

**The Letters to
the Philippians and the Colossians**

THE LETTERS TO
THE PHILIPPIANS
AND THE
COLOSSIANS

**An Explanation of these Letters
Especially for You**

Rock Solid #6

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uitgeverij
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Foreword

Dear friend,

I am glad to present this new volume of the 'Rock Solid series'. These studies are meant for your spiritual edification. If you have read the previous volumes of this series, I trust that you have become fascinated by the riches of God's Word. I trust that these studies in the letter to the Philippians and the letter to the Colossians will help you to enjoy the riches of God in Christ Jesus and to appropriate them in your life.

I would like to repeat the practical tips that I suggested in my previous works:

1. Provide yourself with a good translation of the Bible. Some good translations are the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the New King James Version (NKJV), the New Translation by J.N. Darby (JND) and the King James Version (KJV), preferably with the New Scofield word updates. I will be using the NASB, with permission granted by The Lockman Foundation on February 10, 2016 when referencing and quoting Scripture unless I note otherwise.
2. I tried to write this book in a way that encourages you to use the Bible. At the beginning and end of each section, I have listed the Bible verses pertaining to that section. I encourage you to read those verses before and after reading the section. It would be a good idea to keep your Bible open to those verses so you can easily refer to them.
3. Self-discipline is very important. You have to be willing to discipline yourself to take time to understand the Bible better. I suggest that you read the Bible at a set time that's best for you.

To help you with this, I have divided this book into a number of sections, and each section handles an average of five or six verses. You could read one section every day. If you read at a relaxed pace, you will need about twenty minutes for one section and the Bible verses. When you practice this discipline you will have got within six weeks a good impression of these magnificent letters.

The whole Bible indeed is a great Book. It is my prayer that you will be convinced of that more and more.

I wish you God's blessing!

Middelburg, Netherlands, English edition 2016

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Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen	-	Genesis
Exo	-	Exodus
Lev	-	Leviticus
Num	-	Numbers
Deu	-	Deuteronomy
Jos	-	Joshua
Jdg	-	Judges
Rth	-	Ruth
1Sam	-	First Samuel
2Sam	-	Second Samuel
1Kgs	-	First Kings
2Kgs	-	Second Kings
1Chr	-	First Chronicles
2Chr	-	Second Chronicles
Ezra	-	Ezra
Neh	-	Nehemiah
Est	-	Esther
Job	-	Job
Psa	-	Psalms
Pro	-	Proverbs
Ecc	-	Ecclesiastes
Song	-	Song of Songs
Isa	-	Isaiah
Jer	-	Jeremiah
Lam	-	Lamentations
Eze	-	Ezekiel
Dan	-	Daniel
Hos	-	Hosea
Joel	-	Joel
Amos	-	Amos
Oba	-	Obadiah
Jona	-	Jonah

Mic - Micah
Nah - Nahum
Hab - Habakkuk
Zep - Zephaniah
Hag - Haggai
Zec - Zechariah
Mal - Malachi

New Testament

Mt - Gospel of Matthew
Mk - Gospel of Mark
Lk - Gospel of Luke
Jn - Gospel of John
Acts - Acts of the Apostles
Rom - Letter to the Romans
1Cor - First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor - Second Letter to the Corinthians
Gal - Letter to the Galatians
Eph - Letter to the Ephesians
Phil - Letter to the Philippians
Col - Letter to the Colossians
1Thes - First Letter to the Thessalonians
2Thes - Second Letter to the Thessalonians
1Tim - First Letter to Timothy
2Tim - Second Letter to Timothy
Tit - Letter to Titus
Phlm - Letter to Philemon
Heb - Letter to the Hebrews
Jam - Letter of James
1Pet - First Letter of Peter
2Pet - Second Letter of Peter
1Jn - First Letter of John
2Jn - Second Letter of John
3Jn - Third Letter of John
Jude - Letter of Jude
Rev - Revelation

Explanation of general format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS <> are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

The Letter to the Philippians

Introduction

First carefully take in the whole letter; please read thoughtfully.

We are overwhelmed by pleasant warmth when we read this letter. There is a cordial relationship between the sender and the recipient despite the great distance and the different circumstances. Paul is in Rome and the recipients are living in Philippi. He is not writing from a comfortable apartment or from a nice hotel room, but from a jail. A prison those days was not a luxurious dwelling place, as it is today, at least in the West.

We get in this letter a glimpse into the heart of Paul. When we read this letter we do not hear any lamentation as to how bad things are with him. Rather we hear the singing of his heart. How is this possible? This is possible because his heart is full of Christ. He is not overwhelmed by his circumstances. He does not grieve, nor grumble about the Lord. He sees Him Who is above all circumstances. Paul is convinced that his circumstances are in the hands of the Lord.

When we see our life from this perspective we cannot be intimidated. But often it does not happen in our practical life. The Lord knows this. That is why the Lord takes us by the hand through this letter to teach us how to live with joy in our hearts through all our troubles and difficulties of life. Paul also did not learn this overnight. He had to do some exercises. For him this was worth the trouble. If that was so for him, the same goes for you and for me.

I mentioned the word joy. This is the key word for this letter. It is quite refreshing to hear Paul use this word again and again. Furthermore there is no sign of depression over the situation he was in, nor was there any sign of gloom over the developments in the

church. His heart was full of joy for he was full of Christ. There was also joy because the Philippians had not forgotten him. Paul very much appreciated the proof of their love to him. How good the feeling when others show that they have not forgotten us and that they empathize with us!

Philippi is first mentioned in the Bible in *Acts 16*. There it is reported how Paul and his companions entered Europe and brought the gospel to Philippi. The result of their preaching was the beginning of the church in Europe. It was not without resistance; it was accompanied by oppression and persecution. Paul landed in prison. But the light of the gospel shone forth from the dark dungeon.

When Paul wrote this letter he was back in jail. About ten years had passed since his first visit to Philippi. The Philippians had not forgotten him and Paul also had not forgotten them. There was regular contact between them. Several times the Philippians had sent him something to support his living. And when they heard of his detention in Rome they asked Epaphroditus to visit him. They were eager to send something through him. Well, it was well received by Paul, which is evidenced in this letter.

This letter is really a thank you letter. Paul expresses his gratitude for the gift he had received from the Philippians, and much more than that he is thankful to them for their compassion. One can read between the lines how much he is connected to this church. The tone is full of love and the language full of intimacy. He could share his heart and his sentiments with this church. He knew that they would understand him. It is something valuable to know that someone trusts you and understands you.

The Philippians desired to express their love for Paul through their gift. For them it was not 'out of sight, out of mind', but they kept him in their hearts. They always thought of him with gratitude and concern. Paul in his turn thought of their worry and concern for him. He wanted to remove their anxious concern for him through this letter. A deep affection was present on both sides. What a role model for the local churches is such a relationship with each other and with God's servants!

Paul is a man who would use any situation for the furtherance of the gospel. Here he makes use of his prison experience to serve people spiritually. In a most friendly way he shares with the Philippians the experiences he went through. The *letter to the Philippians* is not a doctrinal letter but a letter full of Christian experience. We encounter here deep soul experiences. Christendom is not just doctrine; it is Christ's life in our life; an experiencing-Him life. Doctrine and life go together and one does not work without the other. In this letter the emphasis is on *life* unlike in the *letter to the Romans* in which the emphasis is on *doctrine*.

An experiencing-Him life is a life of spiritual development. This life is not a search for an optimum fortune; this life does not happen in a snapshot. Spiritual growth is a process that takes place in God's way according to God's will. Therefore it is necessary that Christ is central. You must learn to focus your look constantly on Christ. Then only you can grow spiritually. Spiritual growth means being filled with Christ in your heart and in your whole being more and more every day, and that you incorporate Him in all your activities, and that you do nothing without him. Do you dare to say that you are that far in your spiritual journey? I am not. Even the Philippians were not.

This letter is a description of a Christian's pilgrimage through the wilderness. A wilderness is not a pleasant place to stay. It is dry, withered and dead. So is the world for the Christian. A Christian is not concerned with the things around him on the earth. His concern is about Christ in heaven. His journey is towards Him. He is keen on this objective and this motive is constant in his life. This zeal inspires him for greater activity. He gives up anything that prevents him from achieving this goal.

In this letter you cannot find the word 'flesh' (in the sense of sinful flesh) or the word 'sin'. Nothing is mentioned regarding the struggles of faith. Struggles are a part of life in this world which affects us. In this letter we listen to a man who is full of Christ. When you learn to focus your look on Christ steadfastly at all times, you become invincible to the onslaughts of temptations. Difficulties and problems, doubts and worries do not get a chance

to separate you from Christ. Christ is greater than all our problems. When Christ is involved in your life the problems do not disappear, but they come under His control.

Instead of struggling in faith you experience the power of the Spirit. Where Christ is seen, the Holy Spirit is at work. As your eyes are fixed on Christ the Holy Spirit keeps on working. The Holy Spirit gains free access to fill your heart and your entire outlook with the Person of Christ.

This letter has four chapters and in each chapter the life of Christ is the theme:

- *Chapter 1*: Life consists solely of Christ.
- *Chapter 2*: Examples from the life of Christ – how this life first became visible in Christ and then in others.
- *Chapter 3*: Describes the power this life offers to everyone who desires to live this life.
- *Chapter 4*: How this life lifts a Christian above all his circumstances.

Now read this letter again.

Reflection: Why is the letter to the Philippians such a warm, pleasing and intimate letter?

Philippians 1

Salutation, Thanksgiving and Prayer | verses 1-6

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, 5 in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 [For I am] confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

V1. In his usual style Paul first mentions that he himself is the writer of the letter. Then as he often does, he includes someone with him as he writes this letter. This time he has Timothy who is his “*true child in [the] faith*” (1Tim 1:2). Young Timothy was of special value to Paul as his trusted companion in his work (Phil 2:20-22). He was also well known to the Philippians. Paul mentions his name also as co-sender of this letter to make it clear that he also stands behind the contents of the letter. That was important because Paul was hoping to send him shortly to them.

That Paul mentioned Timothy’s name also as co-sender does not mean that they had written this letter together. In many places Paul uses the word ‘I’ which shows that he is the real writer.

Also note that Paul does not write as an apostle. He introduces himself and Timothy as “*bond-servants of Jesus Christ*”. That means the servant or slave has been purchased by Christ so that he or she is free. The one who is convinced about the price the Lord Jesus paid for his redemption will always want to be His slave.

By saying bond-servants of Christ, he places himself and Timothy on the same level with the Philippians. The contents of the letter do not carry any greater weight when it is connected with his apostolic authority. The important matter is to show its contents in everyday life. That is seen in his life as a bond-servants and not on the basis of his position as apostle.

If he had written as an apostle, then he had given the impression that one must have the position of the apostle to have Christian experience. The Christian experience he presents here is not apostolic in nature, but it is an experience in the range of ordinary Christians. It relates to every ordinary Christian who is a bond-servants of the Lord. Love for the Lord Jesus is the motive to show in our life the contents of this letter. This letter is not a command from above.

Paul really has in his mind all the saints. We see this in the manner in which he addresses his readers. He writes to "*all the saints*" and that means no one is excluded. By the use of the word "*all*" he makes it clear that he stands above all parties and differences. He writes not to the *church* in Philippi but to the *saints* because the Christian experience is something personal. These saints are "*in Christ Jesus*". That is their *spiritual* position. They are also the saints "*in Philippi*". There we see their *earthly* position.

It is in Philippi their role in their social and church life takes place; there they have their responsibility, and there they bear their testimonies. You can apply this to yourself. You have been set apart in Christ from this world, and that is the meaning of *saint*. You no longer belong to the world. In Christ Jesus you have been separated from the world to live for God. In the place where you live you do this in everyday life.

It is true that the "*overseers and deacons*" have been specifically mentioned, but that does not mean they had any special status. The word "*including*" shows that. They have been put on a par with the saints (*cp. Acts 20:28*). It is clear from *Acts 20:17-28* and *Titus 1:5,7* that *overseers* means the same as *elders*. *Elder* denotes

the maturity of the person and his experience in life. *Overseer* denotes the nature of the work or the task.

I would not be surprised if you have questions about the appointment of *elders*. I can say a few things about it. In the New Testament we read three times about the appointment of elders (*Acts 14:23; 20:28; Tit 1:5*). These passages do not suggest that the church appointed them. You read of the apostles who appointed them for the purpose of the church (*Acts 14:23*); you read that overseers are made by the Holy Spirit (*Acts 20:28*); and you read that someone else appoints them in the name of an apostle (*Tit 1:5*). Since we have no more apostles, no one can handle in the name of an apostle, and therefore it is difficult to appoint elders today.

Are not elders necessary? Does not *1 Timothy 3:1-7* speak about the qualifications of overseers? Certainly I did not say that they are now redundant. What I assert is that they cannot be officially appointed by the church. Believers who know the Lord and walk with Him for a considerable period of time are encouraged to seek the position of an overseer (*1Tim 3:1*). Blessed are those local churches that have such men in their midst.

“Deacons” are people who are responsible for the material things of people in the church. This is not a lesser service than that of the overseer, but another one. The overseer is mainly responsible for the spiritual needs of the believers. Both these services require a direct dependence on the Lord. They cannot show any nepotism. They are no respecters of persons. Then only their service can be of any use to the saints and to the honor of the Lord.

V2. Paul closes his salutation with the usual words of blessings. He wishes his readers the consciousness of *“grace”* and inner *“peace”* for their everyday life. Grace means free and unmerited favor. To live a life in the consciousness of grace bestowed is a life lived in which the peace of God is experienced.

He wishes that this peace and this grace will be given to them by the two Persons in the Godhead Whom they are associated

with. The Father and the Lord Jesus Christ have a great interest in the believers. Believers enjoy peace and grace when they have this great interest in everything related to the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. In the light of this letter we can say that grace and peace encompass the total Christian experience. You can relate these two blessings to everything you experience in the shaping of your character as a Christian.

V3. The basic tone of the letter is gratitude. Paul begins to thank spontaneously when he thinks of the Philippians. Sometimes you also could have experienced similar feelings. When you think of certain people you cannot easily suppress certain feelings. The feelings correspond to what these people mean to you. If you had negative experiences with them your heart will not overflow with gratitude when you think of them. But if they are people to whom you owe a lot then things are different.

How good memories make a man happy and grateful! It is the same here with Paul when he thinks of the Philippians. He makes them know that he thanks God when he thinks of them. God also saw to it that this bond of fellowship exists.

V4. Paul's thoughts are filled with the involvement of the Philippians and therefore he always prays for them, and thanks God upon every remembrance of them. One can also learn another fact from this. His prayer for them is not a burden, nor a lamentation before God. It builds up confidence in him. He prays "*with joy*" and that is "*for you all*", so for all of them.

It looks as if there are no exceptions in this church. They were all totally involved in the gospel Paul preached. Even now while he was in prison they were all participants in the gospel. They always stood behind him. The gift they sent him testified to it. I am jealous of such a church. Aren't you?

V5. The Philippians were not just nice people; they were his brothers and sisters. With them he shared his testimonies and with them he shared his faith in the Lord Jesus. They had accepted the gospel on the first day they heard it from him (*Acts 16:14,33-34*).

They then supported him in the preaching of the gospel, not simply once as people do it at the spur of the moment in emotional excitement.

There are Christians who are excited momentarily when a gospel outreach is organized. It is wonderful to do something for the Lord along with many people. But again when the action is over and normal life resumes its course, their activity for the gospel is also over. It was different with the Philippians. Their attachment to the gospel was not out of impulse or out of a temporary emotion. It continued “*until now*”.

V6. Paul is realistic enough to see that “*until now*” is not the end of the line. The Philippians must go ahead a further distance. But he has full confidence in them and sees the end ahead with joy. The fruit witnessed in their life was the result of the good work God worked in them. That gave him the confidence for the future. He knew that God would continue His work in them and complete it. The completion will take place on “*the day of Jesus Christ*”.

The “*day of Christ*” is the day when Christ would appear in His glory. The whole Christian life spans between two days – the *first day* (verse 5) and the *day of Christ*. The first day is the beginning of the race, the day on which they (we) heard the gospel and accepted it. The day of Christ is the period when Christ will openly take control of the world (*Psa 2:8*). For us that day begins when we “*shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*” (*1Thes 4:16-17*) to “*appear before the judgment seat of Christ*” (*2Cor 5:10*). Then we will look back upon our life with the eyes of the Lord and arrive at the same judgment as His. “*We will be like Him*” (*1Jn 3:2*). Then God’s work in us is completed.

Now read Philippians 1:1-6 again.

Reflection: What can you learn from the way Paul gives thanks and prays for the Philippians?

The Love of Paul For the Philippians | verses 7-11

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

7 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 all are partakers of grace with me. 8 For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; 11 having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which [comes] through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

V7. Paul substantiates what he said earlier about his prayer with thanksgiving for the Philippians, and about his fellowship in the gospel, and about his confidence that God will complete His work in them. He is “right” in mentioning all these positive thoughts about them for several reasons. One reason is that they had him in their hearts. They did not think of him now and then. He belonged to them entirely. Though he was not physically present with them they carried him in their hearts. They cherished an abiding love for him, and he felt their love for him.

I think that you can imitate the Philippians. You can also have Paul close to your heart and love him. When you read his letters you simply show your love for his teachings. Then what is said of the Philippians could also be said of you. Others will thank and pray God for you. They will see your life and notice that your life is dedicated to the gospel; they will see that you live for the gospel; they will see that God works in you and therefore are confident that the Lord will complete His good work which He began in you.

Another reason why Paul rightly had good thoughts of them is because of their practical Christian living. They loved him so

much that they had him in their hearts, but also because their love had hands and feet. They rallied behind him as he defended the gospel. The gospel when preached is always opposed and attacked. But the Philippians were always with Paul and together with him they resisted the opposing forces. They showed others that the gospel is the only way to salvation and this gospel included all other blessings. Their own repentance was the confirmation of the truth of the gospel.

We can dispute and refute on various issues. But living witnesses which testify to what happened to them when they accepted the gospel cannot be denied. They had to be killed to stop their mouth. Even then they speak still (*Heb 11:4*). Anyone who thinks that he can stop the course of the gospel by throwing its preacher into prison makes a great mistake. That happened to Paul. The opposing forces only paved a new road for the gospel.

The “*grace*” he speaks about enabled him to endure his chains and to defend the gospel and to confirm it. He felt his preaching as well as his imprisonment as personal grace. Talking about this grace he says “*you are partakers.*” You are all partakers of the grace that is my portion.

You see how Paul and the Philippians built up a unity. Participation in a common cause promotes unity and fellowship. Do you identify yourself with the Lord’s workers and their situations? Then you also partake of the grace they received for this cause. It is not about persons but about God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Where the consciousness of the grace increases the dedication to the Lord and the unity of the believers will also increase. This is true not only among believers who together form a local church but also between the local church and a worker somewhere in the world.

V8. Such an intimate bond of fellowship seeks to express itself in more concrete ways. They want to see each other and be together. Paul wants them to know how much he loves them and longs to see them. That he calls God to be his Witness does not mean that he is concerned about the Philippians’ difficulty to believe

him. It is as if he sought for himself the strongest expression to emphasize his desire for them. His desire for them had nothing to do with human sympathy. He did not want to see them because they were so nice to him. He wanted to be with them because his heart yearned for them.

"Affection" literally means *bowels* or *entrails* and it denotes the inner feelings and affections. However, these are not human emotions but it is the affection *"of Jesus Christ"*. Paul shows that his affections towards the Philippians are compared to the affections of Christ for His church. There we not only love the nice brothers and sisters but all without distinction. It is important to develop such feelings in our relationship with our brothers and sisters.

V9. Paul already said that he thanked and prayed for them, giving the reason why he did so (*verses 3-5*). Now he mentions what he prayed for. Love is not something which is limited to the barest necessities. The nature of love is its abundance. Paul speaks about *"your love"* that it *"may abound still more and more"*. Once the faucet of love is opened the volume of love that flows out becomes greater and greater.

But the river of love requires a channel to flow through. Love is never wasteful or unreliable. That is why Paul prays that their love must be led by *"knowledge and all discernment"*. Love does not operate foolish. Spiritual knowledge is essential to express love and to prove love. Otherwise love is a hollow concept. We need to know what the Bible means by love. A sinful relationship cannot be labeled as love. True love will point out such a wrong relationship. Sin must be condemned so that God's love can be enjoyed.

With *"all discernment"* Paul adds spiritual understanding to his prayer. It is one thing to have knowledge of something, but it is another matter to use knowledge in the right way at the right time. That is why discernment of a particular situation or circumstance is necessary, not in small measure, but in all discernment. Try to acquire all discernment. Well, we are unable to achieve that by ourselves. That is why a prayer like this is essential. You can add this as a prayer point for yourself and others.

V10. Love directed by knowledge and discernment is necessary to “*approve the things that are excellent*”. You see how everything is viewed positively. To approve what is excellent is quite different to avoiding what is evil or spasmodically trying not to sin. To approve means to examine closely and carefully whether something is genuine and to make a decision based on this examination. It is an examination to check if a thing is worthy to be believed.

One for whom Christ is everything is not content with anything lesser than the best. The good is not sufficient and only the best is good enough. When you look for the best in earthly things, why not you look for the best in spiritual things? The best is that you know Christ and that it may result in glorifying Him with your life.

A few examples: You want to use the best Bible translation, and you want to belong to a local church where the Lord Jesus is the Center and the Word of God is recognized in all its authority. You want a job or profession in which you can work for His honor and you want to spend your free-time activities in a way that you can express your gratitude to Him.

These are few examples in which choices are included. It is your choice to choose what is best. When you choose the best in spiritual areas, your walk and behavior will be in compliance with God’s perfect light. In a dark world you will be without offence and you will increase in purity. This is the growth process. This process comes to an end when “*the day of Christ*” dawns or when the Lord takes you to Himself before this day.

I already said something about the day of Christ (*verse 6*) at the end of the previous section. On this day you will be completely “*sincere and blameless*”. But it is the intention of God that you work on it now. He would like to see that you live a life that is pure and blameless as much as possible. A sincere or pure life is a life without ulterior motives, clear and transparent. Impure motives are not there. A life blameless or without offence, is a life on which no one will find fault. To meet the expectations of God, you do not look to the commandments or impose laws upon yourself. You

must only look to Christ. You learn from Him so that the result that He desires in you is achieved with love as the motivating force.

VII. A life without ulterior or impure motive is rare but not impossible. Anyone can achieve this, in whose life Christ takes the first and the only place. Such life will be like a tree which is full of fruits. It has its roots in Jesus Christ. It draws its life's nourishment from Him. The fruit consists of everything in life of which we say, it is righteous (*Eph 5:9; Gal 5:22*). That refers to everything you say and do. Unjust acts are not there. You give everyone his due, and you are honest in your evaluation of God's people and others and in judging words, events and actions.

This is possible only *"through Jesus Christ"*. All what you do, the whole *"fruit of righteousness"*, is to *"to the glory and praise of God"* now as well as at the appearance of Jesus Christ, and to all eternity.

The fruit of righteousness was found in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ in its fullness. Everything He did was a fruit which was characterized by righteousness, the right of God. His whole conduct was a righteous conduct.

Now read Philippians 1:7-11 again.

Reflection: What is the reason you think that you can yearn for a brother or sister?

The Progress of the Gospel | *verses 12-18*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

12 Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, 13 so that my imprisonment in [the cause of] Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, 14 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. 15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; 16 the latter [do it] out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; 17 the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, ...

V12. Only after he expressed his joy over the Philippians and his desire for them, Paul says something about his own circumstances. You can always count on the interests of others in your circumstances, when there is a true bond of love between you and them. Look how he reports. He does not complain, nor does he exploit the good nature of Philippians. He does not give an impressive report on hardships he has to go through. He wants to show how God stands above all his circumstances which helped in the progress of the gospel. Is this not the true Christian view of life? It does not come naturally nor is it something you can read in an instruction booklet, but you must learn it by experience.

The words “*have turned out*” are significant in this regard. It means that it is in contrast to what one expects. Paul is imprisoned. It seemed as if the enemy had obtained a great victory. This might have been discouraging to the Philippians. But as for Paul there was no trace of consternation. On the contrary, he encourages the Philippians by telling them that this exactly fits into God’s plan.

The enemy meant evil, but God used it for the good (*Rom 8:28; Gen 50:20*).

Often Paul uses the expression *"I want you to know"*. This he does when he wanted to draw attention to something special (*Rom 1:13; 11:25; 1Cor 10:1; 11:3; 12:1; 1Thes 4:13*).

The enemy thought that he had shut up Paul through imprisonment and thereby gave a severe blow to the gospel. But that was not the case. Actually God opened up new possibilities for the preaching of the gospel. The enemy also helped in the furtherance of the gospel. The enemy restricted Paul's freedom of movement. But he could not stop his mouth nor affect his conviction. Paul might have been bound but the Word was not bound (*2Tim 2:9*).

In this way a number of soldiers, to whom Paul was chained in his imprisonment, heard the gospel (*Acts 28:16*) as he preached to anyone who visited him (*Acts 28:30-31*). Those who were used to the worst curses should have spoken to each other about this remarkable prisoner. Satan gave this great evangelist of all the times access even to the *"whole praetorian guard"*. As a free man he would have never had this access. Thus the gospel came to places where it would have otherwise never reached. You see how God is exalted above satan's raging and used his evil intentions to carry out His plans.

V13. It becomes clear to all everywhere that Paul is not incarcerated as a criminal to serve a penalty rightly awarded by the law. He was indeed taken prisoner by the Romans but he knew that he was not a prisoner of Rome. He never calls himself that way. When he talks about his imprisonment he always does so in relation to Christ. He is His prisoner (*Eph 3:1; 4:1; Phlm: 9*), or as he says here *"my imprisonment in [the cause of] Christ"*. He is imprisoned for Christ's sake. He does not take his circumstances from the hands of the enemy but from the hands of the One Whom he serves. Christ decides his fate; not the Roman emperor.

V14. There is one more consequence of Paul's detention. When others saw Paul's testimony during his detention they took courage and began to preach the Word. Paul's imprisonment inspired them to do the work of an evangelist. Sharing the Word is everyone's responsibility. No one can pass the buck. But sometimes there are inner obstacles. Sometimes some brothers think that they are not as good as the other eminent preachers. Such brothers need help to overcome their inferiority complex. Paul never wanted to see himself as an obstacle to other believers who served the Lord in their capacity. Sometimes God Himself intervenes and sends the more experienced ones to other places, and then it is a great encouragement to see others begin to preach the gospel and fulfill their responsibility.

The Lord remains the same whether Paul or any other gifted brothers are there or not. The Philippians had put their trust in Him. Even so we can put our trust in Him and speak the Word of God without fear. Our confidence should not be in ourselves; for then the Lord cannot work. Once you put your trust in Him you can see what He can do with your life and with your testimony.

V15. The absence of the apostle not only gave room for the shy ones. It also gave some people the opportunity to excel themselves in their work. Now it was their time to shine like stars. Their rival (so they considered him) had disappeared and with him his influence. They were people who tried to undermine Paul's authority in the church and set believers against each other. They preached Christ *"even from envy and strife"*. They not only sought their own reputation but also wanted to hurt the imprisoned apostle. Their intentions were malicious.

If you are not aware a little bit of the corruption of your own heart, you would say: how could that be possible. But even today it happens. God's servants sometimes want to take over the leadership of the church for selfish reasons. Often that happens at the cost of others who mean a lot for the church.

V16. Then the one, who served the church, having the view that the church is his own, reacts fleshly to the injustice done to him.

Paul presents a good example here. He does not paint all with a single brush. He differentiates them according to their motives. Those who preached with good intentions did so out of love. There is no room for envy and strife if love is the driving force. Then we accept the fact that God entrusts every one with a specific task. Each task is different from the other. It is important that we accept the God-given differences and to act accordingly. Those who were guided by love accepted Paul's special mission to defend the gospel.

V17. The ideas or the intentions of some were mean and base. Their wonderful preaching which tickled the ears of people arose from "*selfish ambition*" which comprises selfishness, ambition and unsound rivalry which are related to one another. They labored to gather people around themselves and form a new party. Such people thought that such activities would jeopardize Paul's mission and that it would add afflictions to his chains. This only revealed their wicked hearts.

V18. Certainly Paul's reaction could have been different too, if he were like them. We could also be upset about a lot of wickedness against our personal integrity. It is even more painful to see the work that we should have done breaking down before our eyes. Isn't it a paradox to proclaim Christ and at the same time do so out of undesirable motives? Does it not seem impossible to misuse the Name of Christ for personal and selfish purposes?

Paul was totally not open for such considerations. His reaction is quite different in nature. His exclamation "*what then?*" sounds like a cry of victory. Do not think this is a call coming forth from indifference or callousness. With this short sentence he sets aside all the resistance and the incriminating actions of the enemy. He does not think of a circular letter to counter all the false allegations of the enemy. He does not give any instructions to the Philippians as to how they should handle such mean people.

This shows his attitude, and awareness of Whom his heart is filled with, namely Christ. His enemies attacked him and he defended the gospel, but not himself. In this he points to Christ. His

enemies as humans could not act above themselves. Paul stands above his circumstances because his heart is filled with Christ.

What can the enemy do with such a man? Christ and the salvation of others are more important to Paul than the question if he could continue the work himself. *God* continued it further. Our God reigns no matter what happens with you or around you. He is sovereign and He uses His word to achieve His end no matter who preaches or how it is preached. This awareness makes him happy now and forever. It also makes you happy when you learn to look at circumstances like him. Then you are invincible, not because you are strong but because He is strong.

Now read Philippians 1:12-18 again.

Reflection: What is the secret not to be depressed by circumstances?

Magnify Christ In Your Body | verses 19-24

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

..., 19 for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 20 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but [that] with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 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. 23 But I am hard-pressed from both [directions], having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for [that] is very much better; 24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

V19. In verse 12 Paul said that he wanted the Philippians to know something. Now he says what he himself knows. To know something means to have knowledge of it. In the meantime you have already understood that the knowledge of certain things about God is not intended as food for your intellect. All what you know about God and all that He gives you as knowledge is given to you that it might work something in your life. That does not only refer to the knowledge that you acquire through Bible study. It also is related to the experiences which you obtain in your faith life. Paul refers to the latter. He knew that all that happened to him, and about which he speaks in the previous verses, was used by God to achieve the one purpose, namely “*deliverance*” or salvation.

The salvation here of course is not the salvation through faith (Eph 2:8). He was already in possession of it. He lived consciously of the fact that all things were in the hands of God. Therefore he was sure that he would overcome all the circumstances, safe and unharmed.

Yes, to a certain extent the tide of circumstances had already carried him towards the goal, and now he is sure of reaching it. He saw that God used circumstances as means of transport to bring

him to the place where He wanted him to be. Paul saw all what happened to him not only in relation to the here and the now, and that is very valuable, but he saw everything from the perspective of the future. All the events in his life did not happen by chance but they were contributions to a final result. Is it not a great encouragement for you too to look at all what happens in your life from this perspective?

