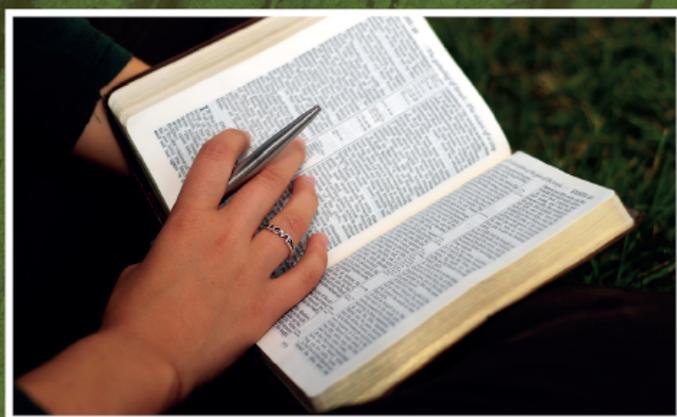


THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS



An Explanation of This Letter
Especially for You

Ger de Koning

ROCK
SOLID
6

The Letter to the Philippians

The Letter to the Philippians

An Explanation of This Letter
Especially for You

Rock Solid #6 (Part I)

Ger de Koning

The original Dutch version is available at

Webshop: www.uitgeverijdaniel.nl

Orders: info@uitgeverijdaniel.nl

Translation: J.R. Jayabalan

Cover design: Jan Paul Spoor

Layout: Jan Noordhoek

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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.

When **ASTERISKS** * are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

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

The Letter to the Philippians

Introduction

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, he does not grumble at the Lord, but sees Him Who is above all circumstances. Paul is convinced that his circumstances are in the hand 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 heart through all our troubles and difficulties of life. Paul also did not learn this overnight. He went through a lot of exercises for that. 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 about the situation he was in, nor was there any sign of gloom about 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 it is 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 (Acts 16:11-12). 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. Such a relationship with each other and with God's servants is a lovely role model for local churches.

Paul is a man who uses 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 involve 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 earth. His concern is about Christ in heaven. His journey is toward Him. That goal fills his life and is the motive to endure. 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. If you have learned to continually fix your gaze on Christ, temptation will not have a chance to force itself on you. Difficulties and problems, doubts and worries do not get a chance to separate you from Christ. Christ is greater than all our problems. If Christ is involved in your life the problems do not disappear, but they come under His control.

Instead of struggles of faith you see 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:

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

Philippians 1

Phil 1:1-6 | Salutation, Thanksgiving and Prayer

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”. A bond-servants of Christ is bought by Him to be free.. However, those who realize the price the Lord Jesus paid will always want to be His bond-servant. 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-servant 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-servant 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 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.

In Philippi, their social and church life takes place; there they have their responsibility, and there they bear their testimony. 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.

That “overseers and deacons” have been specifically mentioned, does not mean they had any special status. The word “including” shows that. They have been put on a par with the saints (cf. Acts 20:28). It is clear from Acts 20 and Titus 1 that *overseers* means the same as *elders* (Acts 20:17-28; Tit 1:5,7). *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 appoints them for the purpose of the church (Acts 14:23). You read that the Holy Spirit has made the overseers (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 speak about the qualifications of overseers (1Tim 3:1-7)? 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 walks with Him for a considerable period of time are encouraged to aspire the office of 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 should not engage in favoritism. 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, it is not a lament to God about them, but causes a sense of festivity 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 faith in the Lord Jesus and with them he shared the testimony he gives of Him. 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 appears 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 over the world (Psa 2:8).

For us, that day begins when we believers “shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1Thes 4:16-17), after which we will immediately “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 come to the same judgment as His. “We will be like Him” (1Jn 3:2). Then God’s work in us is will be perfect.

Now read Philippians 1:1-6 again.

