I may gain Christ,...**

In telling us how he discovered his own worthlessness, Paul gives us a picture of the flesh. He first lists seven achievements which he previously relied upon for his worth. They can be divided into two categories: those he inherited and those he earned, his natural and personal advantages.

Of his natural advantages, Paul starts his list with the covenant privileges he had from infancy; he was “circumcised on the eighth day.” He was not a Gentile who had become a Jew but was introduced into his inheritance on the eighth day of his life. In addition to this, he claimed the national advantage of pure Israelite descent, for he was “of the nation of Israel.” He was from the twelve tribes descended from Israel, the transformed Jacob. There were others who could trace their lineage back to Abraham but only through the impure line of Ishmael. Paul says, “My tribe originated with one of the true sons of Israel.” Not only that, he was “from the tribe of Benjamin” out of which came the first king of Israel. This was the only tribe to remain loyal to David and his successors. Finally, among his natural advantages, he was a “Hebrew of Hebrews.” He was the child of zealous religious parents with all the benefits and lasting heritage that entailed. What a background!

And to this special list of natural advantages, Paul adds his own personal advantages including attitude, activity, and achievement. Towards the law of God, he adopted the most respectful and responsive attitude possible. He was a Pharisee, the strictest of all groups. His overriding concern was to live in the strictest conformity to what he believed were God’s regulations. He was so sure that his belief was the will of God he zealously defended his faith against “heretics.” Since he considered Christians to be a false sect, he persecuted them with a clear conscience. As a result of his achievements, he saw himself as “blameless” in regard to the righteousness under the law.

Thus, Paul describes the flesh not as man at his worst but as man at his best. Flesh can be the man who has reached the pinnacle of moral and religious development. In other words, flesh describes our state before God brings us to the new birth. Do you see the point of all this? If anybody could have confidence in human accomplishments, the apostle Paul did. In fact, he had spent most of his life depending on these things to give him worth.

In what do you glory? What gives you confidence? Is it your background, looks or salary? Is your confidence based upon the school you attended or the degrees or titles you have received? Is it in your address? Do you glory in your activities or service to the community? Is it in your morality, the fact that you do certain things and not others?

Maybe you are more spiritual than that. Perhaps you find your assurance in the fact that you went to a Bible college or travelled to the Holy Land. Maybe you glory in the fact that you only use a certain translation of the Bible or have been on a short-term mission. It is great to be a Christian, but it is even better to be something more. My friends, do you know what all of this is? It is flesh!

Having defined flesh for us, Paul now estimates its worth.

His moral achievements were a feat of human achievement and a significant contribution to humanity. But in giving confidence before God, they failed miserably. Man at his best is woefully unfit. Paul had no recourse but to add up all his advantages and admit that the total was zero. He concluded, “Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.” Notice that he puts his gain in plural—“whatever things.” Paul carefully lists each advantage forgetting nothing. But as the accountant’s eye travels down the list, the total is singular—“loss.”

I am sure Paul can remember the hour his personal system for spiritual accounting broke down. It happened on the road to Damascus when the Lord Jesus appeared to him. This is why he uses the past tense, “have counted.” When he saw that all he had been counting on was worthless, he rejected it and began a new system of accounting. In place of his loss stood Jesus Christ. The man whom he had despised and rejected was his credit to cover all his needs. This was a private transaction. No one else was there.

The same holds true for us. Those distinguishing marks of true Christianity can only become ours when we possess Christ as our own. No one can do this for us. These marks only become evident when we consider everything else as loss. We cannot have both. Christ only comes into our lives when what we already have is reckoned as loss. If we learn anything from Paul’s example, we learn that Christ is not the prize at the top of the ladder of self-advancement. He does not become ours by our effort but by our rejection of effort.

This is not just a once-in-a-lifetime decision. Paul says, “More than that, I am presently counting all things as loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Paul knew how easy it is to subtly revert back to confidence in the flesh. When the pressure increases and the suffering hits, there is always the desire to go back to what used to give us meaning and strength. When we feel insecure, lonely or rejected, it is easy to revert back to the things that once brought us confidence.

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## **Christ does not become ours by effort, but by rejection of effort**

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But Paul has a different perspective. As we look to the Lord for our joy, confidence and assurance, we will find new peace and strength with which to face our circumstances. Not only does Paul describe accomplishments in the flesh as loss, but he calls them “rubbish” which is a mild translation. The term means “dung” (or any other term you might care to insert that would be more meaningful).

Having revealed to us how he came to this conclusion about his own life, Paul now reveals his goals for the future. Look at verses 9 through 11.

### **IV. A GOAL WORTH PURSUING**

**...and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 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.**

Let me restate Paul's goal to gain Christ in an exhortation: *Let Christ satisfy you.* If you could pick only one goal for 1988, make this it. Two verbs summarize Paul's thinking in these verses. The first is in verse 9: "...that I may be *found* in him." The second is in verse 10: "...that I may *know* him." In these verses, we are given three practical means by which we can allow Christ to satisfy us. As you think about the areas in which you long to be different, think of these three exhortations.

**A. Be Satisfied To Be Found In Christ**

Paul changes the metaphor in verse 8. Having portrayed Christ as an all-sufficient wealth, he now sees him as a dwelling place which is so attractive and secure that he cannot bear to be away from it. This word "found" is used in chapter 2 to say that Christ Jesus was "found" in human form. He presented a human appearance to all who saw him and would have been judged to be a man.

Paul wants people to see him as a man "in Christ." Jesus is his permanent address whether he is in Rome or Philippi, healthy or ill. Jesus is the only address worth boasting about. There is no greater security in all the world. Nothing is a threat when we are "in him."

There is a second way in which we can let Jesus satisfy us.

**B. Be Satisfied To Be Blessed By Christ**

In this permanent address "in Christ," there is one particular treasure that is deeply satisfying: righteousness. Righteousness means "being right with God." Paul had spent years trying to establish a do-it-yourself righteousness based on his own self-sacrifice and conformity to an external code of behavior. He had awarded himself high marks, but his efforts could not give him confidence before the judgment of God. However, there is the possibility of a certificate of righteousness in which we can be confident. This is a righteousness which proceeds from God. Since it does not come from ourselves, it is certain from the start. And the glorious truth is that the only condition for our receiving it is faith. Gone is the endless striving to keep laws, the passion for legalism. This goal is not reached by the stairs but by the elevator! Let Christ bless you with his righteousness.

**C. Be Satisfied To Be Like Christ**

Paul says, "...that I may know Him." When the Bible talks about knowledge, it refers to more than acquiring facts about Jesus. Biblically, nothing is known until it is applied. Second, knowledge implies personal intimacy. This is the word used in Genesis to say Adam "knew" Eve. Paul wants to know Christ intimately.

As we learned in chapter 2, this ultimately involves a cross because Christlikeness always leads to Calvary. The servant is not greater than his master. But where there is a cross, there is also a resurrection. Applying these truths involves suffering and pain as we give up confidence in ourselves. But Paul promises that all of the suffering can be faced in the resurrection power of the Lord himself.