Paul not only rests in the idea that everything is in the hands of God, but he also knows that he is upheld by the “*prayers*” of the Philippians. God uses the prayers of His people to accomplish His goal. This is a great encouragement for you and me to pray much for others. We find a beautiful example in the book of *Acts* of the power of prayer (*Acts 12:5-17*). The means of God’s provision for His own is never exhausted. Paul knows that the Lord is sovereign over circumstances when others pray for him. In addition he has the inner “*provision [or sustaining] of the Spirit*”.

Every believer receives the Holy Spirit at his conversion and He lives in him (*Eph 1:13*). He is the Spirit of sonship through Whom the believer knows the Father, and he calls Him “*Abba Father*” (*Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6*), and he lives through the Spirit; he walks in the Spirit, and he is led by the Spirit and he brings forth fruit through the Spirit (*Gal 5:16,18,22,25*). But here Paul calls Him “*the Spirit of Jesus Christ*”. This is not an accidental remark. By so calling the Spirit, Paul relates the circumstances in his life to the earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then he also relates his life to the place where the Lord now is. “*Jesus*” is the name of the Lord in his humiliation. “*Christ*” is the name of the Lord in His exaltation.

The Lord’s earthly circumstances were much more difficult than those of Paul. But the Lord did everything in the power of the Holy Spirit (*Acts 10:38*). The Lord Jesus is no more on earth but is in heaven in His glory. His glorification is the proof of His victory over satan, sin and death. That is the reason why Paul did not live in depression; he lived through this victory. The full result of this victory will become visible at the salvation in the end. Paul was looking forward to see it.

V20. Paul was not depressed which is evident from the fact that he sought with a great desire to magnify Christ through his body. Christ is being magnified when He is brought closer to people. You can compare this to how a star is brought closer by means of a telescope. The star does not change its size. The significance is not the telescope. If you only look *at* the telescope and not *through* it you see nothing of the star. Even so Paul wants to diminish (even as we must diminish), that more is seen of Christ. You see something similar in John the baptist (*Jn 3:30*).

The “*expectation and hope*” Paul is full of, has two sides. On the one hand he did not want to recant any single aspect of what he always preached and translated into action in his life. His incarceration was not a punishment from God for a false proclamation or for a perverted life. On the contrary, and that is the other side, he wanted to see to it that, now also while in imprisonment, there existed no limitation to magnify Christ “*with all boldness*” in his body.

The means to bring Christ closer to people is our body. We share with others what we are through our body, and indeed through our speech and actions. When we consider ourselves important, we so speak and act that attention is drawn towards us. When we see Christ as important we so speak and act, that He would be seen.

Paul adds something more. He wants to magnify Christ “*whether by life or by death*”. That is not boasting. He wanted just *one* thing: the glorification of Christ. His life was all about this. He was for it even if he should die. When you consider your life and death from this perspective, what a rich life you must have then! John the baptist was approximately thirty years old, when he was beheaded for his faithful witness. Jim Elliot was not even thirty when he was killed along with four other young men by the Auca Indians when he wanted to reach them with the gospel. As a twenty-one year old student he wrote in his diary: ‘If my life perishes, Lord, then it belongs to you. I do not aspire for a long life but a full life, just like yours O, Lord Jesus.’

V21. I wish that you and I have such a desire in life. Such a desire is fulfilled in the life of people who desire to say like Paul, because they imitate him: *"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."* This is said by a man who could no longer serve his Lord publicly for a few years. That must have been a great ordeal for him. But the Lord Himself took the place of the work. For Paul life was not his ministry but Christ. For him life consisted only of Christ. Christ was the substance of his life, and the hallmark of his life. That is why for him to die is gain; for then he would be with Christ. In 2 *Corinthians 12:2-4* he writes how he had a foretaste of it.

V22. If Paul had to make a choice between life and death it would be difficult for him to choose. He sees two possibilities, not in the light of what it would cost but in the light of the advantages. The deciding factor in the choice was the well-being of the church. He came to this good decision because he lost sight of himself and his own interests, but exactly like Christ he only thought of the needs of the church.

It was clear to him that it meant difficulties if he remained alive. However he gladly took these difficulties, because life offered opportunities to magnify Christ in his body, to bring forth fruit in his ministry for Him. It poses the question to you as to if it is worth the trouble to remain alive. Do you live for hobbies, or for your favorite sport or for your strong challenging profession etc. or only for Christ?

V23. Paul was thrown back and forth in weighing both the possibilities. Both the possibilities had something very attractive, and both pressed him and fought for precedence. It was a great desire *"to depart and be with Christ"*. The word depart literally means release. This is a word which is used for the loosing of the ropes of a ship that it can depart. We hear Paul calling out: *'Untie the ropes that bind me to the earth; then I can be free and be with Him after whom my heart yearns.'* Upon reflection he says: It is far better to die. Beyond death there is nothing but paradise (*Lk 23:43*), where fellowship with Christ is enjoyed fully and undisturbed.

Have you ever heard about the so called soul sleep or if you would hear about it, this verse makes clear that it is not true at all. Soul sleep means that a believer after his death remains in an unconscious state. But being with Christ denotes a full and conscious fellowship with Christ. Any idea of soul sleep is excluded here (*Rev 6:9-10*).

V24. Paul says what he prefers, but his choice is that he wants “*to live [on] in the flesh*”. That of course means that he wants to live in his body – that is to remain alive. In weighing his options he gave greater weight to the necessity of service to others.

You see the true servant in Paul. He thinks on what is necessary and useful for others and does not give priority to his own desire. This is something that you and I certainly can learn from him.

Now read Philippians 1:19-24 again.

Reflection: What would guide you when you stand before certain choices?

Conduct Worthy Of the Gospel | *verses 25-30*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again. 27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; 28 in no way alarmed by [your] opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that [too], from God. 29 For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, 30 experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear [to be] in me.

V25. The love of Christ for the church was the deciding factor for Paul. If he remained alive it was good for the church and therefore he would remain alive. When you have Christ and His interests in your mind you will know peace and tranquility. How can one look after the interests of Christ? It is by looking after the interests of the church.

Paul's mind is at rest. His trust in God only became still stronger through these exercises. He has a certainty to remain with his beloved Philippians. The result is that he can help them further in the way of faith. This again shows that they in turn can live their faith with even more joy.

Faith is not a statistical or a doctrinal matter, or any other boring or miserable matter. Faith is dynamic; it sets people in motion. The objective is that you grow in faith. When faith increases, and when your knowledge of Him and what you believe increase, your joy will also increase. From the beginning faith and joy belonged to each other (*Acts 16:34*) as sorrow and repentance go together (*2Cor 7:10*). Show that you are a happy Christian!

V26. Paul longs to be back with the Philippians. Not to receive all sorts of thank you sayings from them. Also not to be admired for his special experiences. No, he would gladly contribute to the glory of Christ Jesus. The progress achieved on the way of faith and the great joy his ministry worked out should not redound to his honor but to the glory of Christ. Again and again we see how the servant pales into insignificance in order to make room for the One Whom his heart is filled with. I wish this is so with everyone who does a service to you and also with you when you do a service to another. Every service has value or worth only when it increases the honor of Christ.

V27. With *verse 27* begins a new passage in this letter which goes till *chapter 2:11*. Until now he wrote about his personal attitude toward the Philippians, what they meant for him and what he meant for them. Now he moves to another point, and that is really how the church stands in relation to Christ. Paul focuses his attention to the practical condition of the believers, their walk, their behavior, and on what the world would see in them.

Here he has two things in his mind. First they should stand firm in one spirit and secondly they should not be terrified in anything by their opponents. These two factors have an interaction: when they are in one spirit, they will have the strength to fight the enemy. *Verse 27* is a rich verse. It begins with 'walk' and ends with 'fight', and spirit and mind stand in between.

First he speaks to them about their "*conduct*" which should be "*worthy of the gospel of Christ*". That means that they should lead a life that befits the dignity of the gospel. When we say that we believe the gospel and at the same time so live as the world does then we blemish the gospel. Then we are not worthy representatives of the gospel.

The word 'conduct' is related to the word citizenship (*Phil 3:20*). We can compare it well with the position of the residents of Philippi. The city of Philippi was a colony, an outpost of Rome. The city was in an area far away from Rome, but it was governed by the laws of Rome.

Applying this, we can say that we are an outpost of heaven on earth, a piece of heaven on the earth. We are surrounded by enemies. In this strange world we have to uphold the honor of heaven, the place where we are really at home. Our conversation, our approach, and our whole behavior must be in agreement with the worthiness of heaven where we are at home. We have become citizens of heaven through the gospel, and there we are at home. Our task is to walk and behave correspondingly with that place.

Paul lays great emphasis on the significance of a worthy walk. On the one hand he stresses that their walk must be completely detached from his person. Whether he is with them or not, that is beside the point. They all should strive together in practice. On the other hand he expresses his deep compassion for them and his personal commitment to this matter. He would like to see in them or hear of them striving side by side.

It is all about standing together. How can they do that? When they all have the same conviction and the same goal to pursue. The onslaught here is directed against the unity of Christians. That is why the call is to stand together firmly. Conflicting interests defuses the energy. Mutual interests bind together. That means to be "*in one spirit*". Sometimes you can have the same conviction, but you may not want to stand up for that conviction. That is why it is important that we also fight together "*with one mind*" (cp. Acts 4:32). This is lacking sometimes even among very committed people.

We can take up a fight when we are inspired and convinced of the matter that we stand for. The commitment in this fight is no less than the "*faith of the gospel*". Jude calls for a fight for the faith (Jude :3). He means that with the absolutes which God has given to us in His word we must stand against the attacks of the enemy. Paul says that all what the Person of Jesus Christ is must be shown to the world. That provokes hostility and we must unite with Him against it. We have accepted Him, and when we are consistent in following Him, we partake of what was done to Him.

V28. When you fight together, the enemy will attempt to intimidate you. He will use all means to terrify you. The word “alarmed” reminds us of a horse which when frightened refuses to move on. The devil can take up the form of “a roaring lion” (1Pet 5:8). He can show up his wide open mouth in many different ways. But when your confidence remains fixed on the Lord he can do you no harm. The Lord has overcome the world (Jn 16:33) and rendered the devil powerless (Heb 2:14). And if you resist the enemy this way he will have to admit his impotence.

This acknowledgement at the same time is the clear “*sign of destruction*”. The proof of destruction of the enemy lies in the fact that we are not terrified by him. Despite the world’s power at his disposal the enemy is powerless against the power of God. You need not fear however strong the opponents are. That does not mean that we should underestimate the power of the enemy. Never underestimate his power (Jude :9).

For the believer resistance from the world is always proof of his salvation. That seems to be a strange argument. To understand this we must bear in mind that we live in a world which is not yet openly ruled by Christ. For instance you can ask why committed Christians should suffer. When things go well with the opponents, and when they even have a say, is it not proof that God is on their side? It is quite the opposite. In 2 *Thessalonians* 1:4-7 you get the same proof. You read that the believers are now oppressed, but when the Lord Jesus reigns, they will rule with Him. Today’s sufferings are proof that God is on the side of the believers.

V29. However, struggle and suffering, resistance and opposition are not absolute proofs that you are on the right side. You may know that and it could give some consolation and you may consider it an inevitable evil from which unfortunately you cannot escape. But that is below the measure of faith you have. Suffering for Christ however strange that might sound is a privilege. To believe in Him is certainly a great privilege, and your experience too must affirm it. But in addition to the privilege of believing in Christ, to suffer for Him is an equally great privilege (*Acts* 5:41;

1Pet 4:13). When we do not know this suffering, we must ask ourselves, if we live Godly (*see 2Tim 3:12*).

This is all about suffering for His sake. This is a suffering that is your portion in this world, when you have chosen to be on the side of the rejected Lord and have chosen to walk in fellowship with Him. You will experience this suffering when you look at the world as a terrain where you have nothing to seek and nothing to lose. Are you ready for it?

V30. What Paul wrote to the Philippians was not the jargon of a room. He knew what trouble they had. They had seen that struggle in him when he was with them for the first time (*Acts 16:22*). Now when Epaphroditus read out this letter and explained it they heard of his struggle in the Roman imprisonment. Paul connects with the Philippians in their struggle. This is genuine brotherly fellowship. He wants them to know that he is one with them. This is the only thing that can win hearts. They were physically separated by distance, and they were intimately connected to each other through the hearts.

Now read Philippians 1:25-30 again.

Reflection: How can you conduct worthy of the gospel?

Philippians 2

Bring the Missing In Order | verses 1-5

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

1 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not [merely] look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ...

Introduction. Chapters 2 and 3 are the heart of this letter. They belong together. In *chapter 2* Paul presents the life of the Lord Jesus on the earth as He was in those days. In *chapter 3* he shows the Lord Jesus in heaven as He is there now.

In *chapter 2* he draws the attention of the Philippians (and ours) to the mind of the Lord. In this chapter we are also given examples of men who had the mind of Christ. The examples are Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

Why is the mind of Christ so emphasized here? It is because certain things were not quite in order with the Philippians. Paul wanted to guide them there. This is the real love which is not blind to the imperfections in others. Genuine love goes further in which it is not only grateful for the friendship and help received but it is also ready to point out what could be better. Genuine love also knows in what way these imperfections must be pointed out. If it is done in the wrong ways and means people will be discouraged. The admonition will not reach. Paul links it with what they

have already done well. That is an important starting point when you want to admonish or encourage anyone.

V1. In *verses 2-4* there are certain areas which the Philippians could obviously improve upon. But Paul does not begin with that. He starts in an exceptional way. You should know that the word “*if*” in the beginning of *verse 1*, shows not a possibility but a certainty. We can understand and read this as ‘because’. Paul had experienced the compassion of the Philippians. He had experienced consolation, comfort and fellowship. He had felt their affection and mercy. That was expressed in the gift they had sent him. What a joy it had given him! He appreciated that a lot.

The way the Philippians expressed their solidarity with Paul showed much of God and Christ. Paul did not simply receive ‘encouragement’, but “*encouragement in Christ*”. The Philippians did that in such a way that Christ became more precious to him. He also did not simply receive ‘consolation’, but he felt God’s “*consolation of love*”. The ‘fellowship’ he enjoyed was not human sympathy but it was the “*fellowship of the Spirit*”.

The triune God was revealed to Paul through what the Philippians did. There he saw their inner feelings. These feelings were the feelings of the Lord Himself of which He was full of (*Jam 5:11*). Is this also your desire for the needy brothers and sisters?

V2. Against the background of all that they had done for him and meant for him he exhorts them now in a loving way. All the fine feelings they had for him in their hearts made him happy. They can, however, make him even more joyful and happier. There is something missing in them still. Sure he delights in their love for him. What he wants more is that they had this love one for another. If they proved this, his joy would be complete.

He looks for a way that makes their heart willing to resolve the disagreement that arose during his absence. Please note that he does not blame them for their disunity. In the relationship Paul had with the Philippians it was not appropriate to blame them. He expresses his love for them and his appreciation of their love

for him. He exhorts them in such a way that would make clear that their interests are the issue here.

You see that exhortations are always needed. You see them in every letter, and even in this which is addressed to the church in which at first glance everything seems to be alright. There could be much appreciation, but it could always be better; it is never perfect. Exhortation should make us alert against self-sufficiency. It can arise suddenly, when we discover, that certain wrong things are not among us, which we find elsewhere. Then the danger is when we think that exhortation is not necessary.

The first thing was that they were not *“of the same mind”*, which does not mean that all should have the same thinking. It means that their minds are in the same direction, and that there are no conflicting interests. All their minds and interests are fixed on the Person of Christ.

That is like what we read in *1 Corinthians 1:10*, *“speak the same thing”*. That does not mean that all speak the same words, but all speak of the one Person: Christ. But each one does it in his own way. One could say that in *1 Corinthians 1* it is all about the confession with the mouth and here in *Philippians* it is about what is in the heart. Here it goes deeper, it goes to the source. Every believer who belongs to a fellowship of believers must strive to glorify Christ. Otherwise there arises disagreement.

Then we have no more *“the same love”*. If Christ is not the object of your heart, your love will turn towards other things. The gap in the believers' fellowship widens. You can see this in the lack of unanimity. Harmony simply disappears. Each goes more and more his own way and is increasingly busy with his own things. No one thinks of the one thing, that is Christ, any more. To be like-minded means to have the same thoughts and feelings. The one thing means the object on which the believers unanimously direct their thoughts and about which they have the same thoughts and feelings.

V3. When Christ is not any more the Center in the life of the believers, easily factions arise. Own interests and own honor begin to play their roles. Everyone speaks and works for his own position and thereby seeks the recognition of others. Such efforts are vain, empty and meaningless. The fame one seeks in this way passes away. That is the kind of fame of the world champions. Short-time recognition and momentary fame recede into the dust of oblivion. The highest glory the believer has is when he is praised by the Lord.

To earn this fame you must learn to be humble. Humility is a rare virtue. How rare, you see this in debates and conflicts among politicians, even in normal, daily contacts. Often people attempt to decry others to sell themselves as the best. This tendency is common among us all. Real humility is found only in the presence of God. We must learn to be humble. We can learn it from the Lord Jesus (*Mt 11:29*). Only in His presence we learn to esteem others better than ourselves.

In His presence we see who we are ourselves and what others are for Him. It is about practical Christian life, and that will be seen best where Christ is the most visible. We can know others by their outward expression and we know ourselves what we are in our hearts. We see how others show love, and others are peacemakers. We see that it is lacking in us. Should we not then esteem others? It is not about the gift that someone else has, but the good things you notice. Paul assumes that you have an eye for it.

The other is the one who is different from you. He has received other things from God and has been called for something different than you. You are therefore urged to esteem the other for that, even with more respect than you have for yourself, so that you can at the same time efface your own interests.

V4. Paul goes a step further. He says that you should not only esteem others but that you also should see their interests and look out for them. In other words he means that it is expected of you that you commit yourself to what others need so that they can live better as Christians and also become more similar to the Lord

Jesus. To see the others so and consider them accordingly is only possible when you look on the Lord Jesus Christ. Then only you can seek and see the interests of others.

V5. Therefore Paul wants to present Jesus Christ to you. He does that – of course inspired by the Holy Spirit – in an impressive way. Here you have to bear in mind that all the glories of the Lord Jesus Paul speaks about is given for our admonition. The Lord desires that we have the same attitude or mind as He had. This mind must be the basis for all your thoughts and actions.

All that is said about the Lord Jesus Christ here can bring you down to worship. Often that is the result when He is so presented to you. Nevertheless this is not primarily intended here. The intention is that with every step you see Him do, you ask, what His mind was, as He did it when He was on the earth; you shall then compare it with your own mind.

The mind of Christ will never become yours if you take the law as the standard. Only the example of the Lord Jesus leads to the desired goal. God presents to us a Person Who has all the good pleasure of His heart, so that He can find what in our life speaks of Him.

Now read Philippians 2:1-5 again.

Reflection: What would you like to improve in others and how will you achieve that?

The Mind of the Lord Jesus | verses 6-8

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

..., 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, [and] being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

V6. You see the mind of the Lord Jesus in these verses and it deserves your full attention. We must take up this mind and make it our own. Then we will be able to do what is said in the previous verses. And then we can solve all our conflicts and continue to live in unity.

The mind of the Lord is expressed in His humiliation. Every detail of His way down was a humiliation for Him. He could not have started higher and could not end deeper. Every step of His humiliation, he did entirely voluntarily. But He didn't do every step downwards to show how very much He humbled Himself. What He did was constantly present in his life on the earth. You see the meaning of the word emptied, or 'made Himself of no reputation'. That means to relinquish His heavenly status. He emptied Himself of all that He possessed as God. He used nothing of it for His own interests.

When He came to the earth there was no sign of His Divine glory (*Isa 53:3*). His heart was filled with the wonderful mind described here. His whole existence on this earth was filled with this reality. Every word and action came out of it. Sometimes it is possible to see such attitude in a believer. But to what extent are we filled with it?

The description begins with the fact that He was "*in the form of God*". This makes it clear that He was truly God. He also remained God when He became Man; for God cannot cease to be

God. Nevertheless, God has the right and the possibility to reveal Himself in a way that is appropriate for the circumstances. His humiliation is proof that He is God, because only God has the sovereign right to conceal His absolute Deity in this way. He did that and it was the result of His love. He remained in the form of God even when He was on the earth. He did not relinquish His Deity but all his rights and privileges, which He could have claimed while on the earth. Where He shows His Divine power, that never happens for Himself, but always for others, and never independent of God.

Because He was God, it meant no robbery to Him to consider being equal with God. He did not lay claim to what not belonged to Himself. The Lord Jesus was God and He was God the eternal Son. He had pre-existence with the Father before the world was (*Jn 1:1; 17:5*). He was with the Father before the world was. He did not consider what He was from eternity as robbery in terms of profit. Long ago the serpent lured Adam to be equal with God. Adam was not and therefore he attempted to rob what he had not. The last Adam, the Lord Jesus, was God. He did not consider it robbery, but He emptied Himself. The Greek word for robbery means not only something that can be stolen, but it also means something that is precious which one does not easily give up. That precious thing, His Deity, He gave up outwardly, for He wanted to be born in *“the likeness of men”*.

V7. He had to partake of His own creation and minister as a Bond-servant in His own creation. Can one imagine a greater contrast? He was the Ruler but He became the Bond-servant. He, Who gave orders, received them now Himself. Is it not one of the biggest problems for you and me to give up our rights and serve another? The Lord Jesus did that. He effaced Himself fully. He is our example and we can learn it only from Him.

It is also very important to see how His being a Bond-servant is intertwined fully with His being a Man. He could have first come to the earth as human being and then later He could have decided to be a bond-servant. But He did not do that. Exactly as He was and is in the form of God, indicating His essential and veritable

Deity, He took upon Himself the form of a Bond-servant. He did not wear the clothing of a bond-servant and played the *role* of a bond-servant. He did *not pretend* Himself to be a bond-servant. No. He was essentially and truly a Bond-servant, both inwardly and outwardly. The essence of His nature was obedience, the very character that makes a bond-servant.

It goes even further: He always remains a Bond-servant (*Lk 12:37*), just as this perfect Person always will remain Man. He did not take up the form of God because He *was* God; but He took the form of a bondservant because that is what He *became*. The mind of serving and being a Bond-servant is very beautifully portrayed in the foot-washing in *John 13* (see also *Lk 22:27*). Once again: He is our Example. Just as He came to us as a Bond-servant in the servant's clothing we also should act towards one another in readiness to serve one another in humility (*1Pet 5:5*). We do not quickly wear the clothing of a servant. It does not suit us. We do not feel comfortable in it. Or do we?

V8. The emphasis here is on the Lord Jesus as Man. He was found in appearance as a man. That He was outwardly "*found in appearance as a man*", does not refer primarily to what other people found in Him, but what God found in Him. God saw in the Lord Jesus a Man as He wished to see him. He was full of joy about all that was visible in Him from the outside – every action, every word, and His whole behavior. Therefore He gave His testimony from heaven: "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased*" (*Mt 3:17*).

He was the Man who befitted everything what God intended man to be. He was truly Man and not God in a human shell. He not only looked like a man, but He was fully in the likeness of him (*Rom 8:3*) yet without sin (*Heb 4:15*). People could see and hear Him, and they could understand what He said and did. He was (and still is) truly Man with a human spirit, a human soul, and a human body.

When He was on the earth, He was not conspicuous among men. He did not run around with a halo so that everyone could see

Him as Someone special. When He was taken into custody, Judas had to show the enemies in a particular way Whom to capture (*Mt 26:48*). People around Him saw that He was tired, hungry, and thirsty. He knew all human weaknesses.

As a Man He was indeed born in a quite unique way – He was truly Man by His birth from Mary – but He was not begotten by a sinful father; He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (*Mt 1:20; Lk 1:35*). That did not change His complete and voluntary humiliation, a humiliation that had not yet reached its end. Is it not difficult for us to go our way unobtrusively? He could have surrounded Himself with honor when He entered His creation. He could have surrounded Himself during His life time on earth with all what impressed people around him. Yet He decided to begin His life on the earth in a despised and secluded spot, Nazareth, in an insignificant family.

To become Man was one step of humiliation for Him and to become Bond-servant is another step of humiliation. But His humiliation as Man and Bond-servant was not enough. He could stoop even lower. So He went deeper. He could have returned to His Father after a finished service. He did not need to die. But He became obedient unto death, yes, even the death on the cross. He made Himself completely nothing. He thought only of others.

He, Who did not know obedience, was obedient unto death. The Lord Jesus did not know obedience. In heaven He was not familiar with it. There He gave commands to angels and they obeyed Him (*Heb 1:7*). For the Lord Jesus learning obedience was something different from how we learn it. By nature we are disobedient (*Eph 5:6*). We learn obedience by correction. It was not so with Him. He was never needed to be corrected in anything. With Him there was no insubordination; and there was nothing that was not subordinate.

For Him to learn to be obedient meant to take up a position in which He had to obey. He never was in a position that demanded obedience. He learned that when He came to the earth (*Heb 5:8*).

His obedience culminated in His death. His death was the ultimate obedience, the end point. Nothing more could come thereafter. But His humiliation could go still further and show how His obedience ended up unprecedented. It is by death on the cross, the most horrible and the most despicable way a man could die. Only a disobedient slave was sentenced to such a death. You cannot imagine a death that is more humiliating than this. The perfect Bond-servant died this death. Voluntarily and with no other desire than to be perfectly obedient He finished His race this way on this earth.

He always took the lowest place: with his birth in Bethlehem, with His dealings with people during His life time and finally even in his death. He allowed that those, whom He exclusively wanted to serve, brought Him to death by the most dishonorable way. He, Who was exalted so high, went through the way to the deepest humiliation. He relinquished all rights that were His own, in heaven as well as on the earth, to serve His enemies. He came down from great heights, voluntarily, driven by the love for His God and Father. Should not this great humility make you and me ready to make a relatively small step down to serve others? This is the mind which is proper for us.

Now read Philippians 2:6-8 again.

Reflection: Consider again the steps of humility, by which the Lord Jesus went down. Praise Him for that and ask Him to help you to follow His example in His mind.

The Exaltation of the Lord Jesus | *verses 9-11*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

V9. *"He who humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk 14:11b).* This is a universally applicable verse, but it is particularly appropriate to the Lord Jesus. You saw in the previous passage in what an impressive way the Lord Jesus humbled Himself. Here I would like to reiterate the great contrast between Him, Who is called *"the last Adam"* (1Cor 15:45) and the first Adam. The first Adam wanted to exalt himself by listening to satan who tricked Eve to believe that man would become like God (Gen 3:5). The result was shame, hiding themselves from God, and to be driven out of Paradise. What a humiliation! *"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled" (Lk 14:11a).*

And then we have not yet spoken about the circumstances in which obedience was put to the test. The first Adam was in ideal circumstances where he could be obedient. He saw the goodness of God all around him. The last Adam was in the most adverse circumstances which could lead Him to disobedience. All around Him He saw sin and the consequences of sin. The contrast you discover between the first and the last Adam magnifies your admiration for the Lord Jesus.

The greatest recognition comes from God. He saw with great pleasure the way of humiliation that the Lord Jesus went through voluntarily. He understood perfectly well all the feelings of His Son as He went that way. Everything in the Son was focused on the Father. Could God have answered in a way other than exalting Him above all, after this appalling humiliation?

The Lord Jesus humiliated Himself but He did not exalt Himself. This is another aspect that again augments His glory as Man. He never sought His own glory (*Jn 8:50*). The Father glorified His Son (*Jn 13:32*). He raised Him from the dead and gave Him a place of honor at His right hand and crowned Him *"because of the suffering of death ... with glory and honor"* (*Heb 2:9*).

It was impossible for God to leave Him in death. He deserved to be resurrected because He proved Himself perfect in everything. That is why He *"was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father"* (*Rom 6:4*). As Man the Lord Jesus is exalted to the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven by the righteous act of God. When the Lord Jesus became Man and came to the earth, God came down in His love. On the other hand the exaltation is not a matter of love but of righteousness. He is righteously entitled to the highest place of honor and majesty.

In conjunction with the highest place of honor above all, God also has *"given Him the name which is above every name"*. With this Name God shows His personal pleasure in the Man Jesus Christ. Paul says nothing about the exact meaning of this Name. Perhaps this name is the *"name ... which no one knows except Himself"* (*Rev 19:12*). That might be an appropriate reward for the one who overcomes (*Rev 2:7*). Possibly it is the name *"Lord"* in *verse 11*. It is not the name *Jesus*; for this name He already received at His birth (*Mt 1:21*). We are talking about the name which He received as the Man by exalted God.

Since no other information is given about the Name, the emphasis seems to be on the fact of naming i.e. on the meaning of the word name. In the scripture the name expresses the inner being of a person. Well, no one knows the Son except the Father (*Mt 11:27*). The name says something about the person. No one but God knows the nature of His Son who lived in perfect obedience to God on this earth while being also Himself God. That secret cannot be understood by people and it will remain hidden eternally.

It could be that the Name, which was given to Him by God, connects to that because He never before was as Man in heaven. Never before was there a man in heaven who received the highest place of honor and reputation as reward. Authority is also connected with His Name. Even when the Lord Jesus speaks about being “gathered together in My Name” (Mt 18:20) no name is mentioned. This term focuses our attention on the recognition of His authority. The Name that He received from God expresses that He is the One Who is exalted above all creatures and that He has authority over them. Another aspect is that the name has to do with the fame and reputation of a person. The Bible often speaks about men of renown or name (see Gen 6:4; Num 16:2).

V10. The name of the Lord Jesus will fill all the earth during the millennium (Psa 8:1,9). “At the name of Jesus” every knee bows one day. That is an added compensation that God gives to the Lord Jesus. When the name *Jesus* is used without the addition of, for example, Lord or Christ it is a reminder that the Lord Jesus was here on the earth. It is the name that is reminiscent of His humiliation.

As He was on the earth He was known as *Jesus* to His surroundings. He then was not honored. He was derided and abused, mocked and discarded, and finally murdered. But He will come back one day. Then it will not be again as a lowly man. No, then comes the Lord Jesus “from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2Thes 1:7-8). Then there is no more possibility to bow before Him voluntarily as it is still possible now.

In *Isaiah 45:21-23* we read that every knee shall bow before God, Yahweh. Here we read that every knee shall bow before the Lord Jesus. This is one of the proofs that the Lord Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, is the same Yahweh Who in the Old Testament chose Israel as His people. In *Isaiah 45* it refers only to every knee on the earth. Here in *Philippians 2* the sphere of homage is extended to heaven, and to the area under the earth. Not a single knee can escape this homage.

“Every knee” emphasizes that it is about every individual. Each person will personally and very consciously bow before Him. That means every high priest and scribe who saw in Him a rival, a threat to their own position among people. That is why they did not want Him and constantly sought after an opportunity to kill Him. Also Judas who betrayed Him will bow his knee before Him. Pilate will bow his knee before Him. He knew that the Lord Jesus was innocent and yet he handed Him over to be crucified.

Every man everywhere will bow before Him. *“In heaven”* every creature will do so with great assent and full of joy. His praises will ring through eternity. Also *“on earth”* everyone will honor Him, although in the millennium many people will do that hypocritically (*Psa 18:44*). In eternity, when God dwells among men, all on earth will declare the praises of the Lord Jesus. And also *“under the earth”* every living being will bow its knee before Him. All the unbelievers along with the devil and his henchmen and everyone present will bow before Him. They cannot do anything else but bow down, even if grudgingly, before the One Who once stood against all odds.