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

Phil 1:7-11 | The Love of Paul for the Philippians

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 perfect His work in them. He is “right” in mentioning all these positive thoughts about them for several reasons. One reason is that he had them in his heart. He knows that they do not think of him only every now and then, because he belongs to them completely. Though he was not physically present with them he carried them in his heart. There he feels their love for him. They cherish a constant love for him, because they also have him in their hearts.

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 perfect 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. Their love for him 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. And even then they still speak (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 form 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 longing for them. His longing 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 ‘entrails’ and it denotes the inner feelings, emotions. However, these are not human emotions but it is the affection “of Jesus Christ”. Paul shows that his affections toward 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 never limited to the necessary. It belongs to the nature of love that it always abounds. 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 the very sinfulness of such a relationship. Sin must be judged 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. 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 all 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 true 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. If you

seek the best in earthly things, why not seek 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.
- You want to belong to a local church where the Lord Jesus is the Center and the Word of God is acknowledged in all its authority.
- You want a profession in which you can work for His honor.
- You want to spend your free-time 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. If 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 increase in sincerity and blamelessness. 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 at the end of the previous section (verse 6). On this day you will be perfectly "sincere and blameless". But it is the purpose of God that you work on it now. He would like to see that you live a life that is sincere 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 blameless life is a life in 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.

V11. A life without ulterior or impure motive is rare but not impossible. Anyone can achieve this, in whose life Christ takes the first and 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 5:22-23a). That refers to everything you say and do. There is no question of acting

unjustly. You give everyone his due, and you are honest in your evaluation of God, of other people, of words and events, of actions.

This is possible only “through Jesus Christ”. All what you do, the whole “fruit of righteousness”, is “to the glory and praise of God” both now and 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?

Phil 1:12-18 | The Progress of the Gospel

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 about the Philippians and his longing 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. Really not to complain or to occupy the minds of the Philippians with that. 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 in 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 dejection. 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. On the

contrary, God opened up new possibilities for the preaching of the gospel. The enemy even 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 1:9), 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 determines his fate, not the emperor of Rome.

V14. There is one more consequence of Paul's imprisonment. When others saw Paul's testimony during his imprisonment 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 present themselves. 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. If the servant to whom this injustice is done sees the church he has served as 'his church', he will respond fleshly. 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 purposes 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 have done breaking down before our eyes. Isn't it a paradox to proclaim Christ and at the same time do so out of selfish motives? Surely, it does seem unthinkable to misuse the Name of Christ as a cover for personal, selfish purposes, doesn't it?

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.

His response shows his mind, and that his heart is filled with Christ. His enemies attacked him, but he defended the gospel and not himself. In this he points to Christ. His enemies as humans could not act above themselves. Paul stands above the 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. 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 Paul happy now and it will also make him happy in the future.

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?

Phil 1:19-24 | Magnify Christ in Your Body

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 meant 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 hand 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 toward the goal, and 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 here and 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 hand of God, but he also knows that he is upheld through 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 dwells 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 proof of His victory over satan, sin and death. That is the reason why Paul was not dejected. 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 dejected which is evident from the fact that he sought with a great desire to magnify Christ in 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 decrease (even as we must decrease), 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 preaching 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. If we consider ourselves important, we so speak and act that attention is drawn toward us. If we see Christ as important we so speak and act, that He is 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. That is what his life was about and that is what it will be about if he had to die. If 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 testimony. 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: ‘God, I pray Thee, light these idle sticks of my life and may I burn for Thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is Thine. I seek not a long life, but a full one, like you, 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 he writes how he had a foretaste of it (2Cor 12:2-4).

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 etcetera or only for Christ?

V23. Paul was thrown back and forth in weighing both possibilities. Both possibilities had something 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: ‘Loosen the ropes that bind me to the earth; then I can be free and be with Him after Whom my heart yearns.’ If he thinks about it that way he says: It is far better to die. Nor is there anything beyond that. It is 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 remain 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?

Phil 1:25-30 | Conduct Worthy of the Gospel

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. If you have Christ and His interests in your mind you will know peace and rest. 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 purpose 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 together (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 if you do a service to another. Every service has value or worth only when it increases the glory of Christ.