I trust that this warning is applicable to your life. As I was applying this to my life, I meditated on my own spiritual journey and realized how blessed I am! I have been unable to put any confidence in the flesh in my life. I had none of Paul's spiritual heritage, for I grew up in a non-Christian home with an alcoholic mother and no father. And I was an average student most of my life. When I think of where I am now intellectually and spiritually and of all that God has done for me, I feel like a spectator. Dr. Donald Campell used to describe his life as "a turtle on a fencepost." He explained that when he was a child he would occasionally see a turtle on a fencepost. He knew that someone had to have put it there, for it could not get there on its own. That is the way I feel. All that I am was given to me by Christ. I did not earn any of it. I am incredibly privileged.

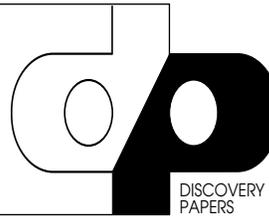
The sign of the old covenant was circumcision. A symbol that we have partaken of the new covenant is the Lord's supper, communion. The old covenant was written on tablets of stone with man saying, "I can keep the law." But the wonderful promise which we have in the new covenant is that it is written within us. The spiritual covenant is no longer based upon our promises. This is the problem with the old covenant—living in the flesh which is unable to keep the promise. Our New Year's resolutions will never succeed. I trust that you have lived long enough in your Christian life to know that holiness can never be achieved on that basis. Holiness requires God's strength and enabling.

It is my prayer as you enter 1988 that you would heed the warning to discern the reality of your own Christian experience. In the midst of the many voices that are encouraging your confidence in the flesh, pay attention to the red light. There is only One who is worthy of our confidence. Let your joy be found in him.

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# ASCERTAINING HOPE IN THE LORD

SERIES: JESUS, OUR JOY



Catalog No. 676  
Philippians 3:12-21  
Fifth Message  
Gary Vanderet  
January 3, 1988

For a long time I have been convinced of the importance of healthy role models. Having spent over ten years working with teenagers, I am painfully aware of the impact these models can have in their lives. Our youth need significant adults to come alongside of them and portray in flesh and blood what life will be like when they grow up. As a father, I know there are two little boys always watching and learning from me.

My son Stephen reminded me of the importance of flesh and blood examples when I was putting him to bed one evening. After two stories, a prayer and two glasses of water, he finally admitted that he could not sleep because he was afraid. I assured him that Jesus was with him and would take care of him, but I was not prepared for his quick reply. He responded, "That won't help tonight, Dad. I need someone I can see and touch." I have pondered that statement often since then.

Because God knows we are all like my son, he has always used incarnation to communicate truth. It is one thing for a five-year-old to hear that God is a Father who loves and takes care of him and another to have a Daddy take him into his arms and hold him. Truth is easier to grasp when it is clothed in flesh and blood. I am convinced that all of Christian life is like this. Truth is more easily caught than taught.

In the book of Philippians, Paul has given us many models. He reminded us of Epaphroditus, Timothy and the Lord Jesus himself. In Philippians 3:12-21, Paul now presents himself as a model and tells us to follow his example. In fact, he will later write, "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things." God is always in the process of turning theology into biography.

In the last message, we were reminded of Paul's dramatic encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. There he discovered that everything he had been living for and everything that he had been counting on to make him righteous was loss. It was "dung" in God's sight. As a result, he turned his back on all of that and decided to allow Jesus Christ to satisfy all of his needs. This was the testimony of his salvation experience.

In the last half of chapter 3, Paul gives us the testimony of his Christian growth. He shares with us his determination for the remainder of his life and twice calls us to follow his example. Surrounding these commands are two predominant ideas about the Christian life. First, he reminds us that we have a goal to obtain, that the Christian life requires personal commitment, effort and determination. And secondly, he tells us that we have a Savior to be awaited, and so our Christian life rests on great certainties. The Christian life is therefore a life of consecration and conviction.

As you contemplate 1988 and future growth in your own life, it is my prayer that you will follow Paul's example. In this passage, he holds up a model of what growth ought to look like in the Christian life. First, let us look at his call to

consecration in verses 12 to 16.

## I. A CALL TO CONSECRATION: WE HAVE A GOAL TO OBTAIN

**Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 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. 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; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.**

These verses fall into two sections: Paul's example in verses 12 to 14 and his exhortation in verses 15 and 16. Paul is confident that the life he has been able to live is not only exemplary but normative for all Christians. In each section, we will learn a principle concerning the process of our growth. The first principle is drawn from Paul's example.

### A. Christian Growth is a Demanding Process

One of the wonderful truths we have learned in this book is that our salvation is secure because it comes by faith and not our own effort.

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## Progress in the Christian life involves cultivating a concentration upon the goal

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However, this certainty is never an excuse for passivity in the Christian life. These verses display an impressive activity. When Paul discusses his own growth, he talks of shouldering a responsibility as if he were performing a job that needs to be done. In fact, in looking at Paul's example, I notice four elements of growth.

### 1. Growth Involves A Correct Self-estimate

Paul says this in two ways: "I do not consider that I have made it my own" and "not that I have already obtained it." Once upon a time, Paul thought he had arrived, for he judged himself to be "blameless as to the righteousness under the law." However, his encounter with Jesus Christ gave him a new perception beginning with himself. Now he can see himself with new eyes and knows that sinless perfection is not the experience of anyone, even an apostle, this side of glory.

"I do not consider that I have made it my own" is an admirable thing to say, especially in Paul's position of leadership. It is easy for a Christian leader to become so

wrapped up in the demands and concerns of others that he forgets about his own growth, to be so concerned with exhorting others to prayer and the reading of Scripture that he allows his own discipline to become perfunctory or even negligible. But Paul does not see himself in this light. In terms of his own Christian life, he sees himself as a brother among brethren. Paul does not say, "I would love to take time to pursue my own growth, but there are needs that must be met first." No, his humility, the correct view of himself, allowed him to see his own need to grow. Christ had brought Paul a different self-estimate than that which his Pharisaic upbringing had offered. This humility was Paul's springboard to progress.

There is a second element involved in growth.

## 2. Growth Involves A Single-minded Zeal

Verse 13 literally says, "One thing! Forgetting what lies behind..." What a motto for 1988! What did Paul forget? I do not think Paul forgot God's past mercies or the valuable lessons which God had already taught him. In fact, he has already discussed both of these in this book.

Paul longs for us to avoid the kind of dwelling on the past that hinders our present efforts and future progress. Have you ever experienced this kind of paralysis? Maybe you are harboring bitterness over a past wrong (either real or imaginary). Perhaps you are paralyzed by a past sin and doubt you will ever be forgiven. Maybe past decisions which have resulted in your present circumstances leave you wondering, "If only..." or "I should have..."

It was a great day in my life when my son Joel said to me, "Dad, why do you always say 'I should have'?" We now have a new game in our house. "Should have" is not allowed in our vocabulary. Every time I say it, I have to pay some money. We cannot allow our past to paralyze us.

In contrast, progress in our Christian life involves cultivating a concentrated forward look upon the goal. This zeal includes not only concentration but determination. Look at the phrases he uses: "I press on...reaching forward...I press on." "Reaching forward" is an athletic metaphor picturing a runner who is totally extended, stretching with every part of his body to reach the tape and win the race. "Press on" is the same word Paul used earlier to refer to his persecution of the church. In other words, it means, "I press on, I pursue, I persecute." Paul is pursuing the goal with dogged determination.

The athletic metaphor reminded me of something Bart Starr, a former quarterback of the Green Bay Packers, said concerning his coach, Vincent Lombardi:

I wasn't mentally tough before I met Coach Lombardi. I hadn't reached the point where I refused to accept second best. I was too nice at times...To win, you have to have a certain amount of mental toughness. Coach Lombardi gave me that. He taught me that you must have a flaming desire to win. It's got to dominate all your waking hours. It can't ever wane. It's got to glow in you all the time.