An example of forced worship is found in the book of *Esther*. A certain Haman is out to kill Mordecai who is a type or foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus, because Mordecai refuses to bow before him. When it is proved that Mordecai saved the life of the king, the king wants to honor him for that. God ensures that Haman is forced to do that (*Est 6*). In the same way God ensures that the Lord Jesus receives the honor He deserves for all that He has done.

V11. The bent knee of every creature shows the attitude of homage. But it does not stop with that. Also the tongue of every creature comes in motion. It will be said aloud that the once humbled Jesus is *“Lord”*. No one will doubt that He has all authority in His hands. Any doubt about it will then completely be disappeared.

For you who believe, it is already a reality that God has given Him *“all authority ... in heaven and on earth”* (*Mt 28:18*), although you see in the world around you everything is not yet in subjec-

tion under his feet (*Heb 2:8*). When you confess Him as Lord now, you are but an exception. But then this will be over. Then one hears no more an opposite voice. It is not because such a voice will be overruled but there is simply no such dissenting voice. *Every* knee and *every* tongue leaves no exception.

And this massive and general homage will be given to God the Father through Him. What the Lord Jesus has done and what God has done for Him will be to the glory of God the Father for all eternity. Do you still know the reason for this impressive Example? To show us what a mind the Lord Jesus had on the earth, a mind we must have too. When you see how God rewards and what its corresponding result is in eternity, does it not spur you on to make this mind your own? For me it does and undoubtedly it does for you also.

Now read Philippians 2:9-11 again.

Reflection: Say to God that you are in perfect agreement with the exaltation of the Lord Jesus.

Light Bearers | verses 12-16

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for [His] good pleasure. 14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing; 15 so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.

V12. In the preceding verses you saw the Lord Jesus. I think you should have felt just like me. When you see Him, you forget all and you are completely engrossed in Him. Now Paul brings you back to the reality of life. And that is the same reality of life the Lord Jesus lived in.

Therefore what Paul now says is connected with the previous. So he begins *verse 12* with “*therefore*”. He focuses on the believers in Philippi whom he calls “*my beloved*”, a beautiful and above all a true form of address. He does not do that to flatter them, but he stresses the deep love he has for them. They are the objects of his loving care. In his care for them he wants them to implement in practice what he told them about Christ.

The obedience of Christ served them as a model. Now they should follow. He appeals to this by pointing out to their obedience they had already shown when he was with them. When you remind someone of the good results he had already achieved he will be persuaded to give his best.

Perhaps for the Philippians it could have been relatively easy to be obedient to the Word of God when Paul was with them. He fought for them at that time. You may recognize that. When

someone supports your cause and is a good role model for you, it has an encouraging effect on you. If such a person is no longer there, then the danger is that you fall asleep. Paul is no longer with them. Now they must fight alone and “*work out*” their own “*salvation*”. They could no longer leave this to Paul. Now it is a matter of their own commitment to work out their salvation to the finish.

Salvation here and elsewhere in the letter is of the future. It refers to a situation where there are no more threats which can block our life of faith, and where there is no enemy to be feared. We have not reached this far as long as we are on the earth. To reach the destination safely you will have to use all your energy. The word work out is used for working in a field where the work is never finished. Weeds are always there to be pulled out; for instance condemning evil thoughts.

This working out must be done “*with fear and trembling*”. This makes us aware of the fact that this is not something you just do. You can feel powerless to confront the dangers which make the way so cumbersome.

Nevertheless it is your responsibility that you commit yourself to reach the goal safe and well. When you really live with the Lord and live for Him, then that will be your intense desire. You will also find that you are not able to deal with the dangers that threaten your life. You fear and tremble when you balance the circumstances through which you are going, against your own strength.

V13. But then you get a great encouragement. All is proof that God works in you. You are not left to yourself and you are not dependent on your own strength. For the Philippians the apostle was not there any longer but God was very much there (*Acts 20:32*). He remained with them and it was He who worked in them. It is His pleasure to bring people to the place of salvation with Himself. He gives them the necessary strength to reach the goal (*cp. Heb 13:21*).

So here you see a close connection between your own responsibility and the work of God. How it works exactly cannot be explained. One thing is certain. When you do what God wants you to do He gives you the power to accomplish it. That applies to any situation you go through.

V14. A major obstacle on the way to final salvation, Paul says, is “*grumbling or disputing*”. The history of the Israelites, the earthly people of God, gives a few examples of these utterances during their wilderness journey (1Cor 10:10; Exo 14:11; 15:24; 16:2; 17:3 Num 14:2 16:11). This evil also reflected itself in the very first days of the church (Acts 6:1). It lies dormant in all of us. It is the feeling of dissatisfaction and discrimination as if you are the only one who always undeservedly received the blow. You think that you always have to do the least of the jobs and when you do something good you do not get the recognition that you deserve.

The step from complaining to disputing is taken quickly. You cannot accept anything unless the matter is first brought to the discussion table and consensus reached with the majority. Often this gives rise to dissensions and dissatisfaction as the mind of the Lord is given the back seat and the like mind with one another vanishes completely.

Since Paul so clearly sees through, he urges to do “*all things without grumbling or disputing*”. Therefore not only in things in which you see the benefits and receive the necessary recognition, but in *all things*, and in this context, all that is conducive to the same mind. Remember the example of the Lord Jesus.

V15. When there is no room for grumbling and disputing, then the way is clear for all positive expressions which are mentioned below, and which describe exactly what Christ Himself showed. So the church – every individual member – should always act whatever be the circumstances.

“*Blameless*” means that there is nothing in your life which someone can point his finger at. This refers to the outer. “*Innocent*” means unmixed, and that refers to the inner character where there

is only one desire and not a desire to want from both sides. You can see these two features clearly in the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless here the matter is not about Him but about you.

Paul continues. He says to the Philippians – and thus also to you and me – that they are “*children of God above reproach*”. Above reproach doesn’t mean that no one can ever say anything wrong about you. But what is the exact reason? Here you are spoken to as a child of God. You are a child of God because you are born of Him. Therefore you have His nature (2Pet 1:4). The nature of God is light and love (1Jn 1:5; 4:8,16). This must be visible in your life. When something of your old nature is visible, then you are no longer without fault. Then people have something to point at, and God also has something to point at.

In your old life you were not distinguished from a “*crooked and perverse generation*”. You were part of a generation, a kind of people, who seduce others to bad deeds. Now you no longer belong to it. But you stand in the midst of it. It is now God’s intention that you shine as a light in the midst of these people. As a child of God you are a light bearer in a world which is shrouded in darkness and is excluded from any divine light.

The world has rejected the true light (Jn 1:5). God in His mercy has not taken away all the light from the world. Now we, the children of God, are “*the light of the world*” (Mt 5:14).

V16. And how can people around you perceive the light? That is when you present “*the word of life*”, that means when you show Christ in your life (1Jn 1:1-2). In John 1:4 you also do find that special combination of light and life.

After dealing with the relationship of the Philippians with one another, Paul is now talking about their behavior in the world. You see how close one is linked to the other. When the believers disagree, it is something that does not go unnoticed in the world. We must be ashamed of any disunity. To prevent disunity it indeed is necessary to go to the lowest possible level to accommodate the other person. The need for separation from believers

in the case of sin is not the issue here. This is clearly spoken of in other letters. But in this case it is about my mind which must be undisputed as for God, as for fellow believers and as for the world.

Paul connects the practice of the Philippians with the responsibility he has to give an account before the judgment seat of Christ. It took him a lot to bring Christ to the Philippians and to keep them in the way of faith. He did “run” for it. Paul makes reference to the discipline of the Olympic Games. The participants submitted to a ten month of strict abstinence and hard training.

He did “toil” for them. The word means that he exerted himself physically and mentally and so he was severely fatigued. It cannot be true that all this was “in vain”. Should it be so that the Philippians should abandon? This persuasive appeal of a man who is so committed to them cannot remain unanswered. Besides harm to their own soul and dishonor to the Lord Jesus, it would mean a terrible ingratitude to this man as they owed him so much.

Now read Philippians 2:12-16 again.

Reflection: What leads you to grumbling quickly and how well are you equipped against it?

Paul Sets Aside His Own Interests | verses 17-24

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

17 But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. 18 You too, [I urge you], rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me. 19 But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. 20 For I have no one [else] of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. 21 For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. 22 But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child [serving] his father. 23 Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things [go] with me; 24 and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly.

V17. The last section ended with the fame which Paul wanted to have through the Philippians' way of life. You might think: Does not Paul seek a bit of his own interests? But we are freed from this thought in the first verse of this passage. In this he speaks about two kinds of offerings. First he calls himself "*a drink offering*" and then he speaks about the "*sacrifice*" of the faith of the Philippians.

In order to understand what he means you must know something of the offerings in the Old Testament. The people of Israel were acquainted with a wide range of sacrificial offerings. The book of *Leviticus* is largely devoted to those offerings which the people could bring and in some cases must bring. Offerings are mentioned frequently also in other books of the Bible. Offerings were in different forms. People could offer different kinds of animals. People could also sacrifice something other than an animal. For instance a drink offering, with which Paul compares himself, is an offering that is made of wine.

The wine is poured on the burnt (or main) offering (*Num 15:1-12*). It was an addition but at the same time a very valuable offer-

ing. Wine is a symbol of joy (*Jdg 9:13*). All offerings point towards the Lord Jesus. The drink offering is reminiscent of the joy with which the Lord Jesus offered Himself. God desires that we also think of that when we bring Him offerings. Bringing offerings to God means we tell Him how much we admire the Lord Jesus.

Paul understood this well. He applies this even to his own life. He wanted to be a drink offering. Through his death he wanted to give God an additional reason to rejoice over and above the joy which He already enjoyed through the offering of the Philippians (*Phil 2:17*). It was also a joy for Paul when he thought that he had given his whole life for others – that included also the Philippians – to bring them to God as an offering (*Rom 15:16*).

The apostle sees their complete faith and service as a sacrifice for God. They presented their bodies a living sacrifice (*Rom 12:1*). This for him is the main offering. Their faith was shown in the fact that they sacrificed themselves and served God and others. Paul values this more than his life. His martyrdom would be poured out as a much smaller offering on their faith (*2Tim 4:6*).

Paul was not seeking his own glory. His work would be a kind of supplement to that of the Philippians. He was content with that position. He could so speak because he did not think of his own interest but only of that of the others (*see verse 4*). He followed the example of the Lord Jesus which he had presented to them earlier. In this way he himself became a role model for the Philippians.

When Paul thinks of how they practice their faith, which means that they present their life as an offering to God, his heart overflows with joy. That is the essence of his life. He longs to see these results in them to whom he brought the gospel and to whom he had given instruction. Then God is honored and He is pleased with them. Then there is also an abundance of joy in him when he thinks of his death. He does everything to ensure that Christ is visible in the lives of believers to the joy of God. He takes part in this joy.

V18. He calls the Philippians to rejoice with him. Their faith and his are one. Their common ministry was to the good pleasure of God to Whom they brought this offering. In your life if you would see to it that your faith is coupled with the faith of others and the good mutual effects it has, you rise beyond your circumstances. You will be like Paul, a man who had every reason to be sad, but rejoices himself and calls others to rejoice.

Paul will not say that a believer must be constantly in jubilant mood. A short time later he speaks about sorrow upon sorrow (*verse 27*). His joy therefore was not an extravagant spiritual emotion. He could be happy and sad at the same time (*2Cor 6:10*). When he saw the circumstances he was sorrowful. When he saw the Lord he was happy. Circumstances might change but the Lord does not change. That is why his heart was always joyful and it was not necessary for him to sink in sorrow.

V19. Following the examples of dedication you saw in the Lord Jesus and Paul, there are two more role models for such a dedication: Timothy and Epaphroditus. The first one is Timothy. Paul wants to send him to the Philippians. There you see that his concern for the Philippians did not stop, although he had committed them to the care of God. The one does not exclude the other. You should in love and faith hand over to God everything that preoccupies you. This does not mean that you do not realize your love and faith in practice.

The sending of Timothy was not an impulsive act that stood in contrast to the fact that he had handed over everything to God. That is why it is said expressly "*I hope in the Lord Jesus*". He did it 'in the Lord Jesus', in fellowship with Him and in subordination to Him. He was convinced that he had the approval of God.

The sending of Timothy is a further evidence of the selflessness of the apostle. How he would have loved to have kept Timothy with himself. He however thought not of himself but of the believers and their needs. At the same time Timothy could report back to Paul as to how things went with the Philippians. He has great interest in them.

Genuine interest is not satisfied with a general impression of the situation, even though there are no reasons for concern. Genuine interest is not transient but profound and rejoices to know the specialties of those whom they love. Paul was not concerned that he would have to hear negative reports, for he knew them too well. But it would be good to his mind if he learned of all their circumstances.

V20-21. In the further explanation with regard to the mission of Timothy there sounds a minor tone. In explaining the mission of his beloved child he says that there was no one like-minded as he was. The choice was limited to a single person. All others who could be eventually sent to Philippi did not have the spiritual maturity for this purpose.

Timothy was genuinely interested in welfare, but not in his own welfare, but of those of others. In this he was like the Lord Jesus (*verses 3-4*) and also like Paul (*2Cor 12:14*). The Philippians would be benefitted when Timothy is sent to them. If you read closely, you will understand how his interests for the Philippians were equivalent to the interests he had for Jesus Christ. If we seek after the interest of others then we seek after the interest of Christ (*cp. Mt 25:40*). Is this not a wonderful motive to work for the interests of others?

V22. Timothy was not unknown to the Philippians. They did not know him from a distance. They knew that he was a man with the necessary experiences. He was tested along with Paul in the service of the gospel. Certainly it is not a holiday tour to work somewhere along with Paul. Many young people began a work for the Lord enthusiastically, but they did not think of the costs and therefore after a short or long time they threw in the towel.

But not Timothy. This was due to the close relationship he had with Paul. It is wonderful to see a harmonious relationship of an older with a younger believer. They had not yet heard of a generation gap. And it cannot exist when the hearts of the older and the younger are filled with the mind of Christ.

The loyalty of Timothy was evident in his love for Paul. I think that even today it is easy to stand against the headwind and continue further if we have love for Paul. I mean love for the letters he has written, and that we assume the attitude of a child. A child is eager to learn and acts accordingly. A child does not argue and is also not impertinent. A father-child relationship shapes the child and gives content and power to the work that must be done.

Timothy's spiritual maturity was so developed that Paul could send him to Philippi. He could do the work independently. He was not only independent but he also did it in the same mind as Paul. When Timothy was with them, it was as though Paul himself was with them. He puts Timothy on par with himself.

V23-24. However Paul had a little reservation with regard to the sending of Timothy. He wanted to know a little more about his own circumstances. That is concerning his imprisonment. When that is clear he would send Timothy. He believes that God would give him also the opportunity to come to them as a follow-up of Timothy's coming to them. He tells them beforehand so that they could look forward with joy to the visit of their beloved Paul.

His heart yearns for them and he knows that their hearts are longing for him. When hearts are longing for each other, they lay it before the Lord and ask Him to fulfill this longing.

Now read Philippians 2:17-24 again.

Reflection: Where do you see in this passage that Paul is very similar to the Lord Jesus?

The Work of Christ | *verses 25-30*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

25 But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; 26 because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. 27 For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned [about you]. 29 Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; 30 because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

V25. From the love of Paul to the Philippians we can understand that soon Paul would send Timothy to them. However it could still take some time till Timothy actually departed. But there was someone else he could send in the meantime and that was Epaphroditus. Paul “*thought it necessary*” to send him. That is, he saw a clear reason, a need that must be satisfied. He mentions this a little later. First however he says something about Epaphroditus.

We know nothing about him more than what we hear in this letter, indeed in this passage and in *chapter 4:18*. From the last verse we understand that the Philippians had sent their gift to Paul through Epaphroditus. His name means lovely or attractive. This name fits in well with the picture that we get of him.

The designations that Paul gives of him speak of the picture of a person who is a Christian in all areas of his life. He radiated that in the family circle of God (“*brother*”) and he also beamed it in the service of the Lord in the world (“*fellow worker*”) and also in the fight that a faithful and dedicated proclamation of the gospel brings with it (“*fellow soldier*”). He was also a man who main-

tained contacts between a local church and a servant somewhere else.

Paul was not a man who made cheap compliments. What he said of Epaphroditus showed what kind of man he was. From the examples mentioned above perhaps you could think: 'I cannot compare myself with all these people. First of all I cannot compare with the Lord Jesus; for He excels everyone and in everything; I cannot also compare with Paul; for he was such a gifted man with a special place; and really I cannot compare myself with Timothy; for he had the great privilege of being the closest to Paul to learn from him what it was to live a real Christian life.'

But now the person under discussion is Epaphroditus. He was someone like you and me and that means what can be said of him, can also be said of us. Epaphroditus is held as a mirror. If you think that you cannot reach up to the standard of the earlier examples (although they were given for your orientation) you can very well emulate the example of Epaphroditus.

In any case the first thing that is said of him is for you. You are a "*brother*" or a *sister* by the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, like all those who have the life of God through the same faith in the Lord Jesus. It is something great to know this fact. This means that you also must behave yourself accordingly. Is it not wonderful that you know you are one with the children of God, with this unique company which indeed is in the world but is not of the world?

Epaphroditus did not stop with this. He did not seclude himself as an escapist with a book in his hand on his easy chair to be amused by the tremendous blessings of being a brother. His eyes were open to see the needs among the believers and the workers of the Lord. He was also a fellow worker of Paul in the preaching of the gospel. Paul does not call him a worker but a "*fellow worker*". He worked not only by himself but he sought the fellowship of Paul in the work. He committed himself for the work of the Lord.

When necessary, if the work demanded it, he would fight and not step aside. For him the work of the Lord was not the execution of only all that was enjoyable. Whoever is working for the Lord will feel the resistance of satan in every way. It was so for Paul, and it was so for Epaphroditus, and it will be so for you if you want to abound in the work of the Lord (1Cor 15:58). Paul could begin something with such people. The Lord also can begin something today with such people. It is to be feared that such people are scarce. But this can be said of us if we emulate Paul's teachings, his life style and his ministry as written in the New Testament.

Still further Epaphroditus was also a "messenger". The church in Philippi sent him with a mission. He had accepted this mission. Nothing is said about his family situation. We do not know if he was married. In any case he had to leave behind everything that was familiar to him and take a long and dangerous journey in those days. But he did it because his brothers and sisters had asked him.

His mission was to take a gift on behalf of the Philippians and hand it over to Paul who was imprisoned in Rome. By doing this he was a "minister to" the "need" of Paul. By the word minister Paul conveys the idea that he accepted their gift as an offering. It is really nice to consider every material gift like this – as an offering, by means of which you express your appreciation for others.

V26. Then Paul gives another great testimony about Epaphroditus. Here the bond of love between Epaphroditus and the Philippians is expressed in a very beautiful way. Epaphroditus became sick and they in Philippi heard of it. Now Epaphroditus is worried about the impact of the news. He is so convinced of the love of his fellow believers that he is now worried about their worry about his illness. Therefore he wants them to know quickly about his condition. He also was someone who did not seek after his own interests but those of others.

V27. Paul does not mince words. Epaphroditus was really sick almost to death. Even Paul was seriously worried about it. Would he lose a valuable fellow worker, a man who lived entirely for the

Lord and for His people? Already such people are few and far between. This thought added to the many sorrows which he had had due to many other things which happened in the churches. He speaks even of “*sorrow upon sorrow*”. It was not a sorrow because of a benefit that he would lose by the death of Epaphroditus, but because of the service the churches would lose.

For Paul the restoration of Epaphroditus was a proof of God’s grace upon Epaphroditus, as well as upon himself. God had healed Epaphroditus, not Paul, although he could have done that (*Acts 19:11-12*). Even the greatest healer the church had ever known, left this matter up to God. He did not believe that disease always had to be fought as a consequence of sin. God had His intentions and Paul submitted to it (*cp. 2Tim 4:20*).

V28. So he knew what it meant to worry about Epaphroditus, and it was a great relief for him to know from experience that God works for good through the turn of events. The Philippians also should rejoice in this as soon as possible. That is why he urged Epaphroditus to hasten his journey to Philippi. That would make them happy, and Paul in turn will be less sad.

V29. He exhorted the Philippians to “*receive*” this man in a way that would be fitting for what he was meant for the Lord. It also should not be a fleeting show of honor. We often forget fast what someone did for the Lord. People like Epaphroditus should be considered as a great gift from God. They are rare but they are still found today. Still further: even you can be one or can become one like him. If you honor such people, it will be because their lives speak to you.

V30. I think, there arises a desire in you to live like them. Such a life is possible for you. That means not to love your life even unto death (*Rev 12:11*) in which you are fully committed to the work of Christ. Here you are looking for the welfare of your brothers. Brotherly love is ready to lay down the life for the brothers (*1Jn 3:16*).

So it was with Epaphroditus. Paul's words seem to indicate that his illness was in connection with his trip. He made this trip on behalf of the mission of the church in Philippi. He came to hand over the gift to Paul. In that he added what was still deficient in the service of the Philippians to Paul. To do that, Epaphroditus had risked and jeopardized his life (*Jdg 5:18*).

Your life is your most valuable possession. When you risk it, you mean that you dare to do something but you are unsure of its outcome. However you do it in view of the full benefit it can bring. The only motive that one undertakes such a venture is love (*1Jn 3:16; 1Thes 2:8*).

For a moment it seemed things did not go well with Epaphroditus. However through his recovery God had shown how much He had appreciated his dedication. Yes, it was an expression of the mind of Christ Who never sought Himself but was obedient unto death, yes, even unto death on the cross.

It looks as if something was still deficient in the service of the Philippians. What exactly that was is not clear. Paul does not reprove them for this. In a way that belongs to the heartwarming tone of this letter Paul says that the mission of Epaphroditus has completed that deficiency. We can learn much from this kind of exhortation.

Now read Philippians 2:25-30 again.

Reflection: Would you like to be someone like Epaphroditus? Why or why not? If yes, what is necessary for that in your case? (Do not hesitate to ask others for advice.)

Philippians 3

Confidence In the Flesh | verses 1-6

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

1 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. 2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; 3 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, 4 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: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

Introduction. Also in this chapter it is all about Christ. He is presented here as He is in the heavenly glory. There He is the source of power for the life of a Christian. When you look at His glory in faith, you will want to gain nothing but Him considering all other things as loss and rubbish.

Chapter 2 describes Christ in His humiliation as a model and the driving force for the true Christian spirit of self-sacrifice. *Chapter 3* is the answer to the question of how to get the mind of *chapter 2*. When you are filled with Him, you will always be like Him and that gives power for a life in humility.

V1. With the expression “*finally*” Paul goes on to another theme. Of course not essentially, but certainly there is a shift in the emphasis as I just pointed out. The joy remains the same because the object of joy does not change. Paul is not tired of asking the believers in Philippi to rejoice in the glorified Lord. He knows that

he is associated with them as brothers. He and they form a family. Together they should rejoice in Him as they are connected with one another by Him. Whoever rejoices in the Lord is kept from preoccupation with his self. The joy of the Lord gives strength to live for the glory of the Lord (*Neh 8:10*).

Some things must be simply said repeatedly. Paul does not say that sighing with the undertone: 'When will you learn it at last?' No, he repeats his message gladly knowing how important it is. He knows how forgetful people are, even the believers.

It is not clear what precisely is meant by "*same things*". It could refer to the joy but it could also be meant as a warning to the adversaries. He already dealt with it in *chapter 1:15*. In the following verses he talks at length about it. When it is about joy Paul however does not present a new method in order to make faith more cheerful. When it is about the adversaries he does not seek to join them to make a compromise.

His teaching is the same. Nothing disturbs him and that gives the assurance to the Philippians that they are on the right track. When views are constantly changed it produces a lot of uncertainty and one might even say a feeling of insecurity. Teachers who once interpreted the Word of God clearly, now say, that they do not know all things so sure any more. Don't let them throw you off the track. The Word of God is exactly the same and sure today as it was in the past centuries.

V2. "*Beware*" (Paul uses this word three times) of people who want to undermine the faith and separate believers from Christ and from the joy in Him. They have always existed. Here it is mentioned about such categories of people. Paul does not use flattering terminologies. He calls them "*dogs*", who are people with a corrupted way of life, just like the unclean Gentiles. He also calls them "*evil workers*", people who introduce evil things under the guise of working for Christ. He speaks of "*false circumcision*". This is a word-play on circumcision by which he means, by reintroducing the law, people mutilate what Christ accomplished. When this happens even the Christian witness is mutilated.

The *letter to the Galatians* is a huge argumentation against this undermining of the perfect work of Christ on the cross. There we read about the reintroduction of all sorts of practices of the law in the Christian church, including the circumcision. That circumcision Paul calls mutilation. Here Paul is very pungent. It is because he sees very clearly that his beloved Philippians run the great risk of becoming entangled in wrong doctrines. Therefore he is sharp. Love is always sharp in defending their loved ones against unscrupulous people who seek to plunge their loved ones into destruction.

As for circumcision certainly it is a God given thing (*Gen 17:9-14*). It belonged to the Jewish people as an outward sign of God's covenant with this people. When it is introduced into the church, it does injustice to God and to His people, and His Word is not taken seriously.

V3. For the church circumcision has a spiritual meaning. Paul says it in *verse 3* (*cf. Rom 2:29*). You have experienced a spiritual circumcision through what happened to Christ on the cross (*Col 2:11*). When He died under the judgment of God against sin you died there with Him. With "*we are the [true] circumcision*", are those meant who are really separate from evil. Paul views this here not from the negative side, but from the positive. He cites three characteristics that belong to those who are the circumcision.

The first is that they "*worship in the Spirit of God*". That puts an end to any stereotyped service which is often seen in Christendom in sacraments, in church orders and liturgy without regard to the Holy Spirit. A church service without the guidance of the Holy Spirit is a formal service which can be performed very well by people who are not born again.

The second point is that they "*glory in Christ Jesus*". In the Old Testament people boasted in their own *I*. Anyone who paid attention to the rules got fame. But the Spirit points our hearts to Christ.

The third characteristic is to “*put no confidence in the flesh*”. The entire Old Testament was oriented on a service in the flesh. You must not understand flesh here as the flesh of sin, from which lust comes out. What is meant is something which you can touch and can lead to great achievements.

V4. Paul knew what he was talking about. When it is about flesh he can enumerate a lot. In seven points he names his privileges about which he can boast. He possessed four privileges without having had to work for it; they were handed to him on a silver platter. Namely, one has absolutely no influence on the parents who gave him birth. The other three privileges are the consequences of his own decisions and have to do with his personal contributions.

With every measure of dignity he could have been winner on all fronts. No, he had no interest in this kind of triumph; on the contrary he gave up these privileges. He considered them even rubbish (*verse 8*) in the light of the glory of the Man Who appeared to him when he was on the road to Damascus (*Acts 9:1-5*). He is exactly like Moses who gave up all the treasures of Egypt and all the prerogatives of a king’s son, because he had seen the Invisible (*Heb 11:26-27*). Thus he became a model for the Israelites. He gave up more than anyone else. Paul also is such a model. He gave up much more than what you and I would probably ever let go.

V5. First, he mentions that he was “*circumcised*”, and that was because he was a part of the covenant God made with His people. He was not added as a stranger to the people through circumcision, but he was “*of the nation of Israel*”, which means he was an Israelite by birth. He was one of a people whom God chose from all nations to be His own people with special blessings (*cf. Rom 9:4-5*). Among this nation he belonged to the “*tribe of Benjamin*” and was therefore a descendent of Jacob’s family and his favorite wife Rachel.

V6. Finally he was “*a Hebrew of Hebrews*”. This name is used for the first time for Abraham (*Gen 14:13*) when he migrated away from his family and came to Canaan. This name means the mi-

grant. By mentioning this name Paul says that he lived, as a true, pure-bred descendent of Abraham in the land of promise.

There were even more things of which he could boast. They were things which he had acquired with unbridled zeal and was committed to them with boundless energy. No one knew the law like him and lived according to the law like him (*Acts 26:5; Gal 1:14*).

His zeal for the law had made him "*a persecutor of the church*". He pursued after the church universally and visited places where the believers were to be found; where they were living as members of that one church in dependence upon the Head of His church, the Lord Jesus. This Name made him furious (*Acts 26:9*). Wherever he could, he wanted to exterminate all who honored this Name. Borders counted nothing for him (*Acts 26:11*).

With all his knowledge of the law, even in persecution of the church, he remained within the bounds of the law. He was "*blameless*". He was like the young rich ruler (*Mt 10:20*). Paul and the rich young man were blameless before the eyes of men, but not in the eyes of God (*Eccl 7:20*).

Now read Philippians 3:1-6 again.

Reflection: Are there things which you can boast about?

Gain Christ | verses 7-11

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 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, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

V7. Verse 7 begins with a meaningful “but”. This brings a complete turn in the argumentation. In the previous verses Paul highlighted all the privileges he possessed and all the achievements he could boast about. ‘What an admirable person’ you could say. But all of them sink into nothing and disappear completely from the scene as soon as he meets the Lord Jesus and sees His magnificent excellencies.

By this encounter Paul sees that he as the ‘best human being’ is the greatest sinner and that all the good things and all the achievements counted nothing before God. On the other hand he gets to know what he received in Christ, all the profit it brings him. He spreads out this gain largely before the Philippians. He lays before them his personal profit and loss account. He writes off what was profit before, and turns it into a loss of income. The only additional entry that stands against this loss is Christ.

The profit is not simply written off. He thought over it and came to the conclusion that all these gains could not be compared to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. They aggrandize man and minimize Christ. Whoever meets the Lord really is inspired by only one desire: to glorify Christ. If this is your desire too, you will

give up all what interferes with it. This desire will be indicated not only at the moment of your repentance but it will run through the whole of your future life.

It is noticeable that Paul here constantly uses the 'I' form. He tells his personal story, and narrates his experiences and desires. You can apply this to yourself only if you are filled with the same desire. What he says is either far from you or is quite near. You cannot be neutrally interested in the zealousness of this man. The fact that you are still reading this means that, at any rate, you want to come close to what drove him. So it is with me too. I am quite jealous of him and I know that this is a legitimate jealousy.

V8. In *verses 8-11* Paul gives you and me in a long sentence an insight into his character and his motives. Thus we become familiar with his desires and his pursuits. In summary he means that he has three desires: to know Christ, to gain Christ, and to be found in Christ.

Paul did not give up all to regret later and to pull some things back (*cf. Heb. 11:15-16*). He was filled with Christ and therefore he looked at all that prevented him from knowing Christ more, as "loss". There is nothing more valuable than the knowledge of His Person! He considered all his own righteousness as something filthy (*Isa 64:6*). It did not matter whether it was a good social position, or a noble family, or a circle of men among whom he enjoyed prestige, or intellectual knowledge. He set aside everything in whatever a man could boast in.