That last phrase stuck with me. That is Paul and his single-minded zeal, glowing all the time! This is far different from the "letting go and letting God" mentality. Growth involves impressive activity.

There is a third element of Christian growth.

## 3. Growth Involves An Absorbing Desire

What holds Paul's attention as he turns from the past and looks to the future? It is "the goal...the prize." If it is "to lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of by Christ," what did Christ have in mind when he took hold of Paul? Surely Paul is speaking of being conformed to the image of Jesus himself.

But Paul purposely does not describe this goal in detail. His words are more impressive for this lack because one scriptural picture after another fills our mind as we think about the prize. We think of the Lord's welcome when we will see him, "Well done, good and faithful servant." There is also "the crown of righteousness" which the righteous Judge will award on that day. And we look forward to "the unfading crown of glory." Revelation speaks of the blood-cleansed robes and the unending presence of the Lord himself. In addition, we are reminded of the "things which eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." All of this is what Paul has in mind.

Growth is an absorbing desire to obtain the goal and receive the prize.

There is a fourth characteristic:

## 4. Growth Involves A Sure Foundation

This last element puts all of our activity into perspective. We are not motivated into action by panic, trying to attain something of which we are basically unsure. Paul describes the prize of this disciplined activity as belonging to "the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." The idea of "calling" in Paul's epistles does not imply God's invitation to be saved but God's determination to save. God's calls are irrevocable. This prize is part of and guaranteed by God's saving purposes at work in all of his called children. Our final salvation, with all its glories and rewards, was secured for us by God calling us in Christ.

Christian growth is a demanding process. Do not let anyone kid you! It is not going to come down a conveyor belt for you to pick up. It involves all the small decisions you will make this year. Although growth is guaranteed, it still involves effort.

There is a second principle concerning our growth as Christians. It is found in Paul's exhortation in verses 15 and 16.

## B. Christian Growth is a Personal Process

In these verses, we discover what bearing Paul's experience is to have on our own lives. He reminds us that his apostolic example is the pattern for all Christians. Paul is confident in his apostolic authority and believes that all mature believers will approve and model the principles upon which he has based his life.

However, even though he possessed this authority, the spirit in which he writes is far from authoritarian. He exercises authority, not dictatorship. He is an apostle, not a pope! Notice he calls the Philippians "brethren." The "I" in verse 14 becomes "us" in verse 15. When he faces the fact that not everyone will concur with his teaching, his word is not one of intolerance but of assurance. He does not respond, "I am the judge in such matters!" Instead, he says, "God will reveal it to

them.”

In so doing, Paul demonstrates a vital element of growth. He calls each Christian to his own personal responsibility before the Lord. This is important! The basis for our personal decisions is not arbitrary; it is the “standard to which we have already obtained.” In other words, the objective truth revealed by Christ in the Scriptures is our standard. Paul is not envisioning each person stubbornly maintaining his own personal whims, regardless of the truth. Instead, he sees a situation in which each believer must work out his own understanding of the Christian life based upon the Scriptures.

Paul understands that real education and growth involves risk, for they have to make room for trial and error. A child guarded by over-protective parents from every hazard in life and every negative result of his own behavior will never emerge from childhood. The same is true spiritually. God “has taken a risk” in giving us his word. Spiritual environments which attempt to provide heavy control complete with all the answers, to shoulder all the responsibilities and to cushion from every adversity sound safer. But such safety has a high price tag—often stagnation in spiritual infancy. We need the “trial and error” of living by Scripture in order to discover what the Bible teaches. Once we have put it to the test, then we can discover where we were mistaken and try again.

Paul assures us that the risk is not that great. There is a God who is over all whose irresistible purpose is to make us like his Son. As we obey the truth he has already given us, he will take charge of the process. When we are in error, he “will reveal it to us.” Christian growth is a personal process.

Having exhorted us to follow his example, Paul now tells us why. Look at verses 17 to 21.

## II. A CALL TO CONVICTION: WE HAVE A SAVIOR TO AWAIT

**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 have 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. For our citizenship is in heaven, from whom also we eagerly wait for a Savior, 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 to subject all things to Himself.**

Paul has already outlined his manner of life and called us to imitation. When Paul commands us to follow his example, he gives an explanation. Notice the word “for” in verse 18. When we follow his example, we will live a life in accordance with two important events, the cross and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul calls us to remember these two events because as we follow his example our lives will agree with them. Paul starts with the cross.

### A. Remember the Cross—Our Life is Not Our Own

The cross was always central in Paul’s teaching, for it revealed to him that no one but Christ could bring him to God. Through the cross, he discovered new life. And through the

cross, he learned that life comes through death rather than self-effort, religious background, powerful personality or intellect. Resurrection power is discovered through death—putting aside the flesh and all of its strengths and abilities and drawing upon the life of Christ within.

In order to sharpen our awareness of what he is asking of us, Paul gives us a negative example. Thus, he calls attention to the life he requires by contrasting it with the life he rejects. In other words, we shall see what to follow if we know what to avoid.

The lifestyle we are to avoid is lived by those whom Paul describes as “enemies of the cross of Christ.” Even in the Christian community, there are people whose lives violate the principle that life comes from death, that strength is discovered in weakness, that true adequacy is found in inadequacy. As long as they live in that violation, they make themselves enemies of the cross of Christ.

Paul says their end is destruction. This means more than eternal loss. “Destruction” could be translated “waste” or “lostness.” It speaks of a wasted life, the loss of everything that makes life meaningful. Jesus said, “He who tries to save his life will surely lose it, but he who loses his life for my sake will find it.” This is an important truth to be learned. Self-denial (the denial of our false, fallen self) is not the road to self-destruction. It is, in fact, the road to self-discovery.

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### Self-denial is not the road to self-destruction, but the road to self-discovery

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In describing these men, the first item Paul mentions is their devotion to self-indulgence—“their god is their appetite.” They recognize no need or authority outside of personal satisfaction. Their appetites dictate their lives. Refusing to bring them under control, they have accorded them the place of lordship and worship. They are sensual, living life primarily to please their five senses.

The second item Paul mentions is a reversal of moral standards and values. He says their “glory is their shame.” In other words, they exalt things they ought to be ashamed of. Clearly this is the next stage in the downward spiral. First, they give themselves to indulgence, and then they justify themselves by saying their behavior is proper and allowable. Their public code of ethics is rooted in their life of self-indulgence.

Finally, Paul pinpoints their problem: the cultivation of an earthly mind. They “set their minds on earthly things.” At the vital center of their being, where life finds its direction and attitudes are formed which ultimately influence our decisions and govern our tastes, the world and its ways are the focus of their attention.

Paul goes to great length to describe the lifestyle of these enemies of the cross. We are to remember them because their lives are a warning. Thus we have two lifestyles set before us as examples. One is based upon the principle of the cross, a life of self-denial. The other is based upon being an enemy of the cross, a life of self-indulgence. Paul says the cross is the source of our power. We are to glory in it, for it has given us everything that is ours. This is the first truth we must remember, the first conviction upon which we are to base our

life. Remember the cross; our life is not our own.

The second event which Paul brings to our mind looks to the future rather than the past. The understanding of this event will also prevent us from degenerating spiritually.

### **B. Remember His Coming—This World Is Not Our Home**

Paul again changes the pronoun from “I” to “we” in verse 20 as he speaks about the common hope of all believers. Thus, we see the close tie between the cross and the second coming of Christ. These two events are central to our belief.

Look at the contrast between the enemies of the cross and those who love it. The former are heading for destruction, while we are waiting for a Savior from heaven. The enemies are devoted to their bodies, bowing to their appetites as to a god. But we, quite the contrary, are looking forward to the transformation of this body, for we view it as “the body of our humiliation.” They have a perverted standard of values, glorying in shameful things. We have a clearer perspective, having an appreciation even now of Christ’s glory. Finally, they are earthbound while our citizenship is in heaven.

In making these distinctions, Paul does not call us lovers or friends of the cross. Rather, he describes us as “watchers of the return.” The closeness of the cross and the coming is noteworthy. Paul could just as easily have described the enemies of the cross as hostile to the Lord’s return, for to deny the return is to fail to appreciate the cross. To forget the return is to lose hold of the excellence of the cross.

Paul reminds us that we are citizens of heaven. We belong to a far-off homeland and await the king who will take us

there. Our names are already on the citizenship roster, and our place is secure. But while we wait, we must live as if we were already there. The primary feature of our heavenly home is the presence of the king. This is also our present privilege. We are to be occupied with the goal of being conformed to the image of Christ, united in his death so that we can experience his resurrection. In heaven, all things obey his will. We must give ourselves to this same obedience now. In heaven, the reality of his almighty power is evident and experienced. Paul reminds us this same power is at work in our daily lives. C. S. Lewis says:

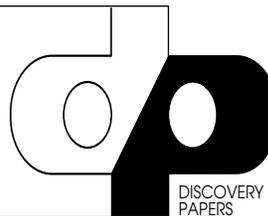
Hope is one of the theological virtues. This means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next...It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at heaven and you will get earth “thrown in.” Aim at earth and you will get neither.

As we think of 1988 and the growth God desires for our lives, I pray that you will remember these two cardinal Christian events. Remember the cross. As you do, you will remember your life is not your own. And remember his coming. This world is not our home. Our focus and desire is to obtain a goal. As a runner reaches for the tape, so should we reach for maturity.

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# KNOWING PEACE IN THE LORD

SERIES: JESUS, OUR JOY



Catalog No. 677  
Philippians 4:1-9  
Sixth Message  
Gary Vanderet  
January 10, 1987

Recently, a Bible verse caught my attention as I was casually reading through Acts. When I read this verse, I could read no further. Acts 9:31 says, "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase." What amazed me were the circumstances that surrounded this sentence. The leaders of the church were being imprisoned, and the believers were being threatened. Stephen's martyrdom had just occurred, and the memory of that experience lingered in their minds. As history shows, a bloodbath was imminent.

Yet the church throughout Palestine enjoyed peace and continued to increase! Against all odds, they flourished. Instead of shriveling into a camp of bitter, negative and frightened people, they remained winsome and magnetic. This brought to my mind the insightful words of Reinhold Niebuhr:

You may be able to compel people to maintain certain minimum standards by stressing duty, but the highest moral and spiritual achievements depend not upon a push but a pull. People must be charmed into righteousness.

We need to learn this truth. These early believers were un-intimidated, determined, resilient, and peaceful. Somehow they maintained a loving atmosphere, an authentic appeal of positive acceptance. No amount of pressure from without disturbed their peace within. All it takes for most of us to lose our peace is one football game! This was not true of the early church, and the result was predictable. People could not stay away from their meetings.

But a situation in the church at Philippi was disrupting the peace of the body. As Paul has been demonstrating throughout this book, only our unity as a church can face the world's affronts without being defeated. Only a united church can have the magnetic appeal as found in Acts 9. It may well be that Paul's primary purpose for writing this book was to solve the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche. In fact, all of the truth we have learned from chapters 1 through 3 discusses both the importance of unity and how to experience its power. As is often the case, public problems may require private solutions.

After revealing the need for peace by pointing out the conflict in the opening verses of chapter 4, Paul then gives two promises about peace. He also tells us the conditions that must be met if we are going to experience this peace. I pray that we will examine ourselves and our church body to determine if we have this magnetic quality of peace. If we do not have it, we will discover what we can do individually in our own lives.

Let us look as Paul outlines the need for peace in verse 1 through 3.

## I. THE NEED FOR PEACE 4:1-3

**Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. I urge Euodia and Syntyche to live in harmony**

**in the Lord. Indeed, true comrade, 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 written in the book of life.**

In this passage, Paul mentions the situation which was affecting the unity of the body at Philippi. Paul calls on two otherwise unknown believers, Euodia and Syntyche, to settle their differences.

The cause of this disagreement is not given to us. We are not told if the problem is doctrinal, ethical, or personal because this is not Paul's worry. He is merely concerned with the fact that these two women are at odds with one another and that their conflict has brought division in the fellowship.

It is also interesting that Paul does not take sides in the matter. He does not say to either one of them, "You are wrong and must apologize." Nor does he soothingly say, "There are two sides to every story. You are both partially right and wrong. Therefore, kiss and make up." This is not a matter of who is right or wrong or where the blame lies. He simply urges both of the women to take the initiative to go to the other person and be reconciled.

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### When there is disharmony inside the Church, there is bound to be defeat outside

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In these verses, Paul points out why division in the body is wrong. First, it runs contrary to how we are to view other believers. Look at the apostle's attitude toward the Philippians. As we learned in the last message, his life is not only exemplary but normative. Therefore, Paul's attitude is a model for us. Notice his words: "My beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and my crown, . . . my beloved." We are a family, and our attitudes toward one another ought to reflect tender affection. Perhaps, if we loved one another in this manner, then we would recognize the scandal of division. Our callous attitudes toward one another cause us to look at our differences with shallow concern.

Second, Paul reminds us of our fundamental oneness. He says, "They have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel." To agree on the gospel is the most fundamental unity of heart and mind. The singleness of the task, proclaiming the gospel, ought to be reflected in the singleness of the workers performing the task.

Paul also mentions, "Their names are written in the book of life." As we saw in chapter 3, there is a heavenly reality involved in the church. The church on earth is to be a replica of the heavenly kingdom. Our heavenly citizenship calls us to live life now with all the privileges and duties of our distant homeland. Since there are no divisions in heaven, there should be none here.

Lastly, Paul reminds us that division among Christians is a serious flaw in the church's armor against the world. This is why he begins these verses with "stand firm in the Lord." For the second time in the book, Paul allows his thoughts to travel

along the same line. In chapter one, he said, “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear that you are *standing firm* in one Spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” He reminded us then that there were opponents to the gospel whose strong opposition could easily stampede the Christians in terror. In 4:1, we are told to stand firm because the self-indulgent examples of the enemies of the cross could lead Christians astray. His argument in chapter one was that only a united church could present a united front; our steadfastness is grounded in our unity. He exhorted us to be of the same mind. Here he exhorts us “to live in harmony.” When there is disharmony inside the church, there is bound to be defeat outside. When Christians cannot bear the sight of each other, they will not be able to look the world in the eyes either.