His goal is clear. It is about "*the surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*". He testifies here to his personal relationship with Christ ("*my Lord*"). At the same time he acknowledged the authority of Christ over his life by calling Him *my Lord*. In the light of this Person he saw all the privileges not only as harmful but they looked even as "*rubbish*". Do you find it difficult to dispose of the "*rubbish*"? It costs dearly sometimes to handle as rubbish things which have a certain value to you although you know that it is detrimental to keep it. Nevertheless, to dispose of rubbish is not a sacrifice.

It is one thing to look at all as loss and it is another thing to suffer loss for all. Paul experienced both. He found out that his privileges were harmful if he wanted to know Christ better. He did not remain with that knowledge. He just gave them up all. He did not do it as a kind of self-flagellation. Such acts will never bring spiritual benefits and they do not bring you to a greater knowledge of Christ.

V9. To all his excellent merits he could have added further that he gave up all his privileges. But even through all this his view of Christ would be more unclear. He just wanted a different and maximum profit: Christ Himself. He wanted to possess Him completely, as the One who gave meaning and direction to his life. He wanted to *"be found in Him"* so that all that he was and all that would be visible in his life would be a clear picture of Christ. Should anybody see him whether man or God he should perceive only Christ and nothing of Paul.

Therefore his own righteousness had no meaning for him anymore. Imagine he thought that he would be able to maintain himself irreproachable before God and men, what would that mean then? His 'I' would be great. But he says, 'I do not want that at all. It would not be more than a human righteousness, and I do not want it.'

Do you know why Paul thought so? It is because he had met Christ and it is because Christ is the content of his life. Faith in Him has given Paul the *"righteousness which [comes] from God"*. Paul has seen how relative and meaningless all is what is of men, even of the most exalted people who are of high standing. He found out the eternal values of all that is of God, and of all whose origin is God.

The righteousness which has God as its source has become his portion, not on the basis of his achievements but by faith. He received the righteousness which is from God, because he put his faith in what the Lord Jesus had done for him on the cross, and therefore he did not place any value on his own efforts any more.

V10. That does not make him a reckless Christian, someone who pays due attention to his own righteousness. No, he desires the daily practical communion with Christ in order to know Him as good as possible. You may know Him as a new convert; nevertheless when you live with Him day by day and experience Him every day you can know Him better and better. You will learn how He thinks about you and how He expects that you should live. And besides you know of Him still better at the very place where He occupies in heaven now, and you can learn more and more of His glories.

When you are preoccupied with Him in His glory, you also learn more of the “*power of His resurrection*” (Eph 1:19-20). It is the power by which you walk on the earth. By this power you will, so to speak, pass through death and can walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4).

However a walk in the power of His resurrection does not make you immune to the suffering that is your portion, when you are faithful to the Lord. With the mind of Paul you do not accept suffering as something which you can not escape from. No, Paul sought after all means to be like the Lord Jesus. Fellowship with Him also included suffering. ‘All right’, Paul says, ‘I like to suffer, because that deepens my fellowship with Him.’

“*Fellowship of His sufferings*” is to have a share in the suffering that the Lord experienced during His life time on the earth, namely, to pass through ridicule and shame and to feel the pain by hearing and seeing sin. Even in his death Paul wanted to be like his Lord. A person says this when he has no more interest on the earth than only in Christ. It was enough for him that the servant would be like his Master (Mt 10:25).

Paul followed Christ on the path of suffering not in fear like his disciples in their days (Mk 10:32). He wanted to undergo sufferings, not for the sake of suffering, but in order to partake of Christ’s sufferings. That is why he did not go away sad like the rich young man who leaned on the advantages of the flesh (Mt

19:22). He had really taken the distance from all these things, and in his heart there was nothing that bound him to the earth.

V11. Paul not only carried his cross after the Lord Jesus, but he also wanted to die on it. Whatever the cost, and however painful might the way be, he wanted full fellowship with Christ on the way that led to his resurrection. His whole aim was to be like the Lord Jesus in all, and be on the way He went, to reach Him in glory. Did the Lord Jesus suffer? Then he also wanted to suffer. Did the Lord die? Then he also wanted to die as a martyr in the service of his Lord. Did the Lord rise from the dead and go into heaven? Then he also wanted to rise from the dead and go to Him.

How exactly it would be in his case, he did not know. Certainly he did not doubt this fact. Note, that it does not say 'resurrection from death' but "*from the dead*". That literally means a 'resurrection out of the dead'. Even so the Lord Jesus also resurrected out of the dead, while all others remained in death.

The great desire of Paul to be in complete identification with Christ shows how much he was attached to Christ. I sincerely hope that this is your desire too. In the following passage you will hear more about it, so that your desire is aroused still more to follow Paul with regard to the one goal for his life.

Now read Philippians 3:7-11 again.

Reflection: How can you gain Christ?

One Thing | verses 12-16

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

12 Not that I have already obtained [it] or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 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, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; 16 however, let us keep living by that same [standard] to which we have attained.

V12. Paul was not yet so far as he wished. His desire to be like the Lord Jesus was not yet fulfilled. He still lived on the earth, and that meant that he had not yet reached perfection. As long as a man lives on the earth the process of becoming perfect and of being like the Lord Jesus is not finished. Precisely for this reason, someone who has known the Lord Jesus continues to pursue after and strive for that perfection. He will never be content to sit back with folded hands behind his head and think: Well I am now where I wanted to go and I am perfectly identical with Christ. That would be great pride and a terrible mistake. This thinking would reveal a tremendous lack of self-knowledge.

On the other hand Paul teaches here to seek for perfection diligently as if perfection can be achieved on earth. There is a wrong teaching which says that you can be perfect on earth, and also you can reach a state of sinlessness. Do not be deceived by that. That is impossible. Every sincere child of God should strive for the utmost in his life to be like Christ. If Christ Jesus has really laid hold of you, as He did of Paul, then you will not desire anything else.

Think of your life before you knew Christ. Perhaps you were a bit like Paul. You were full of zeal doing (religious) work or study.

You thought that you pleased God with all your strivings until you realized that you only did it for yourself. Christ came into your life; Someone fully different from what you were. His zeal was entirely focused on God. He never did anything for Himself. His life consisted solely of service to others. He finally gave up His life for that.

The death He died was not only the crowing act of a fully consecrated life, but it was also the reconciliation for everyone who recognizes himself as a sinner – even for you. So you have learned to love Him, and He has become the content of your life. He has laid hold of you. You have come under the spell of His love. His embracing love has overwhelmed you. You feel safe and secure through and through. He is there for you. You also want to be wholly for Him. You want to be like Him, not only a little bit, for you cannot be content with that. In this respect it is as someone once wrote ‘contentment is the grave of progress’. No, you want to be quite like Him; and perfectly like Him.

Just a side note. It is good to remember that the word perfection has three meanings:

- You are perfect before God in Christ through His work (*Heb 10:14*). Every believer has this perfection the moment he confesses his sins and accepts in faith the Lord Jesus as his Lord and Savior.
- Then there is the perfection which we receive when we are with the Lord Jesus, when our body partakes of the redemption, and the flesh is no more there. This verse is about that.
- Then there is the perfection we can achieve on the earth and that has to do with our spiritual growth. That is the perfection in the sense of maturity, fully grown. That is perfection which is at issue in *verse 15*. It can be said, for example, that the fathers in Christ (*1Jn 2:13-14*) are perfect in that sense. They have nothing else but Christ in their life.

V13. To exclude every misunderstanding Paul emphasizes once again that he knows very well that he is not there yet. He is not leaning back idly content even now while imprisoned. He does not think that his work is done and also does not think that the process of his spiritual education is finished. Despite all the years of his work for the Lord and his incessant action in that work he considered the process of becoming like Christ as not complete yet. With unflagging energy he reaches out for what lies ahead.

The secret of his power is his focus on *“but one thing”*. That is a secret which only a few know, unfortunately. Many people are not satisfied with but one thing. They think that to be narrow-minded. They argue that we must have a wider field vision; they ask: ‘Is there not much more to enjoy?’ Yes, but the moment you want to add something to Christ, in order to pay attention to it, you are no more content with the one thing. The one thing excludes everything else. What is your choice? The decision is not difficult if you understand that this one thing alone gives perfect satisfaction to life. All that you add lessens the satisfaction. What is your preference?

For Paul it was not a question. He makes clear how we can pursue after that one thing. First he forgot *“what [lies] behind”* him. He did not think of all his privileges. He did not even think of all the work he had done, of all the journeys he had made, and of the places where he had proclaimed the gospel or of the many believers whom he had served. When you work for the Lord (and who does not do that?) it is dangerous to look back in order to assess the results of the work. That is the moment you stop looking at the goal. Paul had not kept a list of his spiritual progress.

By the way, *“forgetting what [lies] behind”* doesn’t mean that we should forget who we were. Paul didn’t do that. He never forgot that he was the greatest of all sinners (1Tim 1:13; see also 2Pet 1:9). Instead of being busy with the way that was already behind him he was *“reaching forward to what [lies] ahead”*.

V14. He presents himself here as someone who takes part in a race. Without looking up or looking back he runs as fast as he can

in the direction of the goal which he uninterruptedly keeps an eye on. He is concerned with the prize which is related to the calling of God. God had called him heavenward. Then you must not look at your interest on earth. We will pay attention to the Christians who do that in *verse 19*. When you are called by God it is His purpose to bring you to heaven where you can enjoy in Christ Jesus all the blessings His heart longs to shower upon you. You will not want to miss this prize for anything in this world, right?

V15. Perhaps you acknowledge that it should be so in your life. But you feel the field of tension within yourself. It is difficult for you to really give up everything and focus only on the one goal. There are believers in whose life everything revolves around Christ. Those are the mature ones *verse 15* speaks about in its first part. Paul includes himself in this. The word “us” clarifies that. The mature ones are those who in their Christian experience have come to the point where nothing is interesting to the heart but the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.

How many beautiful things are here on the earth but they all fade away and nothing compares with His beauty. Some people may call it extremism or fanaticism. In any case it is radical. A Christian who grew up this way is characterized by the mind which is in conformity to the mind of Christ. Christ also had only one goal – the glorification of the Father. This prompted Him to do the will of the Father which brought forth all the imaginable blessings.

In the second part of *verse 15* another group of believers is addressed. Paul speaks to them as “you” who “*have a different attitude*” in anything. By this he does not mean unspiritual or carnal believers. He means believers who have not yet learned that mind of Christ; for God nothing really has any value except the Lord Jesus. An example of such believers is found in the weak (ones) about whom Paul speaks in contrast to the strong (ones) (*Rom 14*).

Both groups are spiritually minded believers. He makes clear there that the one weak in faith does not know the full Christian freedom that is given to him in Christ. Such believers think that

they still have to do with certain ordinances. God observes the sincerity in such persons and He is patient towards their spiritual development. At the right time He will reveal what is the real issue for Him by removing the veil that still covers the eyes of their understanding. Then they will be able to see things as they really are.

This difference in the spiritual development, this otherwise mindedness, does not have to disturb a happy fellowship. These are things we can leave to the Lord. In such cases we must not try to force our brethren to fall in line with our views. God Himself will teach them (*1Thes 4:9*).

V16. When anyone does not focus all his interests on Christ, then we ourselves must not wait till it happens. We need to proceed together provided that everyone walks according to the light he received. Light that is received evokes the desire for more light. It does not make passive, but encourages to a closer communion with Christ with the desire for greater likeness to Him.

From the moment you have accepted Christ, you have started to grow spiritually. The stage that you have now reached, on the one hand is the result of God's work in you, and on the other hand, it is your commitment (*see Phil 2:13*). Well, you are inspired to continue along this path. You need not do it alone. You can do that with others who have also come to know Christ and want to live for Him alone.

Now read Philippians 3:12-16 again.

Reflection: Are there other interests that you pursue after apart from 'one thing'?

Our Citizenship Is In Heaven | verses 17-21

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. 18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] enemies of the cross of Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is [their] appetite, and [whose] glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

V17. A good example is worth a lot. As a young Christian you need orientation. It is a blessing if you know people who set the right examples for what the Bible expects of you. Paul presents himself together with Timothy as “a pattern” (they are “us” in this verse). That is not pride but it is conviction. He was following Christ Who was his Example (1Cor 11:1).

He calls upon the Philippians to “*join in following*” his example. The word “*join*” is important. An attentive reader will notice that this is a gentle exhortation to be like-minded. When we make anything together, when we have a pattern before our eyes and follow it, we forget about the unpleasant traits of the others. The Philippians were fortunate that they had many whom they could take as examples. When they looked at their lives they saw the same thing as in Paul. They were all people whose only goal was to gain Christ.

Were there many then? I don't think so, like there are not many today. By the way, do you realize that you on your part are an example for others? Can others follow you because they see that Christ is all that matters in your life?

V18. Do you know what kind of people we have a plenty of? Of people who walk as “*the enemies of the cross of Christ*”. With this qualification Paul points out a third group of believers besides the two he points out in *verse 15*. Between the two groups and this third group there is a big difference. Group one and group two love the Lord Jesus from the heart and want to be in tune with Him in their lives. They put into practice what they know of Him. With the second group however their knowledge is certainly limited but still they want to live for Him whatever be the cost. The third group is completely different. They are certainly people with mouths full of biblical truth and may be they can even say wonderful things about the Lord Jesus. But they do not reckon with Him in practical life.

Here they are portrayed not as enemies of Christ but enemies of the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ has a crucial significance for the life of a Christian. It is the radical separation between you and the world (*Gal 6:12,14*). The more you know of the cross, the more you will give up every connection with the world to be bound the stronger with Christ. An enemy of the cross of Christ is someone who wants to have all the joys and the wealth of Christendom but not its burdens. He is someone who wants to follow Christ indeed but without taking up the cross (*Lk 14:27*).

If you live according to the meaning of the cross, the world has nothing more to offer you. You have settled up with it. The world however does not allow with impunity that you do not like it at all anymore and that you condemn it. It will cause shame to you. If you do not like that and try to stay on friendly terms with the world you are an enemy of the cross. You do not give up Christ really, but you do not come out for Him, since you know that you will be laughed at.

It is not the first time Paul is talking about those people. He has spoken many times about them. He reacts to them differently from the people he has in mind at the beginning of this chapter. Those persons he simply exposes for their evil intentions to undermine his work. Maybe the people here still believe, but they do not live accordingly.

When he writes about it he cannot hold back his tears. He is not the kind of person who says that 'men do not cry'. He speaks more often about his feelings (*Acts 20:31-2; 2Cor 2:4*). Emotion is an essential part of a human being. This does not change when someone becomes a Christian. Faith must not be guided by emotions but be accompanied by it. The Word of God is the foundation of faith. The feelings arise because Paul states that Christians deviate from the path of God shown by the Word of God.

This category of Christians is a wrong model, and they are therefore a threat to others. They act as if they are sure of heaven, but at the same time they enjoy life on earth to the fullest. Isn't this a wonderful way of being a Christian? Do not be deceived by this kind of a lifestyle! I think this is why Paul has said it many times before and he says it again. They are not a good example.

V19. Heaven does not wait at the end of such life but only "destruction" in hell. The broad way, the way on which many walk along, is that which leads to destruction (*Mt 7:13*). The question whether it is about the genuine Christians or about the Christians in name, i.e. who are not born again, does not matter. It is about what you confess. If you confess to be a Christian it will be seen in your life. If you live for Christ your testimony is true. If you do not live for Him your confession is a lie. I do not assume the latter as your statement; for otherwise you would not read this book. But these verses are also applicable for you and me as confessors of Christ.

He who lives as the enemy of the cross lives for himself, for his own "belly" (*Rom 16:18*). His life is for the satisfaction of all sorts of physical needs like food and drink, and also for fulfilling sexual passions (*1Cor 6:13*). It is certainly not only the immoral behavior that is meant here but it is a complete surrender to the things which God has given. It doesn't seem that they did something evil that required punishment. It is about good citizens, people who give to everyone what is his; but they do it all for themselves. They place the earthly things in the first place. Their life is not all about Christ.

The result of such an attitude is that they find their glory in what is shame. For example you can see even Christians who subscribe to the idea that man is descended from ape. They regard it as an honor that human science has brought this to light. They boast of such follies. All this is the consequence when people are focused on earthly things. Their thoughts are filled with earthly prosperity. Their efforts are aimed at making their life on earth as long and as comfortable as possible.

V20. Indeed such an attitude of life fits well with the citizen of the world but not with a citizen of heaven. Since you came to know Christ you are a stranger and sojourner on the earth (*1Pet 2:11*). Your real home is heaven. As long as you are here in an environment in which you have no part you should live in this consciousness.

The Philippians are a good example for this situation. Philippi was a Roman colony in Asia Minor. It was far from Rome, but the citizens of this city had to live as citizens of Rome to hold up the name of Rome. We live in the midst of the people of this world but we must hold high the name of heaven. We live as ambassadors of our true homeland in a foreign country. Our conduct should reflect the life of our homeland. At the same time we adhere to the rules of the country in which we reside temporarily as long as these rules do not conflict with our citizenship in heaven. It is not fitting to participate in the politics of the country in which we are strangers. That would mean a denial of our heavenly citizenship.

Our hearts are so full of our homeland that we long to move in there. That is why we expect the Lord Jesus Christ. It is He that is the goal towards which we travel, Who promised to come soon (*Jn 14:1-3; 1Thes 4:16-17; Rev 22:20*). Paul calls Him "Savior" here. Now you may be thinking: Do I not know Him so already? He is my Savior, my Redeemer (that again means Savior), Who has redeemed me from my sins.

V21. Sure, but there is one aspect of salvation which is not yet complete and that is the salvation of our body (*Rom 8:23*). When the Lord Jesus comes to take the church to be with Him you get

a glorified body. In this body you will know no more sadness, no more pain and no more fatigue. The body you now have corresponds to a situation where sin has left its scars, upon which the curse of sin rests. It is *“the body of our humble state”*, the body in which we live here on the earth.

By the way, this is not a flattering expression in a world in which ‘body care’ is very important. The body is glorified here. You also must not fall into the other extreme and say that the body is not important. For the believer the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and a member of Christ (1Cor 6:15,19). Therefore live responsibly according to this matter.

For all those who belong to Him, the coming of the Lord Jesus for the church is the end of all imperfection of the earthly body. Then the body you will receive is similar to His body (1Jn 3:2). The slightest trace, every remembrance of the imperfection of life that we literally experience in our body on earth is removed. This unimaginable change is brought about by the Lord Jesus. He is the only One capable of doing it. He will do so with the same power He has to subdue all things to Himself. He is the Almighty God.

Think again: the innumerable departed believers of all ages who died or were killed in all sorts of ways – burned, beheaded, cut into pieces or torn and eaten by lions. He knows to bring together all the scattered molecules, and again make them into the human being they once were. The unbelievers receive a body fit to live in hell for all eternity. The believers will receive a body with which they will be in heaven forever to praise Him in eternity.

Now read Philippians 3:17-21 again.

Reflection: What does it mean to you to expect the Lord Jesus as Savior?

Philippians 4

Of the Same Mind and Joy In the Lord | *verses 1-5*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

1 Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long [to see], my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. 2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. 3 Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in [the cause of] the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentle [spirit] be known to all men. The Lord is near.

Introduction. In this last chapter Paul shows you how it is possible to stand above all circumstances. Not like the Stoics whose highest ideal was to live without expressing any emotion. No Paul knew the greatest joy in the manner of life he presents. He wants you to partake of this joy in this chapter.

V1. First, however, he still has a few exhortations. He begins with the word “*therefore*” and a most cordial way of addressing the Philippians. The word ‘therefore’ refers to the two preceding chapters. If you have understood something of what is presented of Christ then you have discovered the basis on which you can stand firmly. That is the conclusion: you find your spiritual strength in Christ alone. You will discover that when you look for things outside of Christ, you will begin to drift about. You will be tossed to and fro (*Eph 4:13-14*) unless everything in your life is focused on Christ.

Paul loved those people and he longed to be with them. When he thought of them he was very happy. This special relationship

with them arose as they had come to faith through his ministry. He could bring them to the Lord Jesus as a crowning achievement of his work. They will decorate him at the coming of the Lord. He wished however, that they also would be this decoration in their practical life by their like-mindedness.

V2. But there was something to be corrected especially with the two sisters who disagreed. He is not reticent; he calls each of them by name. Both sisters hear their name with the words “*I urge*” to listen. This shows that both were equally considered responsible for the lack of unanimity. Paul thus avoids any appearance of partiality or favoritism.

He doesn't seek a fleshly compromise for a solution, but he exhorts them to be like-minded “*in the Lord*”. His point is that the Lord must regain His authority over their lives in the things about which they were in disagreement. The cause of the disagreement is not stated. Therefore we can make use of this situation for a wider application. Sometimes you can be jealous of a brother with whom you should do a work for the Lord because he gets more honor than you. When sisters prepare something for a love meal they can be jealous of one another when people like the dish of another sister more. Disagreement arises suddenly. On the other hand if like-mindedness in the Lord is present, then everyone thinks: ‘My work is for the Lord.’ Then people's appreciation is no longer the standard, but the Lord's.

V3. It is always sad when difficulties arise in a relationship between two believers when they undertake a work for the Lord. Paul himself had this problem with Barnabas (*Acts 15:36-39*). He knew these two women. They must have been powerful in the propagation of the gospel. Perhaps they offered Paul a place in their homes to lodge during his ministry trip (*cf. 2Kgs 4:8*). Anyway, the two women identified themselves with Paul and with the gospel he preached, and were not ashamed. Maybe they served him with their belongings as the other women who had served the Lord in this way (*Lk 8:3*).

It hurts Paul when he thinks of these two great women. A fracture in their relationship is unbearable to him. This fracture must be healed. Paul asks his “*true companion*” – probably Epaphroditus through whom he sent this letter – to help. Companion literally means ‘yoke-mate’. This makes it clear that it is about someone with whom Paul carried the yoke in the proclamation of the gospel faithfully and unanimously. That was not a heavy yoke but a joyous one to carry. Also the word ‘true’ or ‘faithful’ deserves special attention. In each work the Lord assigns, faithfulness is the most important ingredient (1Cor 4:2). This is what the Lord rewards, and not the magnitude of the talent (Mt 25:21,23).

Besides these two women there were also other workers who labored with Paul in the proclamation of the gospel. Of these he particularly mentions Clement. All of them helped in the preaching of the gospel in the territory of the enemy. They had to stand against resistance. This can sometimes be so severe that the servants can despair of themselves or of their service. Then this encouragement of Paul from his imprisonment in Rome comes to cheer them up.

With a few words he raises up the discouraged servants of the circumstances by reminding them that their “*names are in the book of life*” (Rev 3:5; 21:27). This is the book of God’s counsels in which His elected ones are enrolled.

V4. The assurance of being in it is again a reason for his call to “*re-joice in the Lord*”. And even if you have success in your ministry, the greatest joy is not your success, but the fact that your name is written in the heavens. So says the Lord at least to His disciples when they come back delighted to tell the results of their ministry (Lk 10:20).

The sadness Paul had in view of the many people who called themselves Christians (Phil 3:18) could not take away his own joy in the Lord. He could always rejoice in the Lord. In the Lord he found a source of continuous joy that gave him solace in the midst of pain and sadness. The call to rejoice does not come from someone in heaven surrounded by nothing but joy, but from someone

imprisoned awaiting trial. That is why this appeal is compelling and an exhortation that works.

If to rejoice is possible for him, then it is always possible for us whatever the circumstances be. Our joy does not have to be affected by adversity (*Hab 3:17-19; Jn 15:11; 17:13*). Paul lets them hear his encouragement to rejoice, not only once, but he says it again. You do not hear an impulsive man who says something to feel sorry for it a little later. Convinced by his own experience that it is possible, he emphasizes his call by saying it again.

To be a joyful Christian does not mean to run around with a big smile or to say 'hallelujah' again and again. Joy rests in the heart. Of course that will radiate, but not in the sense of: 'The bigger the laugh, the greater the joy.' Here it is important to look deeper than the surface (*Pro 14:13*). Your joy will be consistently pure and stable as long as Christ only is the source of your joy.

V5. This joy benefits others whom you are associated with. When only the Lord is your source, your love for others will be pure also. You will be known as a 'gentle' person by all people. All will agree that you are someone who does not insist on his rights. Undoubtedly some will appreciate this, and others will say that you are mad, but anyway it will be known to all.

Here, to "*be known*" by your gentleness, means that it will be noticed and experienced, but not because you talk about it. You must not promote your own qualities. Leave that to others (*Pro 27:2*). Gentleness means that you know how to accommodate to circumstances and that you do not insist on your rights (*Jas 3:17; 1Tim 3:3; Tit 3:2*). If you think you have the rights, you will then want something from the world and rely on it (*1Cor 6:7*).

The temptation to claim our rights prematurely threatens us constantly. To overcome this Paul advises us again to go to Lord. In Him we see someone Who never exercised his rights. He never went ahead of God's plan in taking His kingdom during His life time, although He was King (*Jn 18:36-37*). Paul once made use of

his rights, but that served the purpose of God and not his own interests (*Acts 16:37*).

A guest who lodges somewhere will always be gentle. After all we are citizens of heaven, and on the earth we are pilgrims and strangers (*see Phil 3:20*). When it is very difficult, and you are inclined to insist on your rights for yourself, then you should know that “*the Lord is near*”. You should know that He will come soon and will give you what you are entitled to and restore whatever you gave up while on earth.

That the Lord is near also means that He is near to you at this very moment (*Psa 145:18*). His closeness now and His soon-coming will save you from being depressed over the things here or from getting busy with them yourself.

Now read *Philippians 4:1-5* again.

Reflection: Do people, whom you have to do with, know you as a gentle person?

The Peace of God and the God of Peace | verses 6-9

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. 9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

V6. The Lord is near! Thus we finished the last chapter. This great assurance gives us the courage for now and for the future. So we need not be anxious for anything (*Mt 6:25*). God knows that we need to be reminded now and again as we are quick to be anxious. We do this because too many times we see the circumstances without including Him. Then our difficulties become greater than God and this is why it goes wrong.

“Be anxious for nothing” means we can hand over everything to Him. You need not carry anything yourself. You can cast all your care upon Him; for He cares for you (*1Pet 5:7*). Is this not a relief? By saying to be anxious for nothing, not all has been said, because you can let all your requests be known to God. Here there is no limit, nor any restrictions. For God nothing really means nothing. So there is not a thing about which you can worry about. For God everything really means everything, and there is not a thing that you cannot place before Him.

Therefore rise up and tell him straight from the heart in your own words. He invites you to come to Him with *“prayer and supplication”*. Prayer is talking to God about all things imaginable. You can share with Him the most common everyday needs without any formality. To pray with supplication is to pray with urgency

or with a strong desire. You do that when you are in trouble. You cry out not once but repeatedly.

Does this also include “*thanksgiving*”? Yes, because you speak to a God Who knows what is in your heart and you know what He has in His heart for you. You thank Him because you trust Him and know that He hears your prayers and supplications and that He will do something with it. You have been brought into union with the loving and almighty God through His grace and mercy. Can you think of anything greater? Can you imagine that something that happens in the world or in your life could upset Him?

No single event can shake His throne. Always each event will fit well into the fulfillment of His plans. Therefore you can thank Him in advance when you direct your prayers to Him; for you know that He will answer you in His grace, whatever the answer may be. I think you also sometimes thank someone you trust well in advance for a favor you are sure that he would oblige. You say thanks in advance for the attention and reaction. This is the way you are allowed to make all your worries known to God. You do this, of course not because He does not know it. You do this, because it relieves you, and you, free from all your worries, can continue to go your way rejoicing. What a God you have!

Do you always receive what you ask for? No? Thank God also for that. Do you really mean that you always ask only for useful things? It is as in a family. Normally a child dares to ask his father everything but the father does not give whatever the child asks. He gives only what is good and useful. The Father will give you only the good things. That is not the same as pleasant things, things that will make life a bit easier. He gives things that build up your character as a child of God, things that make your life on the earth as a Christian more and more conformed to the Lord Jesus. That is what you want, right?

V7. If He does not give you what you ask for, then it has to do with the purpose He has for your life. Therefore He gives something else. He gives you His own peace that will guard your heart and mind. Guard means watch over, hold captive which implies

safety and security. Again this is something really very big. That is much better than when He gives what we asked for, after we have whined for a very long time. Then you get what you wanted and possess what you desired. But it will not go well with your soul. You learn that from the history of Israel (*Psa 106:15*).

When we put our trust in Him we receive His peace. That is why Peter could sleep quietly in the prison while he knew that he would be killed (*Acts 12:6*). The assurance, that all the power on earth could not do any harm to him unless God allowed it, gave him peace. That goes well for you also. It does not state that our hearts will keep His peace. That is something we cannot do. It is the other way round; it is something that He does. "*The peace of God*" is as a shield for our hearts and minds so that they are preserved.

All sorts of thoughts that make you worried and anxious can come into your heart and mind. When you have said everything to God you receive His peace and your heart and mind are preserved, that is "*in Christ Jesus*" indeed. Christ is presented here as a fortress where you are safe and secure. It is a great grace that even our anxieties are used to fill us with this wonderful peace!

The '*peace of God*' by the way is something different from the '*peace with God*'. The *peace with God* is something which is the result of faith in the Lord Jesus as the One Who solved the problem of sin by which a sinner is reconciled to God (*Rom 5:1*). The *peace of God* is the peace that God has as the One Who is above all circumstances. It is the peace of the Lord Jesus amid the circumstances which He calls "*My peace*" (*Jn 14:27; Col 3:15*).

V8. If your heart is thus free from worries and the peace of God dwells in it then you can turn towards positive things. Paul puts it as a task. He assigns you to dwell or meditate on things that activate your intellectual capacity and engage yourself consciously with the things he lists here. You should meditate on these things while you are doing your daily work. That means that your thoughts are filled with these things, when you are in school and the teacher or a classmate is being bullied; or when in the work-

place someone cracks a dirty joke or some obscene photos are hanging there; or when you are at home and have to clear out your dear children's junk repeatedly.

Meditation on the things listed here cannot happen automatically. Your capacity to meditate on these things in your daily activities depends on what you read, hear and see in your free time. Your thought pattern is formed here. Therefore engage yourself with good things. Paul does not say what things you must not engage yourself with. He does not present this as a kind of law but in a way that builds up. He also does not suggest the power of positive thinking.

Whether or not you are listening to his exhortation will be shown up in your conversation and in your behavior. What you have inside of yourself will shine through. Although there can be difficulties in your life, when mishaps occur, it is still important that you engage yourself with what is good and lovely. Look especially at the Lord Jesus in Whom all these virtues were and are fully present.

- *"Whatever is true"* is in the first place. When you meditate on this, lie has no chance.
- The second is *"whatever is honorable"*. That speaks of dignity that befits what we are: kings and priests.
- When you meditate on the third thing, *"whatever is right"*, you will handle according to the rules of what is right, in everything honest.
- The fourth is *"whatever is pure"*. God had told Israel what animals they should eat (*Lev 11*). They were clean animals with certain characteristics. What you eat spiritually forms your character. We take up the character of the food that we eat. Let the Lord Jesus be your food (*Jn 6:50-56*).
- The fifth is *"whatever is lovely"*, that means what is worthy to be loved. How do you think of your brothers and sis-

ters? Do you see only the bad things or do you think also of the good things they have, which are worthy to be loved? With the Lord Jesus everything is graceful and worthy to be loved.