Our unity is so important Paul asks that others in the body help these two sisters. The very existence of the need is a call for rescue. Notice that Paul does not tell Euodia and Syntyche to ask this “true comrade” to help them. Rather, he calls on the comrade to go uninvited and do what he can. We *are* our brothers’ keeper. We are never at liberty to stand aloof when brothers and sisters cannot get along. If we have trouble with our car, we do not give up driving. If our roof has a leak, we do not abandon the house. The irony of it all is that when conflicts arise, only rarely do people stay around long enough to work them out. We usually bail out and try to stay as far away as we can.

Since we desperately need one another, we need to live in harmony. We will never have that magnetic quality of peace without it. Peace was needed in the body of Philippi. Having shared the need, Paul now presents two associated promises. Look at verse 7 and the end of verse 9.

## II. THE PROMISE OF PEACE 4:7, 9b

**And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus...and the God of peace shall be with you.**

There are two promises revealed in these verses.

### A. Our Lives Will Be Touched with a Mark of the Supernatural

Paul first mentions that we will receive something that “surpasses all comprehension.” Paul’s meaning here is not that peace is something mysterious and incomprehensible in its own right, but that it is something which others will not be able to explain away. It is beyond the range of human comprehension. I think that much of our struggle in standing firm for Christ lies in the fact that people do not see why we want to be different. They attribute our standards to personal whims or preference—like the lady whose obituary remarked that “her chief hobby was religion.” What we desperately need in our lives, and what our neighbors need to see, is what is promised here—something supernatural that cannot be explained away by anything except, “This is obviously the hand of God.” This is the peace promised here.

Paul reveals the second promise in verse 9.

### B. Our Lives Will Be Guarded by the Peace and Presence of God

The second promise is that God’s peace will guard us and that God himself will be our companion. Paul says, “The peace of God...shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. And the God of peace shall be with you.” This

imagery pictures a besieged fortress. The castle is the Christian’s inner life, his mind and heart. If the castle can be held, then progress and growth in the Christian life will occur. If it can be captured, then spiritual degeneracy will follow.

The beautiful truth is that it is heavily garrisoned. The castle’s walls are constantly patrolled, and its sentries never sleep at their posts. These troops are the “praetorian guard” of the King of kings, and they march beneath the standard of the peace of God. Our hearts and minds are kept at rest, for their companion is the King himself, the God of peace. What a promise!

The supernatural mark in a Christian’s life is the presence of peace. The use of the word “peace” today carries the idea of a spiritual marshmallow, soft and sweet but without much substance. But biblically, the term is full of strength and vitality. The God of peace is the God who makes peace between himself and sinners. Thus, peace is linked to God’s work of salvation. It is the fruit of Calvary. The God of peace is also the God of power who raised our Lord Jesus from the dead. Another passage tells us that the God of peace will crush Satan under our feet. Security, victory, power—all of these ideas are inherent in the word.

In fact, the word is taken from the Hebrew word “shalom” which describes a sense of well-being, wholeness, contentment, confidence, and security which is the heritage of the people of God. This peace is not only inward, but outward as well. It is a peace that not only promises to master internal anxiety but also to mend our broken relationships. This fortress is strong enough to be an antidote for anxiety and to handle all our wrong feelings toward brothers or sisters.

This ability to be at peace and to live in peace is the unmistakable supernatural mark of a Christian’s life. This is the promise presented in this passage. This is what our neighbors long to see.

There are some conditions attached to this promise. Paul faithfully reveals them in verses 4 through 6 and 8 through 9.

## III. THE CONDITIONS OF PEACE 4:4-6, 8-9a

**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 request be made known to God...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, let your mind dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things;...**

In focusing on the promises made in verses 7 and 9, we left out an important word which both verses have in common. Verse 7 reads, “*And* the peace of God will guard your hearts.” Similarly, verse 9 says: “*And* the God of peace will be with you.” In other words, the promises of God’s peace are dependent upon what had been stated previously, namely a series of commands. The Scripture tells us that we must obey the commands if we want to enjoy the promises.

I have worded these commands as laws. Some of you are familiar with the booklet which begins, “Just as there are physical laws which govern the physical universe, so there are spiritual laws which govern the spiritual universe.” Paul now gives us four laws which are conditions for experiencing the peace of God. The first is the law for relationships.

### A. In Our Relationships—Follow Christ’s Example

In verses 4 and 5, we read: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.” As we have discovered earlier in the book, the essence of the command to rejoice in the Lord is to allow the Lord to be our source of joy. We are to so value Jesus Christ and to so long for the smile of his approval that nothing else matters. In this context, we could never hope to enjoy the peace of God if we give less than first place to him.

But I do not think this is the primary meaning of Paul’s command here. When he tells us to rejoice in the Lord, he urges us to imitate Christ as we wait for his coming. I am sure Paul is remembering the great example of Christ which he gave us in chapter 2. There he said, “I want you to have this attitude which was also in Christ Jesus who gave himself up for our sake.”

He sums up the Lord’s attitude in the beautiful word which is translated “forbearance” or “gentleness,” depending on your version. This word suggests the uncomplaining readiness to accept others as they are and to submit oneself to their demands. It also conveys the idea of a non-defensive attitude. A forbearing person neither asserts his own rights nor insists on his own way. The Lord’s return is imminent, and when he returns all the wrongs will be made right. This confidence enables us to forbear, to be gentle.

Peter devotes an entire chapter to this quality in his first epistle. He says the test of this quality in our lives is found in how we deal with harsh and unreasonable people. Anyone can follow Christ’s example with gentle, kind people. But Peter says, “Servants, be submissive to your masters, not only to those who are gentle but also to those who are unreasonable and obnoxious.” Then he looks at Christ’s example who “uttered no threats and entrusted himself to the Father who judges righteously.”

This is the law for relationships: follow Christ’s example. Apart from this, we will have no peace.

The second law deals with our circumstances.

### B. In Our Circumstances—Pray

The antidote for our circumstances is prayer: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” This is a timeless and universal remedy for anxiety. The cure is found in a combined exercise of prayer and thanksgiving. In prayer, our anxiety is resolved by *trusting* God. That which causes our anxiety is brought to the one who is totally competent and in whose hands the matter may be confidently left. In thanksgiving, our anxiety is resolved by the deliberate *acceptance* of our circumstance as that which an all-wise, all-loving, all-sovereign God has appointed.

Our prayer answers the anxiety-provoking question “How can I cope?” by pointing us away from ourselves to God’s resources and promises. Thanksgiving addresses the despair-provoking question “Why is this happening to me?” by pointing us to the One who never acts without purpose and whose purposes never fail.

Prayer has more to do with aligning my heart with God’s purpose than with aligning his heart with mine. Henry Nouwen said:

Prayer is a radical conversion of all our mental processes because in prayer we move away from ourselves, our worries, preoccupation, and self-gratification—and direct all

that we recognize as ours to God in simple trust that through His love all will be made new.

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### The supernatural mark in a Christian’s life is the presence of peace

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For a long time Christians have forced prayer into a role it was never designed to play. We have even made it difficult. If you read too many biographies of fellow saints, you may see prayer as a guilt-producing discipline instead of a guilt-relieving practice. According to this passage, prayer results in peace! But somehow we have bought the idea that in order for prayer to be effective, it has to be painful. And we have to pray continuously for hours—pleading, longing, waiting, hurting. I do not find this in Scripture. Rather than stripping us of our peace, prayer brings it. This is why I like the description of prayer given by a 17th century Frenchman named Francois Fenelon:

Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one’s heart, its pleasures and its pains to a dear friend. Tell Him your troubles, that He may comfort you; tell Him your joys, that He may sober them; tell Him your longings that He may purify them; tell Him your dislikes, that He may help you conquer them; talk to Him of your temptations, that He may shield you from them; show Him the wounds of your heart, that He may heal them; lay bare your indifference to good, your depraved tastes for evil, your instability. Tell him how self-love makes you unjust to others, how vanity tempts you to be insincere, how pride disguises you to yourself and to others.