- The sixth is “*whatever is of good repute*”. These are things which should be passed on as it is good to hear. There is no room for ill repute or gossip, or slander.
- The seventh is “*if there is any excellence*”. The issue here is that you have an eye for spiritual courage to fight the good fight of faith. This is applicable both for you as well as for others. You can pull yourself down by holding the view that it is nothing at all and it is all meaningless. Then you become dejected. Remember everything that is done out of love for the Lord Jesus certainly makes sense.
- The eighth and the last is “*if there is anything worthy of praise*”. It is important to have a spirit of praise, to consider that for which we can praise God. Despite much struggle, all weakness and failure, you have much to thank God for.

V9. After the meditation of how to guide our thinking, there are also things to *do*, the application in the practical Christian life. For that the life of Paul is a practical example. With him there were no contradictions in his way of thinking, speaking and living. He gave not only doctrinal teachings but was involved with his whole being. He does not speak with a high hand, but from experience. If they would follow his example they would have the “*God of peace*” Himself as their Companion. The *peace of God* and the *God of peace*, what would you like to possess more?

Now read Philippians 4:6-9 again.

Reflection: Mention the blessings and exhortations found in these verses.

All Things Through Him Who Strengthens | verses 10-14

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned [before], but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 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. 13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. 14 Nevertheless, you have done well to share [with me] in my affliction.

V10. The Lord was really enough for Paul. He had the *peace of God* in his heart and the *God of peace* was with him. That did not mean that he was insensitive to the attitude of the Philippian believers. The Lord indeed was with him in all his circumstances, and now Paul rejoices in the Lord over their loving care for him expressed in a very special way. They thought of him once again!

His gratitude is not primarily for their gift, but for their motive. It resembles a bit of an exhortation when he says “*now at last*”. But that’s not so. He knew that they did think of him, but they did not have the opportunity to let him know that. But now by the coming of Epaphroditus their thoughts of the beloved apostle had literally taken hands and feet. Their gift made it clear that they were thinking of him.

V11. Paul hastened to add that he suffered no shortage. He did not want to give them any feeling of guilt as though they let him suffer in need with the delayed supply. He also wanted to avoid giving the impression that he depended on their gift. It is not easy to express deep gratitude and at the same time not to give the impression of being greedy (*Acts 20:33*). Those who learn to be content in all circumstances are not dependent on any one. It was

a long process for Paul to learn this. Now he could say that he had learned it.

It is a lesson that we all need to learn: to be content and at the same time independent of people. There are people who have a lot of money and yet they are dissatisfied. It is because they never have enough as they seek to satisfy all their unquenchable desires. There are also others who have very little and yet are content. To be content literally means having enough (*Heb 13:5; 1Tim 6:6-8*). If you trust in God, you may count on God's promise and be sure of your bread and water (*Isa 33:16*). When you are completely dependent on the Lord you are satisfied with what He sends you, whether it is deficit or abundance.

V12. Paul could have a say on any situation. He had been through them all and therefore he knew them all. He knew to be abased. Sometimes you are in a situation where people revile you, mock you, and treat you as a malefactor or even as dirt, until at last you are reduced to nothing and there remains nothing to your credit (*cp. 2Cor 11:24*). He knew of an overflowing honor (*see Acts 14:11; 28:6*). He was initiated in all the situations of life as if it was the initiation in a secret. It is also a personal secret between a believer and God, that he will not be overwhelmed by all life's situations.

He knew what it meant to be full and to be hungry. His experiences, instead of taking him far away from the Lord Jesus, brought him closer to Him. Amid all these he followed the Lord Jesus in His foot prints unlike many Christians today. Many perish either through saturation or through hunger. Both circumstances drive many away from the Lord. Agur spoke the following wise words as a prayer: *"Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, that I not be full and deny [You] and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or that I not be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God"* (*Pro 30:8-9*).

When a person is full he thinks he does not need God. In the countries of abundance in which we live this is the frightening reality. In the lives of countless people God has no place. Materialism is like a wedge between God and the believer. The Christian

layer keeps on peeling more and more from what still bears the name 'Christian'. Can you imagine in this light that Agur was afraid that he would deny God? Feel free to make his prayer your prayer.

The possibility is great that you can speak on being full and on having abundance. In general we swim in prosperity and luxury. The question is what impact do they have on your life? Ask yourself honestly whether they have brought you closer to the Lord, or have they taken you away from Him. Can you have a say on hunger and on what it is to suffer need? I think this possibility is low. And if someone is already suffering from hunger and want, the possibility is that it is the result of debt he himself made. Loans have been made so attractive today! This passage does not speak about this kind of hunger and need. Here we hear a man talking of his experience of hunger and need during the course of his work for God.

If you can have a say on hunger and need, then I hope that it is in this way. Then you will be able to draw support and courage here. Thus the Lord Jesus also suffered from hunger as he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness and was tempted by the devil (*Mt 4:1-2*). Paul followed his master not from a distance but closely. It is difficult to say something about things that you yourself have not gone through. Paul does not speak in the first person *I* without reason. You can only repeat what he says if it is a reality for you, even if your experience is only a weak form of his experience.

Maybe you are employed and you get a fixed income every month. There is nothing wrong with it. However it is quite difficult in such a case to be dependent on the Lord because you are so used to what is called income security. On the other side there is a spending pattern. In this we are now and then so used to it that we can no longer be open to the instructions of God to do something special for Him with a certain amount from our income. Or don't you recognize this?

In order not to forget the consciousness of your dependence on God it is necessary that you put aside a certain portion of your income to the Lord as soon as you receive your money. How much? You may determine that yourself after consultation with the Lord. However it is important that you do it cheerfully (2Cor 9:7). If you are self-employed and have no fixed salary but an income that depends on your activities and your customers then you feel more the need to be dependent on the Lord. Then as a businessman you can even be more dependent on the Lord than some of the full time ministers who receive regular fixed gifts.

V13. Paul was not in this category. His whole faith was fixed on the Lord Who gave him strength. Through Him he was able to do all what he writes here. The power by which he was able was the result of an ongoing fellowship with Christ, and a constant communion with Him. He lived in the knowledge that he could do nothing without the Lord Jesus (Jn 15:5). You can do nothing *without Him*, but everything *with Him*. He makes the big difference in everything.

In the Lord is the strength to live for His glory and without that the circumstances can have a negative impact. It is even so that every circumstance is an opportunity for the Lord to show what He is able to do if you live in communion with the Lord. Then your life is a testimony to His power. Especially in difficult circumstances you can show that He means everything to you. You can express your faith in Him. But to express your faith in Him means much more while you are really stuck in trouble than when you do it when the sky is blue all around.

For example if you have no money to buy bread, you are much more likely to take your refuge in Him, than when your bank account has sufficient funds and your refrigerator is full. When we speak about spiritual truth it carries no meaning unless there is a genuine change in our lives. The cars in the parking lots of our churches and other buildings where believers come together as well as our houses and their furnishings show where our heart is. When we talk about our dependence on Him and our desire to be with Him it can sound like hypocrisy.

I presume that you are longing to experience the power of the Lord in your daily activities. Then check your life, especially the areas where the Lord does not have His full control. That can be with regard to the books you read, the movies that you watch, your browsing habits on the internet, your appearance, your intelligence, your ambitions, your hobbies, your friends, your vacation, your outing, your work and even more. Have you handed all over to Him? Have you said: 'Lord, do what you want to do with them and tell me what I should do with them.'? You will notice that the power of the Lord will start to fill your life as space is created for it.

V14. After sharing his personal spiritual experiences with them he lets them know that he very much appreciates what they had done for him. They had done a good work (*cp. Mk 14:6*). It was not so much the gift itself that gave so much joy to Paul but rather the love for him and their attachment to him the gift spoke of.

By that they shared in his distress (*Heb 10:34*) and were not ashamed of it (*2Tim 1:8,16*). That meant a great encouragement for him. Here you see again the intertwining of his strength in the Lord, through which he could do all things, with the power that gives encouragement to the fellow believers. Also you may know that you do not stand alone. The Lord and His people are around you.

Now read Philippians 4:10-14 again.

Reflection: What can you apply to yourself and what have you learnt more of the Lord from these verses?

Supply All Needs and Salutations | *verses 15-23*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

15 You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; 16 for even in Thessalonica you sent [a gift] more than once for my needs. 17 Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. 18 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. 19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 Now to our God and Father [be] the glory forever and ever. Amen. 21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

V15. You have already seen that a special bond existed between Paul and the Philippians. Paul points out that this special relationship was visible in their support for him in the beginning of the gospel. He reflects on this beginning with joy after a gap of ten or more years.

That he had accepted money from them was something special. He wanted to be self-supporting and also wanted to support those who were with him (*Acts 18:3; 20:34*). He accepted no money from other churches, for instance from the Corinthians (*1Cor 9:12; 2Cor 11:7-10*). Why did he refuse the gifts from them? Often money has relegated the servant of God to a servant of people. It can become a means by which a person who serves God can become a servant of people. People bribe and are bribed.

But Paul could not be bought for money. For instance he accepted no money from the Corinthians because it would have meant that he had stimulated their sense of honor. Those who serve God must constantly examine the motives when accepting money. Money

should never tarnish the purity of the work that must be done only according to the mandate of God. Also when it is known that it is given with base motives it should not be accepted. These issues do not have a place in the relationship between Paul and the Philippians. Both the donor and the receiver did it for the Lord.

V16. More than once Paul received gifts from the Philippians. He also recalls the times when he was in Thessalonica. Apparently he did not accept anything from the Thessalonians also. That was a new church and he did not want to give the impression that money played a role in the proclamation of the gospel. He wanted to maintain the relationship pure. There he worked for his maintenance (*1Thes 2:9*) and was also grateful for the gifts the Philippians sent him.

You cannot forget the manifestation of the grace of God when you keep it fresh in your mind. Otherwise it can happen to you as it happened with the Israelites. It was a miracle that the Israelites got manna day by day during the wilderness journey. But when it happened, everyday for decades, they forgot the wonder of it and began to get an aversion to the marvels of God. Such is man when he does not give the glory to God.

V17. Paul gives the glory to God. Primarily his point is not the benefits he himself had of the gift. He was not looking for the next gift. His emphasis is mainly what the gift would add to them. While being grateful for the gift, his main concern was about the fruit for the giver. The gift is not only for the use of the receiver. It means also the spiritual fruit for the giver in whose account the fruit is credited. He did not seek theirs but they themselves (*2Cor 12:14*). Their material balance indeed has become smaller, but the balance in their spiritual account has increased. It is one of the principles of the kingdom of God that you will be spiritually enriched by giving your materials (*2Cor 9:6; Pro 11:25*).

V18. To experience this you need faith which is the trust in God that He actually deals this way with what you give. Paul knows that God so works. Therefore he speaks almost in superlatives about what the Philippians had sent him through Epaphroditus. He used

words such as “everything”, “full”, “abundance”. You may think: ‘That must have been a lot of money.’ But Paul does not mean that.

For sure, with the money he can manage for a time. But above all he has an abundance of gratitude in his heart. He is full of joy through this gift of love. The gift which indeed is the proof of their love was sent to him but he sees it as sacrifice to God. And what a sacrifice! It was “*a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God*”. It might sound too sublime a level of praise for such an earthly thing. Here a gift to someone is called a fragrant sacrifice to God. It is the same expression ‘fragrant aroma’ that is used for what the Lord Jesus brought on the cross (*Eph 5:2*). Here you can see the significance of a material sacrifice.

You can also see how very much they both belong to each other. You see the same in *Hebrews 13:15-16*. There the sacrifice of praise and giving of thanks and the sharing and doing good are called in the same breath. Your giving attitude must be properly upgraded in this light.

V19. The Philippians had given something to Paul. I presume it was money; for it is not said what the gift consisted of. In any case they literally lessened what they had and yet they suffered no loss. On the contrary it brought spiritual gain. You must know this by experience in order to understand the truth of it. Yes, this letter is the letter of Christian experience. Well, there is more experience coming.

Paul gives the Philippians something of what he had experienced himself. He has received something from the Philippians. Now he has something for them, something very personal, that he wants to send as gift. What he sends as gift is more than a wish. It is an assurance. He knew from personal experience that God would do it, and therefore he calls Him “*my God*”. This God whom he knew personally through all his circumstances would provide for them.

You see, you can say this to another only when you have experienced it yourself. This God had supplied all his needs, and He would also supply all their needs. God knows all the needs of His

people. He makes sure that they are supplied. For this He uses His children, and sometimes even non-believers, the 'raven', as in the case of Elijah (*1Kgs 17:4*). Everyone and everything is available to Him and He uses everything He wants whether they are aware of it or not.

And how will God supply? Not sparsely, but according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Is there a limit? All the wealth of God is found in the glory of Christ Jesus. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things and of all that lives. Paul knows that God gives out this wealth to those who give to another in the cause of His work. What God gives is not according to the needs of His people but according to His riches.

How blessed are you! You cannot invest your property in a better way than to give it away in this manner. What you get back for this is remarkably stable and independent of all the earthly economic tides. In *Malachi 3:10* God challenges you to throw yourself on the promise that He will return much more than you give (*see Pro 19:17*).

V20. Paul concludes his thanks for the gift and for the blessing that was lying in wait for the Philippians with a communal song of praise of God. He makes the Philippians one in mind with himself and wishes our God and Father the glory forever and ever. Praise is the result from some material given from the one to another!

This is quite different from all the charities in this world which always revolves around people. Donation behavior is investigated, statistics compiled, begging letters are sent, and the names of donors are published together with the amounts. Everything revolves around the honor of people. Brochures are distributed in abundance to persuade people to transfer their will and money as gift for a good cause. Organizations pay for mentioning their names in the brochure hoping to get a piece of the cake.

It should not be so in the church. What is given to our God in secret, He will repay (*Mt 6:3-4*) because it gives glory to Him now and for eternity. So it is, Amen!

V21. Paul concludes his letter with some greetings. The believers in Philippi were all equally dear to him. He had no preference. He greets every saint and among them were the two women who could not get along (*Phil 4:2*). Besides being spiritually minded he was aware of his connection to every saint in Christ Jesus. This fits in with this letter in which he exhorts that everyone should esteem others better than himself (*Phil 2:3*).

V22. There is a relationship not only between Paul and the believers in Philippi, but there is a relationship between the brethren who are with Paul and the Philippians, and between all the saints and the Philippians. Many believers had never seen each other. The greetings give expression to the inter connectedness that existed in Christ Jesus.

It is nice to read that even in Caesar's household there were people who had heard the loving voice of God. The gospel produced fruit in that place also. We do not know what positions these saints in Caesar's household held. In any case it should definitely be an encouragement to pray for all who are in authority (*1Tim 2:1-4*).

V23. Paul ends his letter to them with the wish that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with their spirit. Grace is the hallmark of God. You owe everything to it and you are constantly dependent on it. It is the fountain of all the goodness in your life. It is the source of all that you are allowed to do for the Lord. Grace is here connected with the full name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is your 'Lord'; He is 'Jesus' Who was on the earth in humility; He is 'Christ' Who is now in glory. You saw it all in this letter. Paul wishes that your spirit may be constantly filled with all that is written in this letter. Then your life will be focused on one purpose: on the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Now read Philippians 4:15-23 again.

Reflection: Name a few things of the riches of God in glory in Christ Jesus. Praise Him that He supplies all your needs according to these riches.

The Letter to the Colossians

Introduction

First carefully take in this letter; please read thoughtfully.

There are two things that make this letter valuable in a special way for you as a young believer. First, all attention is drawn towards the glory of Christ's Person. This glory is expressed in various ways in different relationships. You will see Him as the Son of the Father's love in whom dwells the fullness of Godhead (*Col 1:13,19*); you will see Him as the Creator and Sustainer of all things (*Col 1:16-17*); and you will see Him as the Savior and Head of His body, the church (*Col 1:14,18*).

Secondly the way the mystery (*Col 1:27*) is being unfolded, namely as a source of encouragement (*Col 2:2*). The mystery implies that the church is made one with Christ. The more you discover and appreciate it, the more it will support your faith and give you encouragement in an environment that knows nothing of this and even rejects it.

The intent of this letter is that you receive teachings from the things mentioned in it and begin to reflect on them. The result, no doubt, is that your heart and your eyes will be filled with the glory of the Lord Jesus. I can assure you that eventually your soul will be overflowing with gratitude, joy and confidence.

The *letter to the Colossians* is the third letter Paul wrote from his imprisonment in Rome (after the *letter to the Ephesians* and the *letter to the Philippians*). This is not a letter from a study scholar. Paul had experienced comfort and joy in his soul as he reflected on the glory of the Lord and wrote it down. You can also experience the same when you read this letter.

All of Paul's letters were written on the occasion of something he had noticed or heard. The reason for the *letter to the Colossians* was that Paul had heard of errors that had gained access to Colossae. Epaphras must have conveyed these to him. It is not clear what exactly the errors were.

However there are some hints in the letter, namely, in *chapter 2*. There for instance you read about philosophy (*verse 8*), of Jewish rituals (*verses 16–17*), and worship of angels (*verse 18*). They are elements both from paganism and from Judaism. There was only one way that the evil that has been done by these mistakes could be undone and that is by visualizing the entire glory of Christ. Whoever gets to know this glory will never need to have anything to do with errors.

As mentioned earlier Paul must have heard of all the developments in the church at Colossae through Epaphras. This faithful servant stood in close relationship with the church at Colossae. From *chapter 1:7* one can understand that the church at Colossae emerged as a result of the work done by Epaphras. He had preached the gospel to the Colossians (*Col 4:12*). It was, however, not 'his' church, but he certainly felt a great responsibility for them. When errors appeared he spoke to Paul about them, and Paul in turn took paper and ink in his hand, and wrote to the believers in Colossae regarding the dangers of the errors and taught them how to arm themselves against such dangers.

Paul himself had never been in Colossae (*Col 2:1*). However, he didn't think: 'It is the church of Epaphras; let him handle the matter.' Paul was conscious that he was the servant of the entire church. He was also aware that it was not his church but the church of Christ. It is this awareness that gave him an ardent love for the church. When the enemy attacked the church by trying to introduce heresies, he went into action. False teachings are the masterly means to destroy the church – even to the extent of assaulting Christ, for Christ and the church are one.

Paul has learned that at the moment of his conversion. He was busy persecuting the church at that moment. The Lord Je-

sus, however, spoke from heaven, to halt this persecutor of His church, saying: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4). The persecution of the church on earth was equivalent to the persecution of the Lord Jesus in heaven. Here you learn that the church on earth and the Lord Jesus in heaven are one. The church is one body with Him as the Head. This is called the mystery in this letter. A mystery is something which was not made known in the Old Testament, but now it is revealed to the church.

There is one more letter in which you read about this mystery – that is the *letter to the Ephesians*. However, the manner in which Paul speaks about this mystery in the *letter to the Colossians* is different from the way he does in the *letter to the Ephesians*. It will help you to understand the *letter to the Colossians* better when I mention a few differences. One important difference is that the *letter to the Colossians* shows that Christ is one with the church on earth while in the *letter to the Ephesians* the church is presented as one with Christ in heaven.

Another difference is that in the *letter to the Colossians*, the Christian is seen as risen with Christ, but not made to sit in the heavenly places as in the *letter to the Ephesians*. In fact he says to the Colossians that there is a hope laid up for them in heaven (Col 1:5). That means namely that they are not seen in heaven as in the *letter to the Ephesians*, but in their life on earth. You can also conclude that from the exhortation of Paul that the Christian should direct his thoughts and feelings on the things which are above and not on the things that are on earth (Col 3:1-2).

Another difference is that the *letter to the Colossians* reveals the fullness that is in Christ (Col 1:19; 2:9), and our perfection in Him (Col 2:10), while in the *letter to the Ephesians* the privileges of the body are presented.

Lastly I would like to point out the fact that in the *letter to the Colossians* the emphasis is on Christ as our life. The emphasis on the other hand in the *letter to the Ephesians* is more on the Spirit, Who is mentioned only once in the *letter to the Colossians* (Col 1:8).

When you compare these letters with one another in this way you will be more and more aware of the unique characteristics of each letter. In my introduction to the commentary on the *letter to the Ephesians* I compared some letters together, drawing a parallel to the journey of Israel from Egypt, through the wilderness, to the promised land. You can read about it there. I did not mention the *letter to the Colossians* in that comparison. You can classify this letter between the *letter to the Romans* and the *letter to the Ephesians*.

The *letter to the Romans* is about the deliverance from the bondage of sin (the picture of Egypt) through the work of Christ. The *letter to the Ephesians* is about entering the blessings in the heavenly places in Christ (the picture of the blessings of the Canaan land). The *letter to the Colossians* sees Christians as freed from the bondage of sin and connected to Christ. They do not enjoy the blessings of the heavenly places yet, because they are still on the earth.

In this letter, the circumcision of Christ (*Col 2:11*) is mentioned. This reminds us of the circumcision of the people of Israel after they crossed over Jordan (*Jos 5:2-9*). The Israelites were indeed in the land, but they had not fought yet. They were yet to conquer the land.

The circumcision of Christ speaks of the judgment Christ suffered for you on the cross. Since you believe that, now you are free to enjoy His glory which is described in an excellent manner in this letter. I hope and pray that you will experience this to the fullest.

Now read this letter again.

Reflection: Which portion, or which passage, gives you the content of the letter in the best way?

Colossians 1

Prayer For Blessings – Giving Thanks | *verses 1-5a*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ [who are] at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. 3 We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, ...

V1. Paul introduces himself as an apostle. He was not an apostle because he arrogated that role to himself, nor because someone persuaded him. It was also not a vocation that he had chosen for himself, or one that people had instructed him to do so – God Himself stood behind his apostleship. God wanted him to be an apostle and that gave him his apostolic authority. Whoever opposed this authority, opposed God in reality.

The emphasis of his authority in the beginning of this letter is necessary because such important things were at stake. Paul did not preach his own opinion on these things, but God’s truth. To listen to him meant recovery from errors and a renewed worship of God. To disobey meant the destruction of the life of faith.

It was not just authority by which Paul could stand above the believers so that he could give them command. He includes Timothy along with himself as sending the letter, and presents him as “our brother”. Timothy is the brother of Paul and the Colossians and he is the link between Paul and the Colossians. Paul is the apostle over them, but as brother he is one among them. The closeness of brother is the best way to exercise his authority. If

authority is exercised with this awareness, there will be no lust for power, but only the desire to serve (*cp. 1Pet 5:1-4; Lk 22:24-27; Jn 13:13-16*).

V2. Then he speaks of the Colossians as “*saints and faithful brethren*”. With brethren he means both brothers and sisters. This word refers to the bond of family relationship that believers have with each other and it points to their mutual fellowship. The family bond of the Colossians had a few additional marks. It was a ‘saintly’ family that God had set apart for Himself. It was also a ‘faithful’ family, which relates more to their practice. Their position before God and the practice of their faith life agreed together. You must have both these features to understand the truth in this letter.

Paul adds “*in Christ ... in Colossae*” to these features. On the one hand you see the fact that the family relationship is spiritual in nature; Christ is the connecting element. On the other hand it is a relationship that is experienced in Colossae on the earth. I hope that the name ‘Colossae’ can be replaced by the name of the local church you belong to. You can judge for yourself the standard of your church on the basis of the Word of God.

After introducing the senders and naming the addressee, he has a wish for the Colossians. He wishes them grace; that is that they consciously live by the grace given to them. To live by grace means to expect everything from God and nothing from self. The result will be peace. Whoever considers God in everything has this lasting peace in his soul. Paul wishes them this peace from God our Father. God is the source of grace and peace. When he speaks of Him as our Father he again emphasizes the family bond he has with the Colossians.

V3. After the introduction, Paul begins his actual letter. His first words must have gone well with the Colossians. Would you not find it encouraging when someone says to you that he give thanks God always whenever he prays for you? Do you also give thanks to God for others? You have a special relationship with the believers for whom you give thanks. Then you are also sensitive to their

spiritual condition. Once their spiritual condition changes for the worse you will pray for them just because you feel that your giving thanks for them comes under pressure.

You will accept a word of admonition more easily from someone – brother or sister – who you know give thanks for you. If things in someone’s life disturbs you a little and would decrease your giving thanks for him or her, then that would be the reason for you to address the issue with them. This is the way Paul gets to work.

He had an intimacy with God whom he knew as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By the word ‘our’ he reiterates his fellowship with the Colossians both in their relationship to God the Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus he brings their fellowship to a Divine level. This is the sphere in which he stands and makes his appeal. In his letter, so to speak, he comes to them carrying around the fragrance of the sanctuary. He wants them to smell and taste this so that they let go of everything that does not match.

V4. In *verses 4-6* the apostle holds together a number of reasons for his giving thanks to God. Only then he speaks (from *verse 9*) of the subjects for which he prays.

He had never seen them. Others had told him of their “*faith*” and “*love*” – the best evidence for him that they possessed the Divine nature. They openly testified to the Lord Jesus – that is they did not do it in secret. Nowhere in the New Testament are we called to keep our faith to ourselves, or to practice a sort of secret discipleship. The truly converted will have the desire to testify of their faith publicly.

It is said of their faith that it is “*in Christ Jesus*”. There are many who claim to believe. What is of prime importance is in whom they believe (*2Tim 1:12*). As for the Colossians there was no doubt about it. Do people around you know in Whom you believe? Faith in humans, dreams or feelings give no security for one’s faith.

Faith in Christ is evident in its love for all believers. Even the Colossians testified to this. It is impossible to love God and hate a brother (1Jn 4:20). The vertical and the horizontal go together. Only God knows all the saints. Once we come to know a saint (a true Christian) we love him. Not because he is nice but because he belongs to Christ.

Their love was not sectarian, limited to a select group but embraced “*all the saints*”. Their love was to all those who yielded to the love of God. They loved not only the believers in the local church but all believers wherever they lived. This is a good example which you and I can imitate.

V5a. After faith and love Paul speaks of hope. Here is the well-known triplet – faith, hope and love (see also 1Cor 13:13; 1Thes 1:3; 5:8). Hope was the incentive which gave substance to their faith and love. There is no stronger motive for faith in the Lord Jesus and love for all believers as hope which is reserved in heaven. Paul thanks God that he is able to relate this new community of believers to heaven.

When you think of the hope in heaven your heart will be filled with the essence of this hope which is the Lord Jesus. Again, the effect of this will be that you love all those who are dear to the heart of the Lord Jesus.

This hope was a part of the gospel that was preached to them. The effect of the gospel is not just for the here and now, namely, the deliverance from the power of sin. The gospel also has significance for the future, for the entry into the eternal glory. How could it be otherwise? Christ is there and we are set free to be with Him. We will not always stay in this world and also we do not have our home here. We have a hope. This hope enlightens our way through the world.

Now read Colossians 1:1-5a again.

Reflection: Giving thanks to God in your prayers for a number of beautiful characteristics in your brothers and sisters.

The Truth of the Gospel | verses 5b-9

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

... of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel 6 which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as [it has been doing] in you also since the day you heard [of it] and understood the grace of God in truth; 7 just as you learned [it] from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, 8 and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit. 9 For this reason also, since the day we heard [of it], we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ...

V5b. The hope laid up in heaven for the Colossians – and for you and me – is a powerful motivating force to love our fellow believers. We will be in heaven eternally with the Lord Jesus along with the children of God. If this hope is alive in you, you will also be careful not to have a quarrel with any fellow believer. Did you hear of this hope when the gospel was preached to you? That was apparently the case with the Colossians. In my case, I cannot remember whether this was mentioned. But in the course of time it became clear to me that the hope in heaven is inseparably united with the word of truth, the gospel.

This expression shows that the gospel is the pure news of God – not just a happy report to men mixed with human elements. So it came to the Colossians and they believed it, and that saved them. It is as if Paul is already saying (which he points out later): ‘When you know that, how can you open yourself to the Greek philosophies and Jewish traditions? Was there ever a philosophy preached in the world as the message of hope through which people could be saved, receive life and bring forth fruit?’

V6. Let us see once again the hallmarks of the gospel. First you see that it has to do with the hope, which is the future. The sec-

ond characteristic is that this message of hope is not limited to the Jewish people. The gospel reached the Colossians who were in the world then, and now reached even you. It came to them. It is as if a person entered from somewhere. This is actually so, because the gospel represents Christ.

The third characteristic is that it brings forth fruit everywhere in the world wherever believers are. What the gospel caused in Colossae is to be seen in every believer throughout the world. The gospel has brought you into contact with God. Consequently it also produces fruit in you for God. The gospel is first the seed that, the moment you heard it and believed it, awakened in you the eternal life. So you became the fruit of the gospel for God. Thereafter the gospel has become a seed that produces fruit in your life. This fruit also is for God.

First you must become a fruit in order that you may bring forth fruit. Wherever the gospel is accepted you see growth and fruit and not stagnation or decline. That is the big difference between Christendom and other religions, and especially the Jewish system. All religions demand fruit from a man without a change taking place in his inner life. Christendom on the other hand brings first an inner change through conversion and new life, and then fruit and growth are visible.

The gospel that is preached is complete in itself. We cannot make it easier, or richer or simpler. It cannot be enriched or improved upon by any means. What can be bigger and better is the fruit bearing and the growth. The proclamation of the gospel is God's part and fruit bearing and growth are your part. One can stand in the way of fruit bearing and growth by allowing all sorts of things in his life which do not please the Lord.

This happens when you forget the "*grace of God*" that you have known "*in truth*". Can you still remember how you went to the cross with your sins? There you recognized that you could be saved only by the grace of God. You recognized that God's truth applies to you, too – as He says: "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rom 3:23). You also recognized His salvation in

Christ which He offered to you in His mercy. You are converted, have eternal life, and are in a position to bear fruit and grow.

Marvel continuously about the grace of God that you have sincerely understood. You had no right to it. It is a gift from heaven. Then you will see quickly when things come into your life that are delaying the process of fruit bearing and growth, and you will even prevent them.

V7. There were people among the Colossians who in order to gain influence, taught things that were contrary to the teachings of Epaphras. If their evil intentions would succeed, then that would be the end of fruit bearing and growth in the Colossians. Epaphras carried a pure gospel to them. He was the means of their conversion.

Without any jealousy Paul mentions the service that Epaphras had done there. Paul underscores the correctness of what Epaphras taught. He speaks about the gospel as a doctrine. It is not a dogma but a doctrine which means life. Not only by rebirth, but in everything this life involves afterwards. You can read a beautiful description of this doctrine in *Titus 2:10-15*.

Besides the doctrine of Epaphras, Paul also emphasizes his work along with him. He calls him "*our beloved fellow bond-servant*". Paul places Epaphras on a par with himself and Timothy, and with the word 'beloved' he gives expression to his special relationship with Epaphras. When servants of God so speak of one another, and so relate to each other, then there is no room for any base motives in rivalry.

Paul praises the faithfulness of Epaphras in his service to Christ. Faithfulness is the most important characteristic of any service that is done for the Lord (*1Cor 4:2*). The Lord does not reward a gift or a success but faithfulness (*Mt 25:11*). This should be a great encouragement for you and me to live entirely for Him and not be envious of what others are doing.