If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, troubles, there will be no lack of what to say. You will never exhaust the subject. It is continually being renewed. People who have no secrets from each other never want for subjects of conversation. They do not weigh their words, for there is nothing to be held back; neither do they seek for something to say. They talk out of the abundance of the heart; without consideration they say just what they think. Blessed are they who attain to such familiar, unreserved intercourse with God.

This is prayer. When we are anxious, it is much easier to retreat into ourselves and complain. But if we bring the matter to God, then we will find release. This is the law for all our circumstances.

There is a third law which deals with our thoughts.

### C. In Our Thoughts—Discipline Your Mind

Paul tells us to “dwell on these things.” This verb means “to ponder, to give proper weight or value to.” It implies that this appraisal will influence the way we live. Again we are confronted with the importance of our minds. Earlier in the book, Paul said the carnal mind leads to spiritual degeneracy. Now he says the mind drilled on the things God approves leads to practical holiness. If in difficult relationships we allow our minds to be clouded with half-truths or we allow frivolous and damaging thoughts to simmer, then we will never imitate Christ. In contrast to this, the way to peace is found in valuing what is attractive and praiseworthy in others.

We are to meditate on, to prize as valuable and to be influenced by all that is true and all that is honorable. “Honorable” implies those things which merit serious rather than superficial or flippant thoughts. We are to also dwell on all that agrees with justice and purity. “Lovely” describes speak-

ing well of another person, looking for those things which commend them. Finally, we are to look for that which is of genuine worth and merits praise.

What kind of performance would your car deliver if you scooped up a handful of dirt every morning before you left and put it in your crankcase? The fine-tuned engine would quickly be coughing and sputtering. This is true for our lives as well. Thoughts and attitudes about ourselves or others which are narrow, destructive, and abrasive wear on our mental motors. They will eventually drain us of all of our emotional energy and take away all our peace.

In giving attention to the things which God approves, we will allow our minds to become like his. And the promise is that he pledges his guardian peace and his own presence as the God of peace in our lives as a result.

The final law involves our behavior.

#### **D. In Our Behavior—Submit to the Word of God**

We are to submit to the authority of the Word of God: “The things you have learned and heard and seen in me, practice these things.” If we are going to know the presence of the God of peace, then we must certainly seek the life which he approves. Paul himself practiced what he preached (the Philippians watched him). But we no longer have Paul or any

apostle to watch. Thus, this commandment requires us to submit to the apostolic word, the Scriptures.

These are the commandments, the conditions for enjoying the promise of the peace of God. If we as a church are going to stand firm in the face of the world’s opposition, then we must first attend to our own lives, the state of our own hearts and thoughts. If we are going to experience the power of God at work in our inner beings, we must pay attention to these commands. We must model our relationships on Christ, surround our circumstances with prayer, drill our minds in godly thinking, and submit our lives to the Word of God. As Thomas Kelly says:

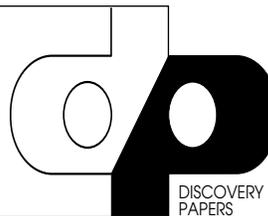
The life that intends to be wholly obedient, wholly submissive, wholly listening, is astonishing in its completeness. Its joys are ravishing. Its peace profound. Its humility the deepest. Its power world-shaking. Its love enveloping. Its simplicity that of a trusting child.

It is my prayer that we as a body will experience the magnetic charm that is called peace. As a result, perhaps it will be said concerning God’s people in this area: “So the church throughout all the Bay Area enjoyed peace. Being built up, it continued to increase. An irresistible magnet drew people in. Their hunger for holiness kept them close.”

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# ENJOYING CONTENTMENT IN THE LORD

SERIES: JESUS, OUR JOY



Catalog No. 678  
Philippians 4:10-23  
Seventh Message  
Gary Vanderet  
May 29, 1988

If you are a parent, perhaps you can identify with these words by Charles Swindoll in *Come Before Winter* :

Someday when the kids are grown, things are going to be a lot different. The garage won't be full of bikes, electric train tracks on plywood, sawhorses surrounded by chunks of two-by-fours, nails, a hammer and saw, and unfinished "experimental projects,"...I'll be able to park both cars neatly in just the right places, and never again stumble over skateboards, piles of papers (saved for the school fund drive)...

Someday when the kids are grown, the kitchen will be incredibly neat. The sink will be free of sticky dishes, the garbage disposal won't get choked on rubber bands or paper cups, the refrigerator won't be clogged with nine bottles of milk, and we won't lose the tops to jelly jars, ketchup bottles...or the mustard...

Someday when the kids are grown, my lovely wife will actually have the time to get dressed leisurely. A long, hot bath (without three panicked interruptions), time to do her nails (even toe nails if she pleases!) without answering a dozen questions and reviewing spelling words...

Someday when the kids are grown, the instrument called a "telephone" will actually be available. It won't look like it's growing from a teenager's ear. It will simply hang there...silently and amazingly available! And it will be free of lipstick, human saliva, mayonnaise, corn chip crumbs...

Someday when the kids are grown, I'll be able to see through the car windows. Fingerprints, tongue licks, sneaker footprints, dog tracks...will be conspicuous by their absence. The back seat won't be a disaster area, we won't sit on jacks or crayons anymore, the tank will not always be somewhere between empty and fumes, and (glory to God!) I won't have to clean up dog messes another time.

Webster's Dictionary defines the word *content* as "happy enough with what one has or is; not desiring something more or different; satisfied." I must confess to you that God has been working in my life in the area of contentment. I am sure it was his plan that I did not preach this sermon back in February to finish off my series in the book of Philippians. I have had to live with Philippians 4 for over four months. As a result, God has been able to do open heart surgery in my life, pointing out many areas of discontentedness over and over. In fact, I could share many personal examples with you, but I will just share one poignant memory.

About nine years ago, shortly after I came on staff at Peninsula Bible Church, my wife and I almost bought a house in Palo Alto next door to Steve Zeisler, another pastor, and his family. We dreamed of having a strong *koinonia* relationship involving shared lawn-mowers and meals. I actually talked the owner, who was using the house as a rental, into selling it and offered him \$89,000. When he put his house up for sale, he received another offer for \$90,000. He came back to me to see if I would raise my offer, but I decided not to buy the house. I took my original figure as a fleece from the Lord and thought we could not afford the extra \$1,000. That decision has gnawed at me for nine years!

God brought this memory to my attention during these past four months, showing me that I have never given it up. In fact, my wife is tired of hearing about it! As I was wrestling with this and thanking God for what he has been teaching me, Steve Zeisler came into my office and said, "Guess what! The house just sold again for \$319,000!" I broke out laughing and said, "Lord, you are funny!"

While working on my life, God has uncovered an irritability which is based upon discontentedness. My guess is that I am not alone in this. I am sure many of you are wrestling with the same seeds of discontentedness planted in the soil of your hearts. Maybe I am speaking to some who have worshipped at the shrine of *promotion* for too long. To you, contentment is a foreign word meaning loss of prestige or laziness. You see it as something to be experienced between birth and kindergarten and between retirement and the grave by those who have no ambition. Perhaps I am speaking to some couples who are discontented because they want a bigger house or a better location. Maybe I am speaking to some students who are flirting with dissatisfaction regarding their lack of transportation or their family situation.

The seed of discontent is planted early in our lives and grows in our brains with every new situation. I found this out when I took my eight-year-old son shopping for clothes. He was not satisfied with just any pair of jeans and shirt. He wanted the "Morey Boogey" brand. He could not be content with anything less.

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## Contentment is one of the true marks of maturity

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I am convinced that one of the critical needs in the body of Christ is contentment. We live in neighborhoods filled with people who are looking for some source of contentment. We are working with people who in their eager pursuit of ambition have grown tired and discontented. We are rapidly becoming a nation of discontented marionettes, dangling from the strings of the dictatorial puppeteer Covetousness.

Paul told us in 1 Timothy that godliness is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. One of the amazing statements Paul makes in this passage is, "I am content." My desire for you is to help you see the importance of being contented with what you have rather than being perpetually dissatisfied and always striving for more.

Philippians 4:10-23 will help us discover the same secret of contentment Paul learned. I want to take you into the operating room where God has been doing his work on my heart. I assume that he wants to perform surgery on your life as well. My prayer is that for the next few moments you will restrict your thoughts to one person, yourself. We can all think of someone else who needs this passage, maybe a co-worker or a spouse, but we must concentrate on ourselves. God wants to teach all of us something in the area of contentment.

Paul has graciously shared his experience with us in this passage. Interwoven in these verses are three secrets that will

help us to experience the same contentment Paul enjoyed. Along with each secret, I have included an exhortation that will help us apply the truth.

Let us look at the first secret in verses 10 and 14 through 18.

## I. The Secret of Christian Generosity: Learn to

### Share Your Resources

**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...Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. 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.**

The principle Paul reveals is simple: one Christian has enough because another Christian is generous. Paul had enough because other Christians contributed to meet his needs. He had a family who cared about him. No matter how distant or isolated he might be geographically, he knew there were people who were willing to give of their means for his needs. What a great source of encouragement this must have been to him!

The Philippians felt a strong attachment to the apostle because God called these believers to faith in Jesus Christ through him. God had brought great blessing to their lives through Paul. As a result, they loved him and wanted to help him.

For a short time after he left Philippi, Paul worked in Thessalonica. Being located near this city, the Philippians sent messengers to find out how Paul was doing. When they heard he was in financial need, they took up a collection for him. Later they sent another gift. Paul refers to this in verse 16 where he says, "For even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs." After a riot drove Paul out of Thessalonica, he went south to Berea and then to Athens. For a while, the Philippians must have lost track of Paul and wondered where he was and how he was doing. Questions flooded their minds: "Does he have a place to stay? Is he without money? Is he forced to take care of himself by tentmaking?" When the news finally arrived that he was in need, the Philippians sent money again, as 2 Corinthians tells us.

Eventually the believers at Philippi lost touch with Paul entirely, for he was constantly on the move and communications were slow. After he left Greece and returned to Judea, he began his third missionary journey. Although many years had passed since Paul first set foot in Philippi, their love for him was still strong. Having heard of his need in prison, they immediately sent a gift in the care of Epaphroditus.

The Philippian's generosity was an *ever-present sentiment*. Notice verse 10 says, "You were indeed concerned for me but you lacked opportunity." It had not been easy to maintain communication with Paul, but their love was always there. As

soon as an opportunity arose, they were eager to take it.

Paul was not too proud to admit that he needed the help of other believers. There are two extremes we can take in the body of Christ. One extreme is total independence. This is the attitude that says, "I don't need anyone else! I am sufficient in myself." The opposite extreme is total dependence upon the support and encouragement of others. Both of these are wrong. The correct attitude is one of *interdependence*, being willing to give and to receive. This is the attitude Paul expresses here.

Generosity is essential in Christian relationships. Other people's needs ought to affect us. The Philippian church was not a rich church, comprised of prominent and wealthy people. In fact, in 2 Corinthians 8:1-2, Paul says, "Let me tell you what God in his grace has done for the churches in Macedonia. Though they have been going through much trouble and hard times, they have mixed their wonderful joy with their deep poverty, and the result has been an overflow of giving to others." (TLB) The Philippian church was poor but generous.

Paul says to the Philippians, "It was kind of you to share in my trouble." His need was not remote to them; they felt it. Paul commends their actions as an admirable thing to do. Be generous with the resources God has given you. In talking about money, William Barclay puts this in perspective:

Money in itself is neither good nor bad; it is simply dangerous in that the love of it may become bad. With money a man can do much good; and with money a man can do much evil. With money a man can selfishly serve his own desires; and with money he can generously answer to the cry of his neighbor's need. With money a man can buy his way to the forbidden things and facilitate the path of wrongdoing; and with money he can make it easier for someone else to live as God meant him to live. Money brings power, and power is always a double edged thing, for it is powerful to good and powerful to evil.

Dr. Karl Menninger once asked a wealthy patient, "What on earth are you going to do with all your money?" The patient replied, "Just worry about it, I suppose." Dr. Menninger then asked him if he derived much pleasure from his worrying. "No," responded the patient, "but I get such terror when I think of giving it to anyone else."

In commending the generosity of the Philippians, Paul makes two important statements about this attribute.

### A. Generosity Is Given to God

Generosity is primarily a vertical transaction, not just a horizontal one. Paul calls their a gift a "fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice." This takes us to the Old Testament and the picture of the burnt offering. In Genesis 8, we find the first account of a burnt offering. After the flood when Noah offered a burnt offering to God, the Scripture tells us, "When the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man...'" Paul is telling us that when we generously sacrifice to meet the needs of others, we are ultimately expressing our own obedient consecration to God. We are offering a sacrifice to God which is a pleasing aroma he delightfully accepts.

### B. Generosity Will Be Rewarded by God

Paul was always sensitive about receiving monetary help from churches because there were always those who questioned his motives. He even risks appearing cold in this passage to emphasize the real value of the gift. His words in verse 17 seem

to be a disclaimer: “Not that I seek the gift.” This is not Paul’s intention at all. He is genuinely content to accept whatever circumstances God provides.

Thus, he says that he does not covet the Philippians’ money, but the “profit which increases to your account.” These Greek words are the kind of financial terms we would expect to hear in a banking institution to indicate that a new partnership has been formed. They involve credit and compounded interest. Paul is saying that when we share what God has entrusted to us, whether it be our love or possessions, we are actually entering into a partnership not only with those with whom we share but also with God himself. Paul says God pays interest compounded daily for our investment!

In his statement, he is suggesting that this is a proper motive for Christians to cultivate. This is similar to Jesus’ words in Luke 12 where we are told to seek opportunities to be generous to the needy for in so doing we are making for ourselves purses which do not grow old and a treasure in heaven that will not fail. Cultivate a generous heart by learning to share your resources. This is the secret of generosity.

Paul’s second secret is revealed in verses 11 and 12.