V8. Epaphras' faithful service to Christ is expressed in his concern for the Colossians. His service did not stop with his preaching of the gospel. He also did the follow up. When he saw the approaching danger that they would deviate from Christ, he rushed to Paul and Timothy. He not only spoke of the error which threatened to find entry, but he also reported about the deep and sincere Christian love of the Colossians, the source of which was the Spirit. This at the same time was proof that correction was not yet too late. The Spirit was still in action in their lives.

V9. After this introduction full of gratitude Paul shares with them that from the moment he heard of their conversion he was constantly praying for them. Here you see the best way to keep your spiritual interests alive towards certain particular believers. Paul also shares with them the content of his prayers for them. From this you can learn what and how you can pray for others.

Our prayers and our supplications have to do with our perspective on God's interests in His children. If we are aware how deeply God is interested in all His own, would we not, then, pray more for their problems and would think less of our problems? We are often more like Abram who asked: "O Lord GOD, what will You give me?" (Gen 15:2) than like the Abraham who worshipped Him and prayed for others (Gen 18:23-33). Paul is more like the latter.

The first thing he asks is that they "*may be filled with the knowledge of His will*". The apostle is not satisfied with anything less. The will of God must fill their whole thoughts and their entire view. Then there is no place for our will or for the approaching errors.

However, doing the will of God is not a matter of blind obedience. That is why the apostle next prays for "*all spiritual wisdom and understanding*". This will enable you to do the will of God in your life in the right way and with spiritual understanding.

Now read Colossians 1:5b-9 again.

Reflection: What are the truths of faith that are connected with the gospel?

Walk Worthy of the Lord | verses 10-13

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

..., 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please [Him] in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. 13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ...

V10. With *verse 10* we come to the heart of the letter. The point is to walk worthy of the Lord. This is not said to a select group of super Christians, but to all Christians. It is not a concept that leads to the formation of trained preachers who are able to convey their knowledge to large groups of people. No, it is an order to which every believer should give the highest priority. Here you are called to a walk that is in accordance with the worthiness of the Lord. Therefore you must indeed know the worthiness of the Lord, which is brought before you extensively from *verse 16* onwards.

That He is called 'Lord' brings you to a relationship with the position the Lord Jesus now occupies, a position He received from God (*Acts 2:36*). Besides the knowledge of His worthiness, it is also important that you recognize His rights as Lord in every area of your life. Knowing His worthiness and the recognition of His lordship will result in your whole walk being a pleasure for God. God will recognize the image of His Son in such a walk. He rejoices in it.

Now you should see the other unique effects of such a walk. First it is about every good work. You can take it as a species of rich fruit; every good work is a certain fruit. The fruit, the good work, is the result of your connection to the Lord Jesus Christ as the true vine (*Jn 15:1*).

Sometimes one is happy when he does a good work. But God is not pleased with that. He has provided you with all the necessary means so that you can do nothing else than good work. You can use these means if you take the preceding and the following verses and let them work in your life. When God endows you with such rich resources, you should not be satisfied with doing something good now and then.

As mentioned in *verse 6*, fruit bearing is followed by growth. By fruit bearing, people think more about the enjoyment of the one for whom the fruit is determined. That is why it is given the first place. By growth we mean the life that develops itself, the process of increase and maturity. It is about the believers.

It is not about growth *in* the knowledge of God but growth *through* the knowledge of God. If we use in our lives what we know of Him we will grow. The argument that knowledge is not important but that it is all about practical Christian life doesn't make sense. Without knowledge it is impossible to grow in faith and put Christian life into practice. Incidentally it is a mistake to assume that you can do something practical without you knowing how it works. This applies to social life as well as to spiritual life.

V11. In society you also see that people who speak knowledge-ably radiate power. Your strength to walk worthy of the Lord is in the knowledge of God; the more you know of God the less prone you are to resistance and to all sorts of errors. You are "*strengthened with all power*"; there is the power to overcome every form of resistance.

This is not a power from an earthly, human source. This would give no guarantee of victory. No, your power comes from the heavenly glory, the glory of God, the glory of the Lord Jesus. That is the source with which you are brought in contact and nothing can work against it.

This power is not only resistant to *fierce* attacks but also to *long lasting* offensives. As long as you are on the earth there will be resistance. The greatness of this power is that you can bear all. And

while you persevere you remain patient and you are even happy. You do not experience this with people who do not know Christ. Perhaps they have an enormous capacity to stick it out and can put away a lot of attacks. Their patience however will come to an end sometime, not to mention the absence of joy.

The Christian who is focused on Christ is able to endure suffering with patience and even with joy instead of yearning to be delivered from suffering (*1Pet 1:6-9*). That is the miracle of real power and not the accomplishments of heroic deeds in the forms of signs and wonders as healings, exorcisms and raising the dead. You will be strengthened with all power – the standard for this is Christ in glory – to be patient and forbearing in a world where you are going through pain and suffering in your life with God. There is no clearer proof of the power than this life-style.

V12. A walk in this life-style gives joy. This joy is directed to the Father and expresses itself in thanksgiving to Him. Thus you are lifted above your circumstances. Your thoughts are focused on what the Father has done for you and what He has given you. Then you see that you cannot but thank Him.

He has already enabled you together with all the saints who belong to the church, to enjoy the inheritance in the light of God's presence. That really is something great, isn't it? It does not say here that He will enable you sometime; neither does it say that you are indeed able but that you must continue to grow further. That is all not the case at all. Your capability is an established fact. You have received this by your new nature. You are born of God and you have received God's nature, and therefore you can be in the light of God.

However the inheritance lies in the future. Peter also speaks about it (*1Pet 1:4*). The inheritance is what the Lord Jesus will possess when He reigns over all things. Then you will also reign with Him. You inherit from God as His child (*Rom 8:17*) and that means that your inheritance is from your Father. The Father Who gave you the rights over His inheritance has prepared you to receive it and to enjoy it.

V13. However, something must have happened in you, by which you became enabled to share in His inheritance. To begin with, you did not belong to the light at all, but on the contrary to darkness, lacking even the smallest ray of light. You were in its power, the darkness holding you prisoner. Satan, the prince of darkness, was your master. Those who sit in darkness lack even the smallest ray of light. There was absolutely no orientation as to where you were or where you were going.

How terrible the darkness was, was found when the Lord Jesus came as the light! But the darkness did remain (*Jn 1:5*) because people loved darkness rather than light (*Jn 3:19*). The power of darkness held people captives – this was shown at its height when people caught the Lord Jesus and killed Him (*Lk 22:53*). The grace of God however is greater. The Lord Jesus conquered the power of darkness. He rose from the dead. As a result the One Who said “*light shall shine out of darkness*” lit up your heart and saved you from this power (*2Cor 4:6*).

But that was not the end. After He saved you, you have not landed in a sort of no-man’s-land; neither has the Father transferred you back to a restored paradise. It is much more glorious. He transferred you to the kingdom of His beloved Son. In this kingdom the Son is the Center. The atmosphere of this kingdom is the love of the Father to His Son.

When you think of a kingdom, you think of domination and subjugation. It is so here also, but everything is embedded in the love of the Father to the Son. So it is not just an atmosphere, but it is all about Divine Persons. You have already been brought in contact with the Father and the Son, and their love already surrounds you. I do not know if you can come up with anything greater.

Now read Colossians 1:10-13 again.

Reflection: Examine the blessings Paul lists here. Thank the Father for every blessing.

The Glory of the Son | verses 14-19

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

..., **14** in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. **15** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. **16** For by Him all things were created, [both] in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. **17** He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. **18** He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. **19** For it was the [Father's] good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ...

V14. All the previous blessings have become possible through the Lord Jesus Christ. You are delivered from the domain of darkness only by salvation. Salvation is not only a mighty act, but it happened only by paying a ransom. The Lord Jesus paid this ransom on the cross with His blood (1Pet 1:18). He gave His life (Mt 20:28). Thus you are His property now (1Cor 6:20). So if we do things for the benefit of our own selves, then we actually rob Him because we belong to Him entirely.

Another magnificent result of the price He paid is that all your sins are forgiven. I wonder if you ever realized this. If not, that's a pity, because, though you are free, the burden of sin could sometimes weigh heavily down on you; and you might be going about with remorse in your heart. But cheer up. The blood of Jesus Christ has solved the problem already. Your sins are forgiven; they are gone and they have disappeared from the sight of God. He no longer sees them or thinks of them. Do you doubt this? Then listen to what the Scripture testifies: "*The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin*" (1Jn 1:7).

Redemption and forgiveness are granted by God but caused by Christ. Any annoying question that is shot at you or demands an answer can now be dealt with adequately. I am thinking of the

people who make your right to the inheritance a matter of dispute. Sometimes you might feel that you are incapable of enjoying the relevant blessings. Then you should say – certainly with humility, but with joy and assurance – that you are saved and have received the forgiveness of sins.

Now your relationship is fully with His beloved Son. When you thank the Father you spontaneously talk of the Son (*Jn 5:23*). If the Father is the source of every blessing, then the Son is the channel through Whom all the blessings come to you. The Son has executed all the plans of the Father at His own expense. Now it is all about worship. Thank the Father Who is the source of every blessing! Thank His beloved Son Who is the channel through Whom all blessings have become accessible to you.

V15. Who is this beloved Son Who has made these blessings available to us? Here the apostle presents the Lord Jesus not only to refresh your heart, but also to fill it so that there is no room for anything else. His presentation is in the following sequence:

- Who Christ is in *Himself*;
- what He is *in the works* that He accomplished;
- what He is *in His own*.

“He is the image of ... God” and that means He is the representative of God. Only He can be this because He is by nature God. This nature comprises the complete equality of the Son with the Father in His essence, in His nature, and in His existence as the eternal One (*Jn 14:9; 1:18*). Only through Him we can know God.

He is also the *“first born of all creation”* (*cp. Rom 8:29; Heb 1:6; Rev 1:5*). This does not mean that He was the first created being. It describes the preeminence of the Son Who is exalted above everything. This refers to the *order of ranking*. You see this also with Solomon. He was not the first born son of David (*1Chr 3:1*); nevertheless he was called the firstborn (*Psa 89:27*).

The Lord Jesus is not a created being but He is over all created things and beings. He is the Creator indeed. He is the Firstborn,

because He created all things. When the Creator by being born as a Man enters into His own creation, He cannot be anyone other than the Firstborn. He is the Lord of all creation.

V16. Although there are three Persons in the Godhead, creation is attributed to the Son (*see Jn 1:3; Heb 1:1-2*). Everything in heaven and on the earth so in the whole universe both in its visible and invisible forms owes its existence to Him.

The thrones, dominions, principalities and powers appear to be references to various angelic powers (*Eph 6:12; 1Pet 3:22*). However impressive the angelic world may be, the glory of the Son Who created them is infinitely greater. The whole angelic world is called to worship Him and is created to serve Him (*Heb 1:6-7*).

He made them in His own strength (“*by Him*”). He did it personally (“*through Him*”) and He did it for His own glory (“*for Him*”). He is the beginning, the means and the end of creation. This excludes the worship of anything or anyone else.

V17. The words “*He is before all things*” expresses that He is the eternal Son, the eternal Being; He was there before creation. He has an eternal pre-existence. He stands outside of creation; He does not belong to it; He Himself is not a creature. He also reveals the fact that He sustains everything by His own power (*Heb 1:3*). He not only called everything into existence but the current existence owes itself to Him. Planets traverse their prescribed courses only because He guides them and upholds them. Should He withdraw His hand for a moment, this would simply mean the end of the world.

V18. After speaking of His glory as the Head over all creation. Paul says that the Lord Jesus is the Head from another point of view (*verse 18*). One can say that as He is Head over the first or old creation, He also is Head over the new creation. Head symbolizes authority and dominion as well as life and growth. This also applies to the new creation, the church, which owes its existence to Him. He is the church’s beginning and its origin (*Rev 3:14*). In

the absolute sense He is the beginning of everything, while and because, He Himself is without beginning.

However there is a big difference in the way the first creation originated and the way the second creation came into being. The first was created by the Word of His power (see *Gen 1; Psa 33:6,9*). In order to become the Head of the new creation he had to become Man and go through death to resurrect from it.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus was the new beginning for God. Thus the church, called here the body, emerged. We can compare it with how Eve was built from Adam. God put Adam in a sleep of death. During this sleep of death God took a rib from his body and formed it into a woman. When Adam saw her he said: *"This is now the bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh"* (*Gen 2:21-23*). Paul applies this to Christ and the church (*Eph 5:30*). The church is the body of Christ and Christ is the Head. He directs His body and gives it what it needs.

The Lord Jesus has the first place not only in the first or the old creation, but He also is the Head and the Firstborn in the new creation. In the new creation He is the *"firstborn from the dead"*. This does not mean that He was the first to be resurrected from the dead. People had risen from the dead earlier. But even here He is the Firstborn because He has the priority over any other who has risen from the dead or shall rise.

He is the First because by His resurrection He is alive for all eternity (*Rev 1:18*). By His resurrection He entered into another world which is now open for others. All who believe in Him will follow His resurrection. The special feature of this position is that by His resurrection He takes the first place in all things as Man.

As God He has the glory of the Creator. But He became Man in order to pass through death as a man. As Man He is risen from the dead and as Man He has ascended into heaven. He became Man in order to remain so forever. That does not lessen His glory but makes it greater.

V19. This is evident in the words “for it was the [Father’s] good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him” (verse 19). In the Lord Jesus – He is meant by “in Him” – dwells the triune God with joy. This was so when He came to the earth as He did the work of God, and as He returned afterwards to heaven. God is revealed in all His fullness without limitation, in the Person of Christ. In Him the triune God is involved with the new beginning. How great is His glory!

Now read Colossians 1:14-19 again.

Reflection: What are the glories of the Lord Jesus Christ you have discovered in this passage?

Reconciliation and Ministry | *verses 20-23*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

..., 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, [I say,] whether things on earth or things in heaven. 21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, [engaged] in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— 23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

Introduction. In the previous verses the glory of the Son as the Head is presented in two ways:

- He is the head over the creation.
- He is the head in the resurrection.

You will see more glories which stand on the one side in connection with the old creation and on the other side with the new creation or resurrection.

Similarly there are also two reconciliations:

- One of the creation.
- One of the believers (saints) who form the church (*verses 20-22*).

Also there are two ministries which come from Him:

- The ministry of the gospel that is preached to all creation.
- The ministry to the church (*verses 23-25*).

V20. First we read about the reconciliation of all things, namely the creation. Through reconciliation there arises a peace where there was enmity (*Rom 5:10*). Enmity arose between man and God through sin. Man drew the creation with him in his sin. The creation is still under the dominion of satan (*Jn 12:31*).

The Lord Jesus broke the power of satan through His work on the cross. Sin will be taken away from the world because of His once and for all accomplished work (*Jn 1:29; Heb 9:26*). The results of His work will be seen when the Lord Jesus will publicly exercise His authority. Authority has already been given to Him in heaven and on earth (*Mt 28:18; Heb 1:8-9*).

Peace can come because all that caused disturbance is taken away. This peace was made on the cross and will be enjoyed in the kingdom of peace and for all eternity. That will mean a great relief for all that is now groaning in pain under the evil and corrupting power of sin under satan (*Rom 8:22*).

This peace is based on the “*blood of His cross*” which is the cross of Christ. The Lord Jesus shed His blood on the cross. Peter calls it ‘the precious blood’ because it is the blood of a Lamb without blemish and without spot (*1Pet 1:19*). This basis is unassailable and holds its values for eternity. You can say this as follows: The basis of reconciliation is defined by the blood of the Lord Jesus, but the reconciliation of the things on earth and in heaven with God, still lies in the future.

The reconciliation of all things of course does not mean the reconciliation of all unconverted people as well as satan and his demons. They will not be reconciled but subjugated to Christ (*Phil 2:10*). It is all about the things on the earth and in the heavens, i.e. the material world. The doctrine of universal salvation is a gross heresy, a lie from satan.

V21. The reconciliation of all things lies in the future. Nevertheless there are people who are already reconciled, including you. Praise the Lord for that. You have faith in the shed blood of Christ for your sins. Once you stood outside of reconciliation, you were

alienated from it, and you were even hostile to it. This was expressed in the wicked works you did.

V22. The Lord Jesus became Man in order that you could be reconciled. He bore your sins in *"His own body on the cross"* (1Pet 2:24). His death is the sure proof that He bore God's judgment for your sins. Death, namely, is the wages of sin (Rom 6:23). At the same time, however, reconciliation took place through Christ's death. His death is the sure foundation on which rests the reconciliation.

As a result you stand in the favor of God. He sees you as holy and perfect in His eyes. Sin will no longer be counted against you. Nobody can bring a single accusation which can succeed against you. God, men and satan can find nothing on which they could lay their fingers at. The death of Christ has provided for all.

Christ stands before you as the perfect result of His perfect work in the perfect light of God, and indeed no flaw can any longer be found against this. The just claims of God have been fully complied with by the atoning work of Christ so that no question can be raised against its legality.

V23. After the securities faith offers, there comes an *"if"*. That seems to make the foregoing uncertain as though it depends upon our commitment to have a part in it and to keep it. The power of this 'if indeed' however is that the chaff is separated from the wheat. The aim is to encourage faith and to condemn the self-confident nominal Christians.

A namesake Christian confesses with the mouth that he is a Christian. But he has never gone to God with a remorse for his sins. He had never accepted in faith the power of the blood of Christ for the remission of sins. You have part in the foregoing blessings only when your faith is genuine, and you really belong to the Lord. You should say 'Yes' whole heartedly to this. You will provide evidence that you remain in the faith that came to you through the gospel which you accepted.

What Paul says here is not to bring you eventually to doubt, but just to encourage you. You would certainly completely agree with Paul that faith is demonstrated by the fact that you are holding it, especially when resistance arises. With your faith you must deal with resistance, both by hostility from people and by the flattery of false teachers.

If your faith is genuine you are “*firmly established and steadfast*” and you are “*not moved away from the hope of the gospel*”. If your faith is not genuine, that will show up. The hope of the gospel is not to be saved by the gospel but is Christ. The gospel is not a summary of a number of rules that you must keep; the content of the gospel is a Person. If you are connected to Him by faith you will not want to allow anything that obscures or hides your view of Him. This desire for Him is present in everyone who loves Him in truth. I do not doubt that it is so with you also. You have heard this gospel exactly as the Colossians heard it (*verse 6*).

Paul became the minister of this gospel. The range of his ministry was the whole creation. The gospel is valid throughout the world and universally applicable (*Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15; Acts 1:8*). His ministry was directed in a special way to all the nations that are under the heaven (*Gal 2:7*), though he certainly did not exclude the Jews. In his love for them wherever he went he first preached to them from the Word of God (*Acts 13:46; Rom 1:16*). But the gospel was not limited to the borders of Israel. It extended to the ends of the earth (*Acts 1:8*).

The whole creation on the earth was the range of Paul’s service. Here you notice the fact that Christ is the Head over creation. As you have read, it embraces all things in heaven and earth. This, at the same time, is the distinguishing feature of the gospel. The words under the heaven show that the gospel is not preached in heaven but on the earth. The gospel is addressed to the people on earth and not to the angels in heaven.

You saw the same distinguishing features by the two sides of reconciliation. The reconciliation of all things does not mean that all people will be reconciled. Only people who believe in the Lord

Jesus will be reconciled. This happens at the very moment they confess their sins and believe that His blood covered their sins before God.

Paul became a minister of this gospel. The Lord Jesus appointed him to this ministry (*1Tim 1:12*). Formerly he was a blasphemer, a persecutor of the church (*1Tim 1:13*). Now he is both a preacher and a teacher (*1Tim 2:7*). He preached the gospel to all people and instructed those who became members of the church by believing the gospel. His ministry to the church is mentioned in the verses following.

Now read Colossians 1:20-23 again.

Reflection: What do you learn about reconciliation in these verses?

Christ In You – Perfect In Christ | *verses 24-29*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. 25 Of [this church] I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the [preaching of] the word of God, 26 [that is,] the mystery which has been hidden from the [past] ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Introduction. In *verse 23* Paul started to say something about his ministry. He talked about his ministry of the gospel that he preached in all creation under heaven. Now he talks about his other ministry, his ministry to the church. This ministry has the same two sides as the headship of Christ and the reconciliation through Christ. And this ministry is also connected on the one hand with the creation and on the other with the resurrection. So there is

a double headship of Christ:

- Head over the creation and
- Head of the body,

and a double reconciliation through Christ:

- of all things – later, and
- of people – now.

In addition there is a double ministry of Paul:

- of the gospel and
- for the church.

V24. For Paul, the ministry to the body – the church – is associated with sufferings. He suffered to make known the truth of the church. He was in imprisonment for that. He says to the Colossians that these sufferings are for them (“for your sake”). His sufferings for the global church meant the sufferings for the local church. What applies to the local church applies to the global church.

This form of suffering, Paul says, is in addition to the afflictions of Christ for the sake of His body which is the church. Here he does not speak about the afflictions *for* Christ, but *of* Christ. His sufferings had the same character as the sufferings of Christ. This does not mean that he suffered to the same extent, and certainly not because of reconciliation. Reconciliation lacks nothing; it is complete in itself. God purchased the church through the blood of His own Son through His sufferings on the cross (*Acts 20:28*).

No, it is all about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ as a Witness on the earth. In His witness the Lord Jesus revealed God. This brought enormous afflictions upon Him because men did not like to break with their sinful ways and deeds. The Lord Jesus Christ in His life on the earth revealed God but not all the eternal purposes of God (*Jn 16:12*). Only when the Holy Spirit came to the earth, the believers were given insight into the purposes of God through the apostle Paul (*Acts 20:27*). Witnessing to this truth brought abundant sufferings to Paul. These were not vicarious sufferings but additional sufferings. On the earth the Lord Jesus could not suffer for this truth because He did not reveal it then.

Paul did not view his suffering for the church as a necessary evil. He rejoiced in it. He saw the church as the body of Christ, as a community of people who had a special bond with Christ. He saw what the church meant for the heart of Christ. Therefore he did not shrink from suffering, but advocated it.

V25. He desired that all those who belonged to the church both then and in the future, would know how unique the church is in her relationship to Christ. That was his ministry.

As he made this fact known he completed the Word of God. Completing or making the Word of God fully known does not mean that Paul wrote the last words of the Scriptures. John did that. It is not about the Bible books, but it is about the themes, about the things God wanted to make known to men.

The communication of the mystery, which was not known earlier, means that he communicated the last thing which God wanted to reveal. All other themes that God wanted to communicate were already known. Think of such things as the law, the kingdom, the redemption, the Person of Christ, and the ways of God. After he revealed this mystery about Christ and the church, no truth was left to be added to all God had revealed.

V26. This mystery was unknown in previous ages and in previous generations. Now it is revealed, certainly not to all people, but only to the church, His saints. It relates to Christ and the church, and especially the fact that believers from the nations and the believers from the Jews together form one body (*Eph 3:4-6*). The church does not exist from Adam; for it was hidden in all previous ages and it is now revealed.

V27. The special characteristic of the church is that it is connected to a Head in heaven; that was unimaginable in the times of the Old Testament. The coming of Christ to the earth, His suffering, His death, His resurrection, His ascension and His return to the earth to establish His kingdom in glory, power and majesty were not mysteries; they were already revealed. But a Christ Who is glorified as Man in heaven, as the Head of His body formed by the saved Jews and Gentiles, is found only in the New Testament.

The mystery here, exactly as in the *letter to the Ephesians*, is the union of Christ with His church. Paul's emphasis here however is different from that in the *letter to the Ephesians*. To the Ephesians He presents the church of Christ in heaven; to the Colossians He

speaks about 'Christ in you'. This means that Christ is seen here in His church on earth. This means that the glory of this mystery is only visible in faith.

Another special feature is Christ 'in you'. In exactly the same way as Paul uses the words 'for you' in *verse 24*, he says that this is not about the global church but about the believers in Colossae. What is true of the global church is seen in miniature in the local church. And another thing: the 'you' denotes those who were originally Gentiles. To find Christ with the Gentiles is completely new. God used to live with His people. When the Lord Jesus came He stayed with His people. But now to find Christ with the Gentiles sets aside the privileged position of the Jews.

V28. It is all about Christ. Paul and other preachers proclaimed Him, a Person, and not a doctrine or a philosophy. The essence of Christendom is a Person and not a better teaching. Christ was the substance of his proclaiming, admonishing and teaching. He had an eye on everyone. This is strongly emphasized by using this expression three times 'every'. Every difference had disappeared. It is about everyman personally and not in mass.

Paul not only saw the church as a whole but everyone individually. It was a ministry of one to one. He warned of the coming wrath to the unconverted people. He taught the great truths of the Christian faith to the converted people. His ambition was that each person should reflect the power of the Word and the Spirit of Christ and grow towards perfection. This is real follow-up and after-care.

Paul is not satisfied that someone only accepts the Lord Jesus as Savior. He is concerned that every person, including you, is presented perfect in Christ. He desires that you reach the stage of spiritual adulthood and that is the meaning of the word "complete" (*Phil 3:15; Heb 5:14*). It is that you grow up to the point where nothing else is more important in your life than Christ alone. Then you know not only your standing before God in Christ and that God sees you in Him, but living in God's presence means everything to you.

That is the meaning of life; a life that has no room for anything from men. Christ is all. It is all about a father in Christ (*1Jn 2:13*). For this it is necessary that you understand Who Christ is, and that your character is formed by this knowledge.

V29. This lofty goal – God’s goal for every person – which the apostle had before his eyes, demanded the use of all his vigor and energy. This also entailed much struggle and resistance, but Christ worked in him and gave him the strength. The servant who has the passion to reach the goal as mentioned in *verse 28* – that Christ is everything for the soul – will find all the power for this ministry in Christ.

Now read Colossians 1:24-29 again.

Reflection: See if Christ is everything in all the spheres of your life.

Colossians 2

All the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge | verses 1-5

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and [attaining] to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, [resulting] in a true knowledge of God's mystery, [that is,] Christ [Himself], 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument. 5 For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.

V1. For Paul it is important that the Colossians knew that he is fighting a great spiritual battle for them and for their neighbors at Laodicea. He adds: “*And for all those who have not personally seen my face.*” He expands the circle to all the children of God through the centuries. He wants everyone, including you, to realize that he has a great struggle for every believer. He struggles to make the believers understand that the church is one with the Head in glory. He desires that this full awareness works in their hearts.

He struggles for them because he saw the danger of false teachers, and as a result the Colossians could lose this awareness. He struggles in prayer for this in his imprisonment. He is not struggling *against* the heretics but *for* the believers. If believers live in accordance with what they have become and what they have received in Christ, false teachers cannot gain control over them. We should not underestimate the importance of prayer for each other as we struggle along with Paul.

V2. It is good to tell someone that you are praying for him or her. It is an encouragement, a blessing for the heart of the other. They feel supported. Thus prayer is a great tool that God has given to us to comfort others. Even if you are someone who perhaps does not have a public service in the church you can be an instrument of comfort and encouragement. This service is open to every child of God, and can be done anywhere. Paul did it while he was imprisoned; you can do it in your room (*Mt 6:6*). You should not think little of consoling a heart as though it is something trivial. It is the fruit of a prayer battle.

Encouragement is needed when fear and discord arise due to emerging heresies; for encouragement provides the heart with strength and resistance. When someone's heart is encouraged, it affects all aspects of his life, *"for from it [flow] the springs of life"* (*Pro 4:23*).

There is one more fruit of this prayer struggle. The believers will be united against the upcoming enemies with their heresies; they will be firmly knit together, with the bond of *"love"* indeed. Welded together and interconnected believers who love each other form an impregnable fortress. Note that it is about a fellowship experience. We cannot experience this individually.

When you isolate yourself you can study the Bible and get spiritual insight, but it will not be possible for you to be strengthened by experience. Maybe you can explain what it means to be united in love, but it is quite different to experience it. You can never really understand something if you do not experience what it means. For example if you are not married you can know about it, but you can only really know it when you are married.

Believers who are knit together are not only protected from evil but they are also open to what is good. Paul comes still closer to the heart of this struggle. He wants to take the believers to the treasury of faith. That treasury is the Person of Christ. All the riches are to be found in Him. Paul wants them to understand this.

When you understand the mystery of God, you have complete security and you know for sure that nothing further can be added. But as long as there is a propensity for pagan philosophy or Jewish traditions, you lack the complete security. You are hurting yourself and above all you are hurting Christ. He is everything. He wants to be everything to you and He is not happy with anything less than that; neither are you, are you? That is why Paul is very anxious that you come to the knowledge of the mystery of God.

V3. And where can this knowledge be found? In Christ. For in Him *"are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"*. Christ is the great treasury of Divine riches. There is nothing apart from Him that can be complementary to this. Nobody can add something to Him. Everything is hidden in Him, which at the same time is inviting all to search for these treasures. All these treasures are accessible to all believers.

This however requires exertion. Treasures are hidden for their high value. They do not lie on the surface. You know however where you must dig: in Christ. The big question is: 'How much is this treasure worth to you?' Your appreciation will be determined by your efforts. Do you doubt its value? Look again closely: all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The word 'all' does not allow any exception.

Job makes an impressive comparison of wisdom with the finest metals which can be obtained only with much strenuous effort, and concludes that even all these treasures are eclipsed by wisdom (see Job 28). Job wondered: *"But where can wisdom be found?"* (Job 28:12). Here is the answer: in Christ.

The wisdom of God in Christ is revealed in a special way by the existence of the church. The manifold wisdom of God is seen in the church (Eph 3:10). Only the wisdom of God could think out a plan that Christ would connect with people who are sinners by nature and that they would share in His glory.

In Christ you can even know all there is to know about God. There is no true knowledge outside of Christ. People can have interesting ideas or express assumptions both about the origin of creation and about how man can come into contact with God. But whether it is about the origin of heaven and earth or about the church, only in Christ will you get to know both the one and the other.

V4. Paul says all this because the right view is the great protection against misleading teachings. Knowledge of the mystery will keep you from being receptive to errors. You will not be impressed when people approach you with persuasive speech and give the best of their nice rhetoric. A beautiful and smooth speech and fiery argument are no guarantee that the truth is spoken. Paul himself did not make use of persuasive words. The power of God was palpable in him (*1Cor 2:4-5*).

People who lure away believers from the faith are conspicuous by their arguments based on probabilities, and their training system is based on derivatives of conjecture. The truth, on the other hand, does not require evidence. One does not need to defend the truth. *Speak* the truth and the truth will defend itself.

V5. Although Paul and the Colossians had never seen each other, Paul was always busy with these believers. He took upon himself the responsibility for them, because they belonged to the church and he was a minister of the church. His deep concern for the churches came upon him daily (*2Cor 11:28*). The evidence of this concern is seen firstly in the fact that he constantly prayed for them, secondly that he wrote this letter, and thirdly that he sent Tychicus to them.

Worries apart, before he speaks about the seducers further, he points out some things that he saw in the Colossians he was happy about. Their good order and the steadfastness of their faith in Christ were presented to him so alive that he could see them with his spiritual eyes. Besides their external order there was also an inner steadfastness which consisted of faith in Christ. Christ was the object of their faith. Outer order and inner steadfastness

are mutually reinforcing. They are both necessary to prevent your faith from being torn apart.