## II. The Secret of Christian Discipline: Learn to Discipline Your Desires

**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.**

These verses give us another vital principle. The first factor which allows us to be content is the generosity of others. The Lord uses the resources of one to meet the needs of another. The second factor involves a Christian’s attitude toward his own circumstances. It is easy to complain when times are difficult. One of the secrets of contentment is being able to see our needs as being met by that which we presently have. What we learn from Paul’s personal testimony is that “enough” and “contentment” are relative terms based upon what we think our needs are.

We must cultivate the discipline of learning that we do not need more than we have. We have already mentioned how careful Paul was in detaching the financial gifts of the Philippian church from any personal desires. He was so careful that his statements can be misinterpreted as ungratefulness: “Not that I speak from want...Not that I seek the gift.” Paul is not giving backhanded thanks here but guarding himself from being covetous.

Coveting has many nasty synonyms: envy, jealousy, lust, and greed. It starts in our heart as a seed, but it gets watered by the inevitable pressures of our pride. Your friend gets a promotion with a significant pay raise—the seed germinates. The new model cars roll out on the showroom floor—the seed sprouts roots. You go shopping with a friend who fits into dresses that are the same size she wore 15 years ago—the seed becomes a budding plant. Coveting is material inebriation, an addiction to things that do not last and a craving for things that do not really matter. It forces us to depend on tomorrow to bring us the contentment that today could not supply.

In this passage, Paul uses two well known idioms from his

day. The term translated “content” is taken out of the Greek Stoic philosophy which used it to describe a “self-sufficient” person with no needs or weaknesses, someone who had found a completely self-satisfying world. The Stoics aspired to being so self-sufficient that they were untouched by anything. This is a strange word for Paul to use, but he borrows the term to describe the “restful contentment” of a Christian who has freed himself from the constant cravings of a covetous spirit.

The second word helps us to understand that this contentment is something learned. Paul says, “I have *learned* the secret.” This verb was used in the Greek mystery religions to describe the person who had worked through the various lower degrees of knowledge until he reached the full possession of the “mystery” itself. Paul is saying, “I have made my way through the progressive detachment from the things of the world, both its comforts and discomforts, and I have gained freedom from those things. Circumstances no longer master me.” From this passage, we can learn a wonderful principle: contentment is one of the true marks of maturity.

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## Coveting is material inebriation

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It is interesting to compare Paul’s attitude with that of the children of Israel during their journey from Egypt. In Exodus 17, the children of Israel grumbled and quarreled with Moses and with one another because there was no water for them to drink. Verse 7 tells us Moses “named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the Lord, saying, ‘Is the Lord among us, or not?’” But the Psalmist tells us in Psalm 81 that God had not abandoned them. Their thirst was not an accident but a purposeful test designed to examine their devotion to God. They failed the test because they tried to force God’s hand, reasoning, “If God were really with us, this would have never happened. Let him deliver us and then we will trust Him.”

We struggle with this same truth. We often say, “If God were with me, I would not be in this circumstance! Lord, get me out of this, and then I will trust you.” John D. Rockefeller was once asked, “How much money does it take to satisfy a man?” With rare wisdom he replied, “A little bit more than he has.” This is true in so many areas of our lives. Paul had learned contentment bit by bit, through circumstance after circumstance.

How is your heart? Have you learned to discipline your desires or are you constantly wishing for more, for something better, or for something different?

The third secret may be the most important one of all. Look at verses 13, 19 and 20.

## III. The Secret of Christian Trust: Learn to Live in Christ

**I can do all things through Him who strengthens me...And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

Paul gives the glory to God. We can pass over this common Christian phrase without pausing to grasp its significance. What is Paul giving glory to God for? This would include the times

when the Philippian church could not help him as well as the times they could, his times of hunger and times of plenty. It would also include the churches who neglected him and those who remembered him. I am sure he thought of his chains as well as his freedom. Because he accepted all of these circumstances as being from God, he glorified God in all of them. He was contented because God was trustworthy even when it looked like he was not. Paul had learned to be content because he had learned to trust.

He expresses his contentment in two ways: as his own personal experience and as a doctrine for all. Verse 13 gives us his personal experience: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." No circumstance could ever defeat Paul because it could never be too much for his God. He says, "I have all the power I need to handle every situation I face."

Here we find the secret of his strength. Although Paul has already revealed that he has the strength of a self-sufficient Stoic, he now reveals his source. His power for victory over the demands of life is not inherent in himself but arises from another source. Paul has this daily strength because of the one who, as we might paraphrase, "infuses me with dynamite."

The key word in this sentence is "in", translated "through" in the NASB. Jesus Christ is not a channel along which all the blessings flow, but the place in which they are deposited. He is the sum of all the blessings. The person who possesses Christ possesses all! Paul could be content because he learned how to live in Christ. Christ *in* us is our internal power. He is the one who gives mastery over the demands of life.

Lest we should feel that what Paul is expressing is unique to him, he restates the trustworthiness of God as a Christian doctrine: "My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." The apostle is not unique in gaining this strength from his God. His God will supply anyone's needs. The *all things* of Paul's personal experience is matched by *every need* which might come upon the Philippians or us. No situation is beyond the power of this God whom Paul knows well enough to call "my God." In meeting our need, his supply is not limited to the size of our need, but rather is given according to the infinite riches of heaven available to the Christian on earth.

The key to it all is "in Christ Jesus." Christ in us is the adequate resource for every circumstance. Paul had learned what it meant to be in Christ. This is what he has been talking about throughout this book. In Christ, we are secure and have everything we need. For our anxiety, he provides the peace of God patrolling and guarding our hearts. For our struggles in relationships, Christ is our model. In Christ, we become new people with new feelings. We have a new way of looking at life, seeing his sovereign hand in all our circumstances. Learn to live in Christ.

Paul began this letter by addressing the saints and commending them to the Lord Jesus. He ends in the same way, greeting the saints and commending them to the Lord's grace. Look at verses 21 through 23:

**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.**

God's grace is enough for them because it is the remedy for every human need. Jesus' grace reveals all his glories—his power, helpfulness, and riches—and makes them available to his people. God's grace is our all-sufficient supply. The greatest power of God is not found in signs and wonders or even in the power of nature. Rather, it is found in the power of Jesus Christ living in a heart, causing that heart to rise above every circumstance to trust him in the midst of any turmoil. This is the power of God.

There is no more fitting conclusion to this book than the simplicity of this final prayer. For us, as well as for himself, Paul wants nothing more than a daily deepening experience with Jesus which he finds so satisfying and rewarding.

Horatio Spafford, an attorney who lived in Chicago at the turn of the century learned this lesson well. He was a dynamic Christian man and was influential in founding the Moody Bible Institute. During the great Chicago fire in 1871, he lost his business. While rebuilding, he sent his wife and children abroad to Europe. On the journey across the Atlantic, their ship was struck by another vessel and sank. Although his wife watched their four children drown, she was miraculously saved by falling on some floating debris. While she was recuperating in a hospital in Wales, she telegraphed her husband two words: "Saved Alone." He, of course, took the first ship to Wales. As he sailed near the spot where the ship had gone down, Dr. Spafford walked along the deck contemplating all that had happened. There he was moved to write the song we sing so often, "It Is Well With My Soul,"

When peace like a river attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,  
"It is well, it is well with my soul."

This is the message Paul wants to communicate to us. Whatever our circumstances, we can say, "It is well with my soul." This is the key to our contentment, the secret which enables us to rest. Our neighbors and associates are longing to find a life at rest and peace. May they see that contentment modeled in our lives.

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