But be on your guard! The enemy can also try other ways to undermine the steadfastness of your faith. When he cannot take away anything from you he would like to add something that apparently deepens your faith. In reality however he wants to scoop out your faith and make it powerless. This is illustrated by the verses following.

Now read Colossians 2:1-5 again.

Reflection: What treasures have you discovered in Christ?

Brought To Fullness In Christ | *verses 6-10*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

6 Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, [so] walk in Him, 7 having been firmly rooted [and now] being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, [and] overflowing with gratitude. 8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. 9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; ...

Introduction. The enemy is tirelessly busy attacking the nature of believers, namely the nature of their faith. He wants to inflict as much damage as possible upon their faith in God. He will try to make you doubt certain truths of the faith. For example, he tries to persuade you that God did not mean all that. If you reject his arguments and repel his attacks, he will try a different way. When he does not succeed in taking away something from you he will try to add something to your faith. He offers some appealing motivation. Do you want to believe more and better, and deepen your faith? Then he has the exact solution for it.

V6. To avoid yielding to this danger, the enrichment by additions to your faith, Paul takes you back to the beginning. You have received Christ and accepted Him; is there anything else that you accepted besides Christ? Indeed you were not saved – nor were the Colossians – by the Jewish or Greek wisdom or by Christ plus additional wisdom. It is clear and must be strongly emphasized that Christ is sufficient for our salvation. He is also sufficient for your walk as a Christian. All that is required for salvation comes from Him.

Further you have accepted Him as “*the Lord*”. You have accepted Him as the absolute sovereign Ruler of your life. There were no

negotiations. As it was when you first accepted Him, it should be so even today.

“So walk in Him” is a commandment and that means other ways of walk are forbidden. Walk in Him means that you put into practice what you know of Him, and that you are doing His will in your life.

V7. You draw your life force from Him, and not from any philosophy, because you are *“rooted ... in Him”*. That way you are standing firm like a tree that withstands the storms. Rooted in Him reminds you of what happened at your conversion. Christ is presented here as the soil in which you were rooted at your conversion. From then on you get your entire food from Him. Therefore it is important to be firmly rooted and your roots penetrate deeper and deeper into Him.

“Built up in Him” makes us think of a house. Here you see Christ as the corner stone on which you build your life’s house. The structure of the house is dependent on Him; the construction is done in Him. Therefore you must align yourself with Him so that He can show you the plan and process of building.

When you are deeply rooted in Him, orientating yourself to Him for the building up of your faith life, you will be strengthened in the faith. Faith is the truth of faith that you believe. Faith finds its center in Christ. Faith affects Him. Confirmed in faith means to be confirmed in Christ. You can see that it is all about Him. Even in your life of faith all things are from him, through Him and for Him.

These were not new things for the Colossians. They had already been taught them. I wonder if it is so with you too. In any case you have the touchstone in your hand to test the teachings that you received at your conversion and thereafter. You might discover some things in your life that need to be changed, also your view of things. You will also have the desire to apply them and do them as it is said here. After you have received the right teachings and accepted them you will surely overflow with gratitude.

There is much reason to give thanks if you let what you have become in Christ and what you have received in Christ to work in you, and consider how this is quite enough for now and forever. Thankfulness to God is at the same time a protection against temptation to doubt the faith delivered to the saints once and for all. When your heart is full of the wonderful truths of the gospel your giving thanks will ascend to God. Giving thanks is a very effective antidote to the poison of false teachers.

V8. “*See to it*” Paul insists. Do not think you are immune to the wiles of the enemy. He prowls around and considers every believer a prey. He plans even to carry you away as loot from the Lord Jesus. Two means he uses are philosophy and empty deceit.

Philosophy is as old as the world, but it has never saved a man from misery and sorrow caused by sin. The reason is the world’s philosophy ignores sin and pretends sin doesn’t exist. That is the reason every solution philosophy offers is empty deceit. This cannot be otherwise, because philosophy is a product of the tradition of men, and it is seamlessly woven with the basic principles of the world. In the basic principles of the world you can think of all the individual parts that make up the world’s system. God has no place in this system.

When the tradition of men, that is the tradition besides Christ, gains any value over the knowledge of God, it is in contradiction to the Scripture (*Mt 15:3-9*). When you begin to favor the traditions instead of the Bible, it means that doubt replaces the security. Traditions are from men and not from God. Where traditions get room, the door to the basic principles of the world is open.

In many ways they have crept into the service to God. People recognize traditions because outward appearance is the measure of the spiritual content of the service. The Spirit of God is suppressed by an order that is made by men. For example consider situations where only qualified, eloquent people should preach, and where altar, cloth, music and icons decorate the whole event.

Paul sets the whole system aside with one stroke of the brush or better with one name: Christ. The twofold danger, philosophy and human tradition, is contrary to Christ. He who has Him has everything.

V9. What do you need more than that you have Him, in Whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily? This is almost the same expression we find in *chapter 1:19*. There he refers to the time when Christ was on the earth to fulfill the counsels of God. Today (*verse 9*) He is in heaven as the result of the finished work of redemption.

In both the expressions you can see what Christ was when He came to earth and what He still is and will remain in eternity. He took a body then and has always had a body since, although now He has a glorified body. He became Man in order to stay so in eternity. The dwelling of the fullness of the Godhead bodily is a present and an ongoing dwelling of the fullness of the Godhead in the glorified Son of God at the right hand of God.

It is not that only certain aspects of the Godhead dwell in Christ, but the complete and total volume of all the essence and attributes of God, for He is God Himself. He does not share His Divine power and majesty with any single creature. The body He has is imperishable and that is forever.

V10. The conclusion Paul draws from this, of course is breathtaking. He says that you are in Him, in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily, and brought to completion. You lack nothing. In Him you are perfect before God.

On the one hand you see that God is presented in Him in all His fullness (*verse 9*); on the other hand you possess in Him the completion and perfection of God. You lack nothing in terms of your position before God. There is nothing and no one who can take place between you and Christ, because you are in Him. Philosophy and tradition can add nothing to this perfect position. On the contrary anything you take from them will drive you far from God. Do you want that? Please note that He is not only greater

than all men but also greater than all the angelic powers He created. You are perfect in this Person. What more do you want?

Now read Colossians 2:6-10 again.

Reflection: What contrasts do you find in these verses?

In Him, With Him | *verses 11-15*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

...; 11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

V11. It is really amazing that you are perfect in Him. Now therefore it is understandable that the question arises: 'How did I come in Him?' Paul explains this in the verses we have before us now. You have become one with the Lord Jesus in His death and resurrection. By faith you must know that what happened to Him when He died and rose again has happened at the same moment with you too.

The word "*circumcision*" refers to a practice of the people of Israel in the Old Testament. God placed this as the sign of the covenant He made with Abraham and his descendants (*Gen 17:9-14, 23-27*). What happened then does not happen here again literally ("*made without hands*") but it has a spiritual meaning. This circumcision took place "*in the removal of the body of the flesh*" and indeed at the very moment when "*the circumcision of Christ*" took place.

Circumcision means that something is cut off thoroughly. For the people of Israel that was the cutting away of the foreskin. Spiritually it means the body – a generic term for all that serves the sin-

ful flesh to express itself – is totally cut off. This cutting away happened through the judgment the Lord Jesus suffered on the cross.

The circumcision of Christ has nothing to do with the literal circumcision that happened on the eighth day after His birth (*Lk 2:21*). That circumcision happened with hands indeed. But the spiritual significance of circumcision is the judgment of the flesh. God in Christ condemned sin in the flesh (*Rom 8:3*).

You are also circumcised in Him. In the judgment He met, you see the judgment that you received. That He bore this judgment in your stead does not change the fact that it was executed on you. When God judged you, you were in Him.

V12. Your being one with Him does not stop with that. Death is followed by burial. Burial is the confirmation and the validation of death. Your burial in fact is the signature which certifies this statement. When you get baptized you declare publicly the truth that Christ bore the judgment for you. You show outwardly what happened in you inwardly. You draw the full consequences of your being one with Him by breaking all ties with the world at the very moment of your baptism. One cannot think of a more radical break with the world than being dead and buried. When you think of it, it will keep you from returning to the world and from its influences.

Through your conversion and baptism, and through your death and burial, you are no longer for the world. This marks the end of your old life and at the same time the beginning of a new life in a new world. You have entered into this new world “*through faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead*”. The fact that God raised the Lord Jesus from the dead is proof that the work is done perfectly.

Everything is in order. Whether you feel that now or not the fact remains the same. The question now is not whether you feel, but whether you believe. As good as you see your own judgment in His judgment you may see your resurrection in His resurrection

through God. Are you aware of how far reaching the consequences of your own connection with Christ are?

V13. Well you know now how you came to be in Him. But, how does it look now with all the things that you were, with all the sins you have committed before this time? Can they be held against you again? There is a sufficient answer to this question. That answer silences everything that exalts itself against your perfection in Christ.

You fully agree that you were “*dead in your transgressions*”. Dead in this instance means the total absence of any movement towards God. Also in this death there is nothing that is in tune with the benevolent desire of God. You were dead to God and thereby you were not concerned about God’s commandments, but you trespassed them. That was because you were dead in the uncircumcision of your flesh. You followed the affections of your sinful, unjudged flesh (*Rom 8:6-7*).

God brought life to you who belonged in this state of death and its evil way of life and mentality; and He brought you into relationship with His Son. God found perfect satisfaction in His work. He proved the fact that He raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. His resurrection and the fact that you have been made alive with Him is the assurance of the forgiveness of your sins. All sins are forgiven without exception.

The life of the Son and your life in Him give no room for a single question that can be raised regarding any sin that you ever committed. When you are made alive with Him all your sins are forgiven. Possession of life proves that sin is put away because it is the resurrection life. Sin cannot enter the area of resurrection.

V14. At the end of *verse 13* Paul changes from ‘you’ to ‘us’. He now says something that is primarily intended for the Jews. It does not mean that it is not written for you. You will see that you received freedom in addition to life and forgiveness. But to understand the power of his words, it is important to bear in mind whereof he speaks in the first place.

The “*certificate of debt*” is written in the debtor’s own hand. That is exactly what Israel had done. When the Lord gave them the law (here called “*decrees*”) on Mount Sinai they declared: “*All that the LORD has spoken we will do*” (Exo 19:8; 24:3,7). Soon this declaration became their adversary. Very quickly it became clear that the conduct of their life was completely contrary to the statutes they wanted to keep. The law was an unbearable yoke (Acts 15:10). Their debt was still more burdensome and prohibitively large to pay.

Then Christ came. He paid the debt and wiped them out. He cleared the mortgage note and tore it up. One clears something which hinders his pathway or his work. This literally means to make something disappear completely so it doesn’t matter anymore. This is what happened on the cross. There you see that it did not happen by nailing something to the cross but by nailing Someone to the cross. The same word nail comes again to point out the print of the nails which was visible in His hands after His resurrection (Jn 20:25).

It must be clear to every Jew who believes in Christ that the death of Christ made the very requirement of the law powerless. How easier it is for him to breath now! The threat that comes from the law is over. He is made alive with Christ and therefore he should know by experience what kind of life he has received in Him – the kind of life that can be received in no other way.

What foolishness it would be to give it up and prefer to come under the law again? If you are not a Jew you never were under the law. But it is applicable to you also. What a folly it would be when you subject yourself again to what has been cleared away by Christ, even if the intention behind it could be out of gratitude!

V15. You are freed from the law because you are dead. You are saved from death because you have been made alive with Christ. And you are also saved from the power of satan and all his demons because the cross is the victory over the forces of evil. Life, liberty and victory are your portion in Christ. By going through death straight away He disarmed the one who had the power

over death (*Heb 2:14*). He achieved victory before all eyes. The enemy is not only shut out but also humiliated.

There is not a single reason to pay him any honor. Honor belongs only to Him who was crucified in all weakness and overcame in this way. What is weaker and more humiliating than to hang on the cross? But thus He gained complete victory. The triumph is complete.

Now read Colossians 2:11-15 again.

Reflection: Count everything by which you are made one with Christ and what He has done for you. Give thanks to Him for it.

Holding the Head | *verses 16-23*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

16 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17 things which are a [mere] shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on [visions] he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. 20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” 22 (which all [refer to] things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, [but are] of no value against fleshly indulgence.

V16. Paul has made your position clear in Christ. You have life. God’s purpose is that you live this life of freedom and that is a life of victory. Outsiders will evaluate your life. That is alright. But sometimes there are outsiders who want to tell you that you have to adhere to certain statutes. You should not yield to them an inch. Remember religious statutes have no authority over those associated with Christ.

Do you know what it means if you allow these things in your life? You deny the perfection of the work of Christ and its glorious consequences for you personally. The enemy indeed is disarmed; but certainly his cunning strategy is not over yet. His greatest weapon, death, is no longer a threat. However he wants to devastate your life of faith. He knows how effective Jewish and other

religious statutes are. He is successful, if only he can make you comply with them.

The five things that are named are the marks of the religious system which the false teachers hold on to. None of them is spiritual; it is all material and earthly. There is nothing wrong in eating and drinking; but when a religious significance is added to it, it is a corruption of the true worship to God. In Israel dietary laws had their place, specifically for annual festivals, the monthly new moon, and the weekly sabbath. When these things are brought over into the Christian era, the true meaning of Christendom is lost.

V17. The covenant observances of the Old Testament were shadows of the reality that was to come. The reality is Christ (*Jn 5:46*). Christ is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament shadows. He is our true food and our true drink indeed. He is the fulfillment of everything that is presented in the various festivals. To implement parts of this shadow in Christendom is to cast a shadow on Christ.

This is like viewing the photo of a person while the person himself is physically present. The one who is satisfied with the photo and ignores the person rejects the person himself. Whoever continuously changes his attention between the photo and the person himself offends the person because he says thereby that the person himself is not sufficient. The desire to mix the shadows with reality means that Christ is not enough.

Currently there is a discussion about keeping the sabbath. There are voices which want to make the sabbath, in some form or other, an integral part of the Christian life. A discussion on this subject in the light of what is presented here is completely useless and even dangerous. Of all the twenty-one letters in the New Testament this is the only occasion where sabbath is mentioned. To keep it? No, on the contrary to abandon it. Is that not instructive?

V18. In *verses 16-17* Paul points to the threatening danger from the Jewish side namely the observances of the laws and covenants.

In the verses following he points out the danger falsely called knowledge in the form of mysticism. Maybe you know of people who claim to have had visions. They drive hard to impress that they have seen things others have not seen.

Thus they present themselves as more spiritual than others and view themselves as a kind of mediator. You must visit them to learn specific things about God. They are very humble in their behavior as though they do not seek their own glory. But they worship angels because they maintain that these creatures are in the immediate presence of God, and again they think that they can learn more about God through them.

When you open yourself to such people and their ideas you run the risk of losing the prize. And that means that after your Christian race you will be robbed of your crown. The only angels who want the adoration of humans are evil angels. Holy angels decline this worship (*Rev 19:10; 22:9*). Another pernicious form of worship is that of Mary as the mediator, as though she is necessary to draw near to God or to the Lord Jesus. This is not the humility with which one seeks the honor of God. It is a false humility and the worship of a creature.

Paul exposes these people by saying that their ideas come out of their own depraved thinking, the thinking of the sinful flesh. There is absolutely no basis for this.

V19. Whoever accepts such ideas no longer holds on firmly to Christ the Head. You are – this is true of every member of the church – personally connected to the Head, and without any intermediate person of whatever kind. Your growth results from this direct connection with the Head, Christ Jesus, without any intermediary. God has ordained it thus. Growing this way is growing with the increase that is from God.

Do not let anything or anyone come in between you and Christ. Each member of the body is in direct contact with the Head to fulfill its own function. Through the Head you are connected with all the other members of the body and you grow up together. Do

you realize that if you give in to false teachings and traditions of men, not only your own growth is disturbed but that of other members too?

V20. You are again directed to the death of Christ in order to escape from the dangers of the Jewish and philosophical systems. What to die with Christ means is that you are dead to the systems of this world and to its elements. Then how can you subject yourself to certain specific statutes. If you have died then you cannot continue to live as though you still belonged to that system. All laws and regulations and other things are no longer applicable to you because you are dead. Is there anything that could still exercise power over the dead? Can a dead man respond? Can we expect any action from him?

Christendom is not keeping all sorts of commands and taboos. You are freed from all those because you died with Christ. A renewed attention to these things means that you go back to the world to which you died.

V21-22. In summary, the decrees “do not handle”, “do not taste”, “do not touch” are earthly and material things. They are like any laws in connection with decrees (Mk 7:1-23). They are not applicable to you. It would also be foolish to get involved in them. They are also things that have absolutely no lasting value; they all perish after they are used. This is because they are according to the commandments and doctrines of men. What is devised by man will not last long; only what is conceived by God will last forever (1Pet 2:24-25).

V23. Sometimes what is invented by man appears to have great value; nevertheless it is only apparent, and the reality is hollow. Their talk sounds wise; but the content is foolish. Self-will is dominating. The ‘I’ stands in the center. It does not bend before God and His Word. They bend indeed and appear to be very humble, but that is not their real attitude towards God. It is their attitude towards creatures which they look up to, perhaps to exceptionally gifted men or even angels.

In the realm of the spirit they worship those who are superior to them, but in the realm of matter created by God there is no respect. Thus the body was regarded by the Greeks as a prison in which the spirit was trapped – just dust and irrelevant. While the spirit develops and unfolds, the body is punished with fasting and mortification. The needs of the body cannot be resisted. The pride of man wants to dominate everything, even the God created bodily needs. This effort is nothing more than the satisfaction of the sinful flesh.

If you are conscious that you died with Christ the enemy will try in vain to gain entry into you with his errors.

Now read Colossians 2:16-23 again.

Reflection: In this passage on ‘commandments and teachings of men’ did you detect anything in your faith life? What will you do about them?

Colossians 3

Christ Our Life | *verses 1-4*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

V1. The last verses of the last chapter dealt mainly with the fact that you died with Christ. You saw how important that was. Now we see the other side of the coin. Not only you died with Christ but you also rose with Him.

If you have been raised with Him, (the word “if” is not to be understood as an option, but as an absolute certainty) then you are transported into a new world. Previously you were living in a world which had only a cross and the grave for Christ. There you served sin. Now you live in a world where everything is about Christ and where you are serving Him. Now you are freed from every form of slavery. This certainly does not mean that you are free to do anything you wish. Perhaps you have learnt through trial and error where such experiences lead to. You certainly do not want it at all. No, you are given this Christian freedom to serve Christ.

Serving Christ begins with the fact that you are seeking those things which are above. Why? It is because Christ is there. Keep seeking the things that are above does not mean that you should always be dreaming of heaven. It means to be centered on Christ and represent Him on earth. You compare this with an ambas-

sador in a foreign country. He promotes the interests of his own country. He is not sitting there on a comfortable chair thinking about his beautiful homeland.

It is a constant exertion using all ones resources. By seeking after things that are above your life is formed here. It is more and more showing the character of your life that is above and that promotes your service and testimony. It is a quest to know all the attributes of the glorified Christ. Your knowledge of all His glory will keep you from all the doctrines and commandments of men.

One of the essential elements of the Christian faith is that Christ sits at the right hand of God. This faith determines our Christian position. We have much in common with the faithful of Israel; but we have a big difference here. They did not know a glorified Man in heaven with Whom they were made one. But we do.

V2. This knowledge therefore determines our life and position on earth. The fact that Christ is there determines where our interests are and where we must focus our attention.

Unfortunately many Christians are not aware of this and they live as an earthly people of God – looking for things on the earth. In such cases they consider it right to enjoy all the beauty that is found on the earth. It also can happen that they campaign for the equitable distribution of all the beautiful things on earth. The first look for a good job and a high standard of life and the second gets involved in politics to obtain the desired things. Both categories of people ignore the fact that they are united with Christ in heaven.

When one considers the things that are above, we can only be conscious of the fact that our real wealth is found there. Then you can no longer think of the things on the earth. Here you are only a steward of those things. You must leave behind everything when your time on earth is over. You cannot take them to heaven. Therefore it is stupid that you cram your head and heart with earthly things. You are warned in many places in the Bible about setting your heart on earthly possessions (*see Mk 10:24; 1Tim 6:17*).

One who is engrossed in earthly things expresses the fact that the Lord Jesus has no place in his life (*Mt 16:23; Rom 8:5; Phil 3:19*).

Earthly things do not necessarily have to be sinful or worldly. Earthly things are often the things that God has given. Marriage, job and rest are all good things. But if life consists only of those things then your view on Christ is blocked and you no longer live with Him. Then you are like someone who looks for copper instead of gold because you think copper is as valuable as gold. We do not consider someone like that as being wise, yet many Christians are living like that.

Faith transfers many future things to the present, and the present things to the past or the future. Faith sees things that cannot be seen and lives in it. Earthly mindedness caused sadness in Paul (*Phil 3:18*) and also in the Lord Jesus.

V3. Again it is said that “*you have died*” to this world and that your new life does not have a single link with this world. In this world Christ is not only absent but He is also hidden (*Jn 8:21-23; 13:33*). Your new life is also hidden to the world because Christ is your life. It is unknown to the world.

What was the last thing the world saw of Christ? It was that He hung dead on the cross and was in the grave. With that everything seemed to be over. But faith looks beyond the grave and sees the resurrection and glorification. If He is your life, then the world gives you the same place it gave Him. The world understands nothing of the motives which guide you because it does not know the source; it is hidden to it. You are still here to bear witness to Him Who is hidden to the world.

The world itself has nothing to improve upon. Any attempt to improve anything in the world overlooks the fact that Christ is rejected by the world and is now hidden to the world. Among the Corinthians there were believers who felt the need to exert political influence. They desired even to be rulers (*1Cor 4:8*). But for the faithful who belong to the church the time of ruling is still future.

V4. The mark of the believer's life is that it is with God and that it will be revealed soon. Now the world does not know us; but it certainly will later (*1Jn 3:1-2*). Change does not happen by the acceptance of Christian principles, thanks to political efforts, which could create an environment in which Christ can feel at home. No, when Christ is revealed in glory, He will judge the evil in the world in righteousness. He thus creates the perfect conditions for His government which would enable the thousand year long reign in justice and peace.

His public appearance in the world will highlight your relationship with Him. You are made one with Him in His death, in His resurrection, in His present obscurity and in His appearance before the entire world. When Christ is revealed, you also will be revealed with Him. Then the world will see the hidden source of the life you lived on the earth. For He Who will be revealed then, is already your life on the earth now.

Now you live in this world as someone who died to the world. By this you prove that you do not have any expectation from this world. This means for the here and now it is only rejection and suffering, but that will change the moment you are revealed with Christ in glory. Then the times of rejection and suffering will be over and you will certainly have a responsibility and a position. You will reign with Him and share in His glory.

This revelation of Christ with all His own is something different from His return for His church; of the latter the world will not notice anything (*1Thes 4:15-17*). After the Lord Jesus has taken the church away for Himself as His bride, the marriage of the Lamb will take place in heaven (*Rev 19:7*). Then He will reveal Himself to the world with His bride following Him (*Rev 19:11-16*). This is His appearance in glory. Then every eye will see Him (*Rev 1:7*) including you along with all those who will come with Him (*2Thes 1:10*).

Now read Colossians 3:1-4 again.

Reflection: How do you seek and what do you think of the things that are above?

Christ Is All and In All | verses 5-11

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, [and] abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its [evil] practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— 11 [a renewal] in which there is no [distinction between] Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

V5. After the magnificent view of the last verse you find yourself with both your feet on the earth again. There is something you must do. If you enjoyed the glory of Christ and your part in it because you are in Him, you will have no desire to indulge in sinful desires. They hinder you from seeking the things that are above. In view of this you have already been told what things you should not seek. Now you read of things you must put to death.

You may ask how to put them to death. It is not that you should kill yourself or your flesh. The old self, the old man, is dead; he has been made powerless. God condemned sin in the flesh (*Rom 8:3*). The mechanism which made use of the sin, the old man, is dead (*Rom 6:6*). Consequently you need to consider yourself dead to sin (*Rom 6:11*). That means you no longer allow the members of your body to be used for sin, but place yourself in the service of God (*Rom 6:12-13*).

When sin attracts, you must immediately cut off its work on you. A more radical solution than considering as dead does not exist. Putting to death is a stronger and a more meaningful expression.

You have to act uncompromisingly with immoral things. This is what you do when sin is denied any authority. Just say to yourself, 'I do not give any room for that sin'. You assign sin its appropriate place – the old self; it has no more say in your life.

With this determined attitude you prevent thinking on it. As soon as you begin to think on sin you are lost and the sin in question grabs its chance to get hold of you. To put to death means to take the life out of sin. As a result sin is denied all chances to reveal itself.

Paul is very clear about the particular “members” of the body. The members are identical with sins.

- The list begins with “immorality” (as in *Gal 5:19; 1Cor 6:9; Eph 5:3*). This sin is a serious threat to holiness.
- “Impurity” is closely related but more general; it means any kind of uncleanness.
- “Passion” refers to erotic desires that lead to immorality in thought and action.
- “Evil desire” in this context seems to refer to sexual desires.
- “Greed” means wanting to have more and more, and seems in this context connected to sexual offences.
- Sexual desire that dominates to the extent that it has taken the place of God becomes “idolatry”.

V6. Maybe you have heard of the view that the only sin upon which God’s judgment comes is unbelief. This is a misconception as you see in this verse. There are other sins upon which the “wrath of God will come”. The wrath of God comes upon all sins. The wrath of God comes from His hatred for sin. God’s wrath is not the expression of His temperament but of His government. That wrath will be revealed and is described in *Revelation 6-19*.

The wrath of God meets people who do not know new birth and who remain in their unbelief. The characteristic of such a life is disobedience. It is presented as if disobedience is their father and they its children with all their rebellious characteristics. It is unbearable when believers imitate them. The motivation to put to death the members which are on the earth will be present with you.

V7. That does not mean that you can now arrogantly look down upon the sons of disobedience. As a believer you must be aware that you are not standing over them. You too were resistant and lived exactly like them before (*Tit 3:3*). Now it is not so. This life came to end when you died with Christ.

V8. Therefore you must put off all these habits and traits which people saw in you before. It can be described as though you put off the piece of clothing you wore before. It is about the attitude that once marked your life. This attitude was particularly evident in your speech. The things that are mentioned here have to do with the tongue, and consequently with the heart, because what you say comes forth from the heart (*Mt 15:18*).

- The first sin expressed by the heart is called “*anger*”. Definitely anger is the expression of our temperament. An expression of anger need not necessarily be sinful (*Eph 4:26*), however in this context it is.
- “*Wrath*” emphasizes the sudden outburst of emotions about a thing; *anger* refers more to a state or condition of mind.
- “*Malice*” is an attitude that is intended to harm or damage others.
- “*Slander*” is the deliberate utterance of falsehood about another person in order to place him in a bad light.
- “*Abusive speech*” can be a ranting or slovenly or nasty talk.

V9. Lying is a sin of the tongue, which characterizes the old self. It is not in vain said that every person is a liar (*Rom 3:4*). Since the believer has put off the old self (or: the old man) with his deeds he must also end his unsavory comments. Relationship with the old man is torn down. The old man is the essence of the first Adam as he is expressed in the totality of his progeny.

V10. You no longer belong to the first Adam but to the last Adam – Christ. He features the new man you have put on. The new man is characterized by Christ as expressed in all believers. Only all believers put together can express the hallmarks of Christ as no single person possesses all of Christ. Something of Christ can be seen in each person.

Putting on does not mean to be clothed from the outside but this new man is seen outside from the inside. The new man is what you are inwardly after your conversion. You will show this in your life. You have put on the new man in your conversion. The more you know of God, the more you will exhibit the new man in you.

“Renewed to a true knowledge” means that God brings the new man to the full knowledge of His counsel. This is a process of development. The model God always has before Him is Christ. God wants to teach this new man in the knowledge of Christ in order to shape him in the image of *“the One who created him”* (see *Col 1:15; Gen 1:26-27*). The more He works in you the more you will walk as the Lord Jesus did (see *1Jn 2:6*).

V11. Every difference disappears in the new self or the new man (see *Gal 3:28-29*). Only Christ is seen and He fills everything with His glory.

- In the new man there is no difference between *“Greek and Jew”* and that means all difference in race, national origin, or nationality is gone.

- Also there is no difference between “*circumcised and uncircumcised*” which points to the religious difference, the external relationship with God.
- The difference between “*barbarian*” and “*Scythian*” has vanished. Among these lowest cultures the Scythians were given by the Greeks a place lower than the barbarians. In Christ Jesus such difference is no longer there.
- With the abolition of the distinction between “*slave and free-man*” the social difference in the new man is no longer present.

The only position that counts is our position in Christ. He is everything in this new man; yes you can now say, He is the new Man.

While you are waiting for the glory of the Lord where God will be all and in all Christ already lives in His saints. He has formed the new man in them in whom He is all in all. The old man might have statutes and philosophies, but for the new man Christ is everything.

Now read Colossians 3:5-11 again.

Reflection: What are the characteristics of the new man and what are not?

Put On Then ... | verses 12-15

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things [put on] love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

V12. You know what to put to death and what to put off. If you have done that, then nothing more is expected of you since you do not want to do anything with the old man. The way is now free that you can put on something else. The aim is that you show your new clothing to people around you, in all that you say and do.

Now do not think: Who am I that I could do that? Listen to the kind of appeal made to you.

- Firstly you are one of the “*chosen of God*”. That is because of the special act of God’s grace. He has chosen you to be His and for Him. Why should He do this to you is a question which could overwhelm you. But exalt Him for this unmerited favor.
- Secondly you are a “*holy*” one. He has chosen you and separated you from all people who live without Him. He gave you a special place in order that you may be holy and blameless in His sight (*Eph 1:4*). You are called a saint.
- Thirdly you are one of His “*beloved*”. He loves you. Everything has come from God. How ungrateful you would be if you refused to accept this love in its entirety on grounds of false humility.

It is great to think that these three names are also used for the Lord Jesus (*Lk 9:35; Jn 6:69; Mt 3:17*).

This is your position. God declares that He sees you like that. Now Christ can be made visible in your life. The life of Christ is expressed in your life in its different aspects as mentioned here. If we go through them separately you will see that every time it is connected to some form of self-denial. You can exhibit these characteristics only when you are able to bow down and humble yourself. The Lord Jesus Christ showed all these features in His life in perfection.

- “*A heart of compassion*” is in contrast to passion that seeks its own gratification. It is the kindness out of which flows forgiveness (*Lk 1:78*); it is the affection of Christ Jesus (*Phil 1:8*).
- “*Kindness*” is the abundance of goodness that comes out of the tender mercies.
- “*Humility*” is an attitude that is proper for you before God and people. The Lord Jesus calls us to learn this from Him (*Mt 11:29; Phil 2:3*).
- “*Gentleness*” is an expression in which you put up with injustice and do not insist on your rights and privileges (*Num 12:3*). In the world meekness means not being able to push through and run everything. Meekness is the opposite of a self-assertive behavior.
- “*Patience*” is the patient endurance of evil. It is the spiritual ability to bear evil without direct retaliation.

V13. You find opportunities everywhere in the world to exhibit these characteristics in which Christ is visible. The following characteristics will be shown more clearly in your relationship with believers who can make things difficult for you. The word “*one another*” also involves you. Sometimes you too might be an uncomfortable fellow believer to someone else.

“*Bearing with one another*” means that you do not pass comments on about someone else when you think he makes or does something in a strange way. Be restrained or cautious towards others.

If bearing is more passive “*forgiving each another*” is more active. When you deal with people it is inevitable that you get to know their mistakes. It can quickly create a situation where accusations fly back and forth. The peace within the community disappears quickly. The solution is to have an attitude of forgiveness. Then you will not answer an accusation in the same manner.

The standard of forgiveness is Christ. Look at Him and at all that He has forgiven you. Think of His parable on forgiveness (*Mt 18:21-35*). You will discover that you are ready to forgive anything.

V14. Paul is not yet ready with accumulating the pieces of clothing. There is something more which holds all these garments together like a belt and that is “*love*”. Love is the virtue which not only holds together all the other virtues but brings them to maturity and thus perfects them.

The virtues mentioned here are not acquired characteristics but they spring from love. Nothing in our behavior towards others is complete without the love of God which is expressed in brotherly love (*2Pet 1:7*). Therefore love is the bond of perfection. You are in a position to tie this band around because you have received the Divine nature (*2Pet 1:4*), and the nature of God is love (*1Jn 4:8*). When this bond of love is carried by every believer, it will bind the believers with one another.

V15. The clothes are put on. Everything is in its place. Now you can go out of the door, and show your dress to the believers and to the world. You are not called to flaunt your dress but to show your life as a witness for Christ. In order to give this testimony in the right way, it is necessary that the “*peace of Christ*” reigns in your heart. All your actions, words and thoughts will take place in an atmosphere of peace – the kind of peace that is of Christ.

The Lord spoke about this in the upper room and called it “*My peace*” (Jn 14:27). It is the peace of heart and mind that emerges from a complete trust in the love of the Father in complete submission to His will. He walked in this peace on earth.

When this peace reigns in your heart and in the hearts of your fellow believers with whom you are associated, then this meets the requirement for the call to be “*one body*”. The absence of the definite article before body suggests that the local church is meant here.

The emphasis therefore is not personal peace which you can experience when you walk with the Lord. It is more about the peace that determines your attitude and your goodwill in dealing with others. It is all about the one body. When the members are subordinate to Him, the peace that He proffers determines your dealings with one another. You will not do anything that disturbs this peace. By the way and the means these things are described it is clear that it does not mean that you should draw yourself into isolation so that you do not get into any kind of dispute with anyone.

Thankfulness is an important ‘trade mark’ of the Christian who sees the hand of God in all things. This should always characterize him and should come to expression by every opportunity. It is an obligation to be thankful. You must practice this.

Of all the people on earth, Christians definitely have the most reason to be thankful. Anyone who is not thankful is far from God. Thankfulness is not dependent on circumstances. Paul himself shows this here and calls for it from imprisonment. I think, after writing all these things, his heart also overflowed with thankfulness.

After you have understood your position before God, the forgiveness that you received in Christ, the peace of Christ which is your portion, and the attributes of the Lord, it will not be difficult to comply with the call to be thankful.

Everything stands in relation to Christ. The point is to show Him in everything. You have received in Christ Jesus all that is necessary for this. What a joy should fill the heart of God when He sees Christ in your life and in the life of believers with whom you are related.

Now read Colossians 3:11-15 again.

Reflection: Learn by heart what you should wear and ask the Lord to help you to display these characteristics.

Do All In the Name of the Lord Jesus | *verses 16-18*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms [and] hymns [and] spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, [do] all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. 18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

V16. The peace of Christ (*verse 15*) is followed by the “*word of Christ*” which is the Word of God. In this Word everything speaks of Christ. The Word of God is also the Word of Christ. He gave it. He is the source of it. As the exalted Christ, He gives you the necessary instructions for the way, through His Word. The voice of the Word of God is the voice of Christ. As you have seen so many times in this letter, all the focus is on Him again.

The whole Word of God as the Word of Christ must dwell in you and indeed richly. Dwell means that the Word of Christ feels at home in you and therefore that nothing in your life is not in line with the Word. Richly means that your heart and mind are full of it so that your conversation with believers and unbelievers is dominated by it. You have to not only know the Word but you must apply it to everything that you face in life.

You cannot keep the Word to yourself. When you are full of something or overflowing with it you can and you want to share it with others. The big question however is whether you have something that you can share with others. When you are filled with other things then those are the things you would like to tell others of. “*For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart*” (Mt 12:34). The fact that Christians are sharing the things of Christ with each other is seen by their interactions with one another.

In their day to day life and in their common gatherings they are in a position to *teach* each other what is the will of God. Sometimes it can even be an *admonition*. However this should be done with wisdom and not with emotional agitation. Otherwise this will cause to pull down rather than build up.

Another remarkable instrument for teaching and admonishing is singing. I think this gives direction to lead one another to Christ in a lovely way. By the singing of a song, the voice of Christ is heard more than when one attempts to teach another about God tactlessly or with a raised voice. The voice of Christ will be heard when your heart is fully filled with the awareness of the grace of God.

Grace is the space and the atmosphere in which singing takes place. The sense of grace is brought to expression through singing and is the result of what grace has done internally. In this frame of mind you can get into the presence of the triune God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He is the God of all grace.

If the word of Christ dwells in us, there will be constant praise in our hearts (*Heb 13:15*). This can manifest itself in various forms of songs.

- “*Psalms*” are songs in which emotions are expressed by the psalmist when he went through certain experiences, especially suffering.
- “*Hymns*” are more a response to Divine revelation. Admiration of God and the worship of the Lord Jesus are expressed in the hymns.
- “*Spiritual songs*” are more, like a prayer, expressing a particular desire of the soul. It is the most general expression for the content of the song: it is about a spiritual topic.

The similarity among these song patterns is that they flow from having their roots in the Word. If the songs are good it is because they are from the Word. Only when the indwelling Word fills the

heart, can songs be sung with a grateful admiration and adoration in the right spirit.

V17. Not only our singing must be to God, but *“whatever you do”* should be for the glory of God. All things *“whatever you do in word or deed”* includes any area of your life. Everything in your life should be under the rule of the Lord Jesus. It should not only be for the Lord Jesus to approve our actions. If you do something in His Name you must be convinced that it is His will. Only then can you prove His authority.

You can certainly have a desire to do something for the Lord but what is important is that you do what the Lord expects from you. You don't need to think of doing a big work or a great sermon before a large crowd. It is all about the day to day things like friendly actions or an encouraging word. Only do it when you can do it *“in the name of the Lord Jesus”*. When it cannot be done in the Name of the Lord then you should not do it.

One of the indicators that you are in agreement with the Lord in word or deed is that you are able to giving thanks to the Father. Again the emphasis is on giving giving thanks (*Col 1:3,12; 2:7; 3:15,17; 4:2*). You can only do that if you are sure that He is with you in the way you are going. Then you will not ask Him to go with you in the way you think is right – you ask Him which way He wants you to go.

Giving thanks happens here through Him. Our giving thanks to God the Father always finds its reason in Christ in whom He has given all things to us – in the Son. You will find how the whole practice of life is related to the Father and the Son. This raises your daily life to quite a high level.

V18. Subsequently Paul mentions certain areas in which your daily life and the relationships in which you are placed take place. After the plea not to dwell on things that are on the earth you could think that all the earthly things are no longer important. But all the great truths which have to do with your relationship to Christ do not un-

dermine the earthly relationships. On the contrary these relationships are there so that you show what you have become in Christ.

You cannot live in this world without any relationship with your fellow human beings. In these social contacts you experience the most trials and temptations. It is God's will that after your conversion you let the light of heaven shine forth in the circle of your old friends and acquaintances. Your conversion does not change anything in your marriage, or in your family situation, or your position in society. What has changed is yourself.

In each of these relationships there are two parties: husband and wife, parents and children, employers and employees. Each is addressed according to one's vulnerability. The word is always firstly addressed to the subordinate who is also always related with the Lord. The relationship with the Lord lifts the position of the subordinate to a higher level.

The first relationship in which both the parties receive a responsibility is marriage. This good bulwark is attacked violently everywhere in the world. It is always necessary to understand God's original plan, not to be carried away by the world's view of marriage. In a marriage, two different sexes are interconnected. In the light of the Word of God the suggestion of a marriage between people of the same sex cannot be approved and must not even be considered, but must be discarded right away.

The woman is instructed to recognize her husband as the head, and should be submitted to him. Submission is the recognition of the God-given ordinance. This attitude is appropriate and it redounds to her honor; she gets the strength for this from the Lord. When she submits herself to the authority of her husband she recognizes the authority of the Lord.

In our age of feminism a submission of this kind is not easy; this rule is predominantly impractical and outmoded. Women who are conscious of their relationship with Christ are not disturbed by this and they are able to swim against the tide. They can learn

from Him what submission is; for His life on earth was the model of submission to God.

Now read Colossians 3:16-18 again.

Reflection: Does the Word of Christ dwell in you richly?

Men, Children and Slaves | *verses 19-25*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. 22 Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who [merely] please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. 25 For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

V19. Men are given instructions about some positive and some negative things. The positive for a man is to love his wife. Here it does not state that he should wait for a certain feeling or a certain act of his wife to reciprocate his love. There is no excuse to evade this obligation to love his wife.

Men can learn love from Christ. We can see His caring love, which is sacrificial and unselfish. When men treat their wives like that many marital problems can be solved. It is also easy for a woman to submit herself to such a husband.

The negative is the admonition not to be bitter against her. This will keep the husband from being moody, ruthless and hard against her. The latter is certainly a risk if the woman is not converted and is in the habit of unlocking such reactions. It does not say that he should subdue his wife or to constrain her to obey him.

V20. Children should obey their parents, not just in things useful or desirable but in all things. They must learn to listen and be prepared to follow instructions from the parents. Children are not the highest authority and cannot determine to what extent

they have to obey their parents. The Lord Jesus on the earth is the model for children also (*Lk 2:51*).

V21. In this passage the family is held together by two principles – authority and obedience. After obedience which is expected from children, comes authority. This word is not addressed to the parents, what might be expected, but to the fathers. They are the ones mostly responsible for education.

Here the fathers are warned not to abuse or use their authority irresponsibly. This happens by inappropriate and even unfair treatment. It appears the apostle points to a constantly inappropriate or unfair correction for the slightest reason.

Fathers have the great model in God the Father. From God they learn that God never handles His children in such a way that they lose heart or feel rejected. When a child is constantly criticized they get the feeling that they always do things the wrong way. They will be discouraged and lose motivation. Believing fathers should avoid this carefully and absolutely.

How sad it would be if a child rejected the truth of God because of an overly strict father. When a father gives a distorted image of God the Father, the child no longer wants God. Certainly a child needs correction and discipline. If need arises for punishment the following three basic rules must be observed: never punish in anger; never punish unjustly; never punish without an explanation.

Parents can alienate their children from God in another way. Many parents say full of sadness about their delinquent son or daughter: *“While your servant was busy here and there, he was gone”* (*1Kgs 20:40*). They used their time for everything except for their children. They were left to their fate. Perhaps it is not without care but without attention. Lack of attention will make the child depressed and make it go its own way but not the way of the Lord.

V22. The word for slaves is the same as for the children. Obedience is expected from them in all things. The faithful slave is not

governed by the eye of his master but by the fear (reverence) to the Lord.

“With external service” means that you are working hard when the boss is after you; but once he disappears from the scene you relax again or you do things for yourself. As a Christian slave (Christian employee) you should really serve whether or not your earthly master (employer) is watching because the Lord in heaven is always watching. Nothing escapes His eyes.

This awareness might cause you to do your best and then you will not fall out of favor with the Lord. This however is not mentioned here, but it points to the attitude of the heart. *“Sincerity of heart”* is the heart which is honest, innocent, and unambiguous, and free from base motives (see *1Chr 29:17*). This is in contrast to hypocrisy. The Lord Jesus on earth is the model for the slave also.

V23. The slave is expected to perform all his duties with all his energy. It is expected that he whole heartedly does what is commanded of him. This means that he is fully committed to any work, pleasant or unpleasant. The secret behind it is that he works as though the Lord is the employer.

Paul always focuses the eyes of the slave on the Lord. If pleasing the Lord is above all your work, you will fulfill your responsibility in the power He gives. You will not be rewarded in heaven for the number of people who enjoyed your service, or for the success you had, or for your talents, but for your faithfulness.

V24. And do you know what the reward is? In those days the slaves knew it well – the inheritance. With the word *“knowing”* Paul couples them with a teaching they already knew – he just reminds them. They should always think of it when they do their work. The slave who serves well to the honor of Christ will receive his reward in a place where nothing that he did for the honor of Christ will be forgotten. In this place slaves and masters stand alone before Him Who is no respecter of persons. The slave is always conscious of what lies in the future. This is the motive for him to do all his work faithfully.

Here on earth a master will never share his inheritance with his slave. In the future the slaves will have a share in the inheritance of the Lord whom they serve now. Such a great reward is waiting for them because they serve the Lord Jesus. It is an inheritance which at the same time is also seen as a reward. Our feeble attempts to serve the Lord will be rewarded with a reward that far exceeds all parameters. What a Lord we serve!

V25. After all the encouragement the slave receives, there is also a warning. A slave gets no preferential treatment for any unfortunate situations. He is also not specially rewarded because he went through severe afflictions. He indeed gets a special warning because the flesh can be at work in him like in any other person. He can do something to wrong his master by discrediting him, with the aim that it gives him an advantage in which he sees profit for himself. Therefore he needs to know that God is no respecter of persons.

If the injustice is not detected on the earth it will surely appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2Cor 5:10). The slave will discover that this will have a negative influence on his inheritance. Infidelity will bring a corresponding loss of reward. The point is for the Lord to say one day: *“Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things”* (Mt 25:21). Here you also see that for everyone who serves the Lord Jesus as a slave, even if the service is considered great, it is still only a little that has been entrusted to him.

You notice that Paul does not speak about how a slave can be free. When you serve such a Lord and have such a reward in view, the question is if you want to! Christendom does not change social structures, but people. And these changed people in their unchanged circumstances can be tremendous witnesses of the change (Tit 2:9-10). They serve a Person Who delivered them from a much heavier slavery: the slavery to sin (Rom 6:17).

Now read Colossians 3:19-25 again.

Reflection: In what respect does this passage touch you? What more can you do to come into accordance to what is said here?

Colossians 4

Masters, Prayer, Walk | *verses 1-5a*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

1 Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven. 2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with [an attitude of] thanksgiving; 3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; 4 that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. 5 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, ...

V1. The previous verses were addressed to the slaves. Now the word is for the masters. Paul has no intention to negotiate in order to set the slaves free, but calls upon the masters to pay them a reasonable salary. The emphasis is not on favors but on justice.

The payment must be just means that an equal pay should be given to all in case of equal performance. This excludes favoritism. Fairness means the amount of reward must be based on a correct appreciation of the service provided. Every Christian employer must always ask what is appropriate. He must be conscious of the fact that he too has a Master in heaven Who will mete out to him according as he measured.

All previous instructions can be followed only by God's children. Marital problems and family disputes must not arise in the families of believers. As Christian employees you should not seek the redress of grievances from a labor union. A Christian employer need not be pressurized to give his workers what they demand. In all these relationships a Christian must show that he is related to Christ. Thus he is in a position to unfold the hallmark of the

new man in an old creation. Thus he walks worthy of the Lord (*Col 1:10*). And is this not the reason why we have received this letter?

V2. After addressing these groups in a special way the apostle now turns again to all Christians. He speaks to them about topics that apply to every member of God's people, whether male or female, parent or child, slave or master.

He begins with prayer in which he encourages to persevere. To continue in prayer does not mean that you pray now and then or when you have a hard time. Anyone can call out to God when he is in distress. Whoever continues steadfastly in prayer remains in communion with God and is always conscious of his dependence on Him. You stay close to Him in prayer and trust in His willingness to listen to you.

When something goes wrong in your life you discover that it is very often because you did not persevere in prayer. Or you have indeed prayed but you were not watchful (*Mt 26:41*). This means that you ensure that you do not fall asleep during prayer time and do not allow your thoughts to wander in all directions. Your prayer would then no longer be effective and when you say 'amen' you do not know what you prayed for.

When you persevere in prayer, being vigilant, you are conscious that God is at work and that He will never leave you. Therefore your prayer can always be with thanksgiving. Prayer and thanksgiving go together. Thanksgiving is not just for answered prayers. You can thank the Lord because everything you speak to Him about is in good hands with Him.

V3. If you pray and are also watchful you will be totally devoted to the Lord's work. This is what Paul means when he asks that people pray for him and for his co-workers. Exactly like Paul, anyone who serves God needs the prayer support of others. Paul asks the Colossians to pray for an open door. By this he means not the door of the prison, but an open door for the Word. Open doors are opportunities God gives to preach (*1Cor 16:9; 2Cor 2:12*).

How grateful the Colossians will be that the Word of God came to them (*Col 1:5-6*). Surely the call for prayer will have found an echo in them.

Just think about what you have received because someone brought you the Word. This should encourage you to pray that others will hear this liberating and rich Word. You will pray that God gives His slaves opportunities to preach His Word.

People are not waiting to hear a sermon on the content of Paul's preaching on this mystery. This is about Paul's experience. Talking about the mystery brought him to imprisonment. This makes it clear that the mystery was not revealed just during his captivity. Some proclaim this error; but let it not mislead you. This is not the place to deal with it, although it is good for you to know about this. By now you have well understood from the *letter to the Ephesians* and this letter what the mystery is.

V4. Paul lived and suffered to proclaim this mystery and asked for intercession. He asks for prayer not only for the free flow of the message but also for clarity and boldness. He did not want to draw attention to himself with a profound sermon which would go over their heads. He sought no human gratification. The Word of God is clear and simple. Let us pray that all those who minister through preaching the Word of God do it in plain and simple language which can be understood easily by all. Only then hearts and consciences can be reached and they will open themselves to the riches of the Word.

V5a. After encouraging them to pray and intercede, Paul now talks about the walk of the Colossians. It is important to know, that after what you ask for in prayer, should not be negated by your repulsive behavior. The unbelievers around you stand outside the circle of Christians. They are the ones who are called outsiders (*1Cor 5:12-13; 1Thes 4:12; 1Tim 3:7*). They belong to the world and they are not connected to the Lord Jesus, but they are still keen observers.

Added to that, the world is hostile to Christians, so do not let the often seemingly friendly face of the world cheat you. In fact it so quickly takes offence at what you do, even though you do not have any intention to hurt. So make sure that you avoid any occasion that the unbeliever could use against you as a Christian. Wisdom is to fear the Lord and depart from evil (*Pro 9:10; 14:16*) and even from every form of evil (*1Thes 5:22*).

Now read Colossians 4:1-5a again.

Reflection: What believers who bring the Word of God you are praying for? Do you pray also that they really bring the Word of God?

Word, Comfort, Encouragement | *verses 5b-9*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

... , making the most of the opportunity. 6 Let your speech always be with grace, [as though] seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. 7 As to all my affairs, Tychicus, [our] beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. 8 [For] I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; 9 and with him Onesimus, [our] faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your [number]. They will inform you about the whole situation here.

V5b. In the first part of *verse 5* you saw that your walk as a Christian in the world must be tempered with wisdom. Then you escape from all kinds of pitfalls and avoid wrong impressions. But that is not the only thing where we can see wisdom. If that were so, wisdom would cause a negative attitude. You escape from this by doing the second part of this verse.

There it is said that you can make positive use of wisdom by “*making the most of the opportunity*”. That means that you make the maximum profit out of every opportunity the Lord gives. This has to do with the highest market value of a thing; in this case the opportunity. This is in contrast to the fact that you fritter away, misapply and waste your time, thereby doing very little for God.

You come into contact with people every day. These are generally people who are preoccupied with their own affairs and evade serious issues of life. Such an attitude gives the Christian little opportunity to introduce them to the grace and truth of the gospel. He will however take the opportunities God gives to speak the gospel.

Sometimes an unbeliever reveals something of himself, and if we are good listeners, we will know by experience that God has spo-

ken to the conscience in that unbeliever's life. That can happen by a certain event or by something that he had read. Satan can mislead a man but he cannot prevent that God speaks to his heart. It is nice to know that God wants to use you as His voice to speak to lost sinners.

You do not have wisdom yourself. You must ask for it (*Jam 1:5*). In the context of this letter it is nice to see that you can find all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Christ (*Col 2:3*). If you keep occupied with Him you will see what wisdom is and you will know how to apply it. Wisdom is already dealt with in connection with your handling of fellow believers (*Col 3:16*). Here your wisdom is directed with regard to the unbelievers. So you can see that God wants to equip you with all wisdom in all circumstances and for each contact.

V6. Walk in wisdom is about your behavior. "*Let your speech always be with grace, [as though] seasoned with salt*", is about what you speak. The kind of words and the content of your speech should express that you yourself have received grace. The grace in you will resonate with your words. Your listeners will hear an invitation to accept the grace in order to be among those who are inside, and no longer to those who are outside.

Full of grace means that your speech is friendly and gentle. It must be seasoned with salt. This guards you from babbling, and being irritating with your words (*Ecc 12:10; Isa 50:4; Pro 15:23*). This also guards you against using popular speech to attract those who are outside. This takes you down to the level of the world but it will not attract unbelievers. They will regard you as one of their own, rather than your words inviting them to say good-bye to the world and become a Christian.

Salt is an agent that counteracts decay. Where salt is, there is no decomposition. This is what your words should be. On the one side your words must be an invitation in an expression of grace and on the other side they must be inaccessible to the corruption of the world.

Your words can be seen here as a response to what others say and do. This is what is referred to by the term answer. The point is not to react to everything. Do not think that you are obliged to give your opinion on everything. Silence can be a very wise answer. Also, you do not have the right answer for all things. Sometimes it is very wise to say that you do not know the answer for something. This is also an answer. Often it is very wise to say that you do not have the right words for a particular situation because you have not gone through similar situations.

Therefore it is not said here *'that* you will know what you should respond', but *how*. This means a proper language by which the questioner gets the answer (1Pet 3:15). Everyone is different; likewise the right answer is different for everyone. No pattern answer can be used for all people in all circumstances (see 1Cor 9:22).

V7. After this general admonition Paul begins the final words of his letter. They contain some information about his own circumstances, and then he refers to certain individuals by name. He wants to let them know how he was doing and would also like to know how they were doing. Tychicus carries Paul's wishes. What he says of Tychicus should be able to be said of every believer.

"Beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord" are titles more valuable than all sorts of theological and scientific titles people can give or get. Those titles say something about someone's intellect but they say nothing about one's love, spiritual attitude, willingness to serve or ability.

V8. The fact that these titles are used in conjunction *"in the Lord"* means that Tychicus shows the Lord Jesus in his dealings with the fellow believers. The Colossians must acknowledge this to their joy when he goes to them. He will tell them of the circumstances of Paul and Timothy. Paul's intention is not to evoke more of their compassion. He shares information not for his own sake but for the benefit of the Colossians. They in fact were worried about Paul. But now the information passed on by Tychicus will relieve them of their anxiety and they will be encouraged.

V9. One more person will go with Tychicus and that is Onesimus. Thus the information about Paul's situation will remove all anxieties and encourage them. Onesimus was also a Colossian ("*one of your [number]*"). Paul's warm recommendation of this runaway slave (see the *letter to Philemon*) shows his faith in him. At the same time the apostle thought that he would be helpful to the Colossians.

Onesimus by the way must be on his way back to Philemon carrying Paul's letter to him. However Paul does not mention anything about it here. The sin of Onesimus is a private matter between him and Philemon. Paul knows how to separate things that should be handled differently.

Onesimus was converted through the ministry of Paul during his imprisonment. He became his son while he was in chains (*Phlm :10*). He therefore had first-hand knowledge of Paul's circumstances. With his testimony, therefore, he could speak for Tychicus when he shared the information. Thus he is appointed directly for the service of the Lord.

Now read Colossians 4:5b-9 again.

Reflection: How can you be a witness in accordance with this passage?

Greetings | verses 10-18

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

10 Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and [also] Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); **11** and [also] Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. **12** Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. **13** For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. **14** Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and [also] Demas. **15** Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. **16** When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter [that is coming] from Laodicea. **17** Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." **18** I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.

Introduction. Paul asked Tychicus to let the Colossians know how he was doing. Now he greets the Colossians on behalf of the believers who asked to him to do so. There are six in total. Three of them are of Jewish descent ("of the circumcision") and the other three are non-Jewish. The conveying of greetings shows that these brothers are connected to the Colossians, just as Paul is, and that they also shared his concern for them. That Paul conveys their greetings is proof that they supported his work. Greetings therefore are much more than just a formality. Whoever sends greetings shows that there is a connection between him and the ones to whom he sends the greetings. This also shows the appreciation of the connection.

V10. Paul appreciates each servant who worked with him. He calls Aristarchus “*my fellow prisoner*”. He was with Paul on the ship that brought him as a prisoner to Rome (*Acts 27:2*). It was a great comfort for Paul to have this man as his companion in his difficult circumstances (*verse 11*). It is really a comfort when someone comes to you when you are in trouble, just to be with you.

Paul also has a special relationship with Mark. This Mark is “*Barnabas’s cousin*”. Paul does not say this simply in pretence. Mark, in fact, was once the cause of separation between Paul and Barnabas. When you read the passages wherever Mark appears in the *Acts*, you can reconstruct the story (*Acts 12:12,25; 13:13; 15:37-39*).

Paul was not willing to take Mark on the journey he wanted to make with Barnabas. Mark travelled with him on a previous occasion, but gave up at a certain point. Sometimes fellow workers can abandon us. Barnabas felt the earlier failure of Mark was no reason to leave him behind this time. Mark was his nephew and that could possibly be the reason why Barnabas chose him.

In the meantime a change must have taken place in Mark, perhaps because of the pastoral care of Barnabas. Now Paul regarded Mark helpful in his ministry (*2Tim 4:11*). He already informed the Colossians about Mark and instructed them to accept him.

V11. In all the letters of Paul, it is only here that we come across the name Jesus, Justus. Jesus was a common name in those days. Even today this name is common in some countries. People rather called him Justus as he and his fellow Christians probably thought that it was not right to have the same name as the Son of God.

It is quite possible that these three men, before they came to faith in the Lord Jesus, had a different expectation of the kingdom of God. If they were devout Jews they would have expected that the Messiah established His kingdom in glory. Now after their conversion they would have understood that the kingdom of God was not yet publicly visible, and what the kingdom in its present form meant (*Rom 14:17*). Their fellowship for the kingdom of God

meant consolation (a minimization of pain which is the literal meaning of the Greek word) for Paul.

V12. Epaphras also greets the Colossians. Paul calls Epaphras "*a bonds slave of Jesus Christ*", a term he usually used only for himself and Timothy. This tells us something about the spiritual attitude of this faithful servant. He is a preacher of the Word (*Col 1:7*), but Paul also knows him as a praying man and knows how this man prays. Paul must have heard more often how insistently Epaphras brought his prayer before the throne of grace. Whenever he heard Epaphras pray he sensed a struggle, a wrestling, in that prayer. Paul is so impressed that he mentions it to the Colossians.

Epaphras prayed for three things. The first one is that they "*may stand*". This letter teaches that only if they stand firm in the truth they can face any kind of false teaching. Further he prayed that they might be "*perfect*" which again means spiritual maturity. Then they should walk in the truth they had come to know. Finally they should be "*fully assured in all the will of God*" showing at the same time how foolish and worthless are the promises of false teachers. Paul heard these elements in his prayers.

V13. To all his appreciation for Epaphras Paul adds a further testimony. He says: "*I testify for him.*" Even if the Colossians were not aware of it Paul knew about all the hard work that Epaphras took upon himself. The words "*deep concern*" denote a work one does with dedication and with all his strength. Besides the believers in Colossae, Epaphras also had the believers in Laodicea and Hierapolis close to his heart.

V14. The Colossians also received greetings from Luke. The additional word "*beloved physician*" refers to the loving medical care Paul received from him. The Lord had not taken away the thorn from his flesh (*2Cor 12:7-9*). However God gave him Luke who could ease his pain and who remained with him till the end (*2Tim 4:11*). This is also a caution that you should not be unduly influenced by all the extravagant claims made with respect to prayer healing.

Demas closes the list. They receive greetings from him also. Here Paul mentions only his name. In the *letter to Philemon* he is placed in the band of fellow workers (*verses 23-24*). Unfortunately Demas later swapped the companionship of Paul for the world (*2Tim 4:10*).

V15. Then Paul asks the Colossians to relay his greetings to the “*brethren who are in Laodicea*”. Even the believers who gather as a church in the house of Nympha were greeted. As the church in Laodicea had already received the greetings, it is not inconceivable that this church is the house of Nympha is that of Hierapolis (*see verse 13*). Neither of these places received any letter from Paul, or else he would not have asked the Colossians to greet them. His greetings to them prove that he has not forgotten them. Moreover we find here a proof of the fellowship that existed between these two churches which were so close together.

V16. Another proof of the connection that existed between these two local churches is the reason for the instruction of Paul to have this *letter to the Colossians* also read in the church in Laodicea. The Colossians also should read another letter that Paul had written, which was in Laodicea (this letter could be the letter to the Ephesians circulating among all the churches and it was now in Laodicea). Paul wrote more letters than the ones we have in the Bible. Anyway, by the reading of these various letters, in faith they could edify each other and help them enjoy with one another the spiritual benefits graciously given to them.

V17. Paul addressed the entire church in Colossae, but he did not forget the individual. The church receives the instruction to motivate Archippus not to neglect the ministry which he had received in the Lord, but to fulfill it (*2Tim 4:5*). With the words “*take heed to*” Paul points to the dangers the church would face if the brother is negligent to the responsibilities given him by the Lord. If that happens, then that is to the detriment of the whole church. Therefore all those who form the church should motivate one another to perform the tasks entrusted to them.

This fully applies to you in every respect. You have also received a ministry, something that you must do for the Lord. To do something for the Lord also means that you should do something for your fellow believers or to take the gospel to the unbelievers. "In the Lord" means that it is about your walk with the Lord and about the recognition of His authority in your service. A good start is not necessarily a good end. "Fulfill" means that you bring your work to completion and do not give up halfway.

V18. Paul ends with his own greeting. He adds a request for himself and closes with a wish for the Colossians. He writes his greeting with his own hand. He seems to have dictated this letter himself (see *Rom 16:22*). With this handwritten greeting, the apostle confirms that the letter is really from him (*2Thes 3:17; 1Cor 16:21*).

By his request to remember his chains he not only expresses that he is in need of their intercession, but it is also an additional motivation to obey and to listen to what he has written about – the causes of his imprisonment. If they had to suffer for the confession of the truth, his example would serve to encourage them. He suffered for the same cause. He wishes them grace to live according to the content of this letter. This wish applies to you also.

Now read Colossians 4:10-18 again.

Reflection: Examine what you can learn from the people mentioned here and what you can apply to your life of faith.

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