V27. Here 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 how it is about the church 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 second they should not be terrified in anything by their opponents. These two factors have an interaction: if they are standing firm 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 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 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” (cf. Acts 4:32). This is lacking sometimes even among very committed people.

We can take up a fight if 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 to contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 1:3). He means that we must hold on to all truths which God has given to us in His word and defend them against the attacks of the enemy. Paul says here 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. If you fight along with others like this, the enemy will try to intimidate you. He will use all means to terrify you. The word “alarmed” is used for horses that are frightened so that they refuse to go further. 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 acknowledgment at the same time is a 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 oppo-

nents are. That does not mean that we should underestimate the power of the enemy. Never underestimate his power (Jude 1:9).

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. If 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 you get the same proof (2Thes 1:4-7). 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 comfort 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 His sake is an equally great privilege (Acts 5:41; 1Pet 4:13). If we do not know this suffering, we must ask ourselves, if we desire to live Godly (2Tim 3:12).

This is all about suffering for His sake. This is a suffering that is your portion in this world, if 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 if you look at the world as an area where you have nothing to seek and nothing to lose. Are you ready for it?

V30. What Paul wrote to the Philippians was not theory. He knew what trouble they had. They had seen that conflict 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 conflict in the Roman imprisonment.

Paul connects with the Philippians in their conflict. This is true brotherly fellowship. He wants them to know that he is one with them. This is the

only thing that can win hearts. Then you can be physically separated by distance but intimately connected in the heart..

Now read Philippians 1:25-30 again.

Reflection: How can you conduct worthy of the gospel?

Philippians 2

Phil 2:1-5 | Bring the Missing in Order

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,

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 earth, as He was then. In chapter 3 he shows the Lord Jesus in heaven, as He is 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. True love also knows in what way these imperfections must be pointed out. If it is done in the wrong way people will be discouraged. The admonition then does not come across. Paul links it with what they have already done well. That is an important starting point when you want to admonish or encourage someone.

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 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 connectedness 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 (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 a 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 if we notice that certain wrong things are not among us, which we find elsewhere. Then the danger is that 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 think the same. 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, “speak the same thing” (1Cor 1:10). 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 no longer have “the same love”. If Christ is not the object of your heart, your love will turn toward 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, anymore. 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 champions in the world. 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 deserve this fame you must learn to be humble. Humility is a rare virtue. How rare, you see this in debates among politicians, and also in conflicts, even in normal, daily contacts. Often people attempt to decry others to sell themselves as the best. This tendency is common among us all. True 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 regard others as more important 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 heart. We see how others show love, and again 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 regard 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 regard others as more important 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 if you look to 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 to worship. Often that is the result when He is so presented to you. Nevertheless this is not primarily purposed here. The purpose is that with every step you see Him do, you ask yourself what His mind was in doing so and compare that to 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 is the whole good pleasure of His heart, so that He can notice what speaks of Him in our life.

Now read Philippians 2:1-5 again.

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

Phil 2:6-8 | The Mind of the Lord Jesus

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 downward to show how very much He humbled Himself. What He did was constantly present in His life on the earth. In this you see the meaning of the word emptied, or 'made Himself of no reputation'. He emptied Himself of all that He possessed as God. He used none of it for His own interests.

When He came on earth there was nothing of His Divine glory to be seen (Isa 53:3). His heart was filled with the wonderful mind described here. His whole existence on 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 Divinity 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 earth. He did not relinquish His Divinity, but all His rights and privileges, which He could have claimed while on 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 man".

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 important to see how His being a Bond-servant is intertwined fully with His being a Man. He could have first come on 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 bond-servant because that is what He *became*. The mind of serving and being a Bond-servant is beautifully portrayed in the foot-washing in John 13 (Jn 13:1-11;

cf. 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 toward 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 answered in everything to what God had purposed with man. 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 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 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 to the point of death, yes, even death on a 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, we were “sons of disobedience” (Eph 5:6). We learn obedience by correction. It was not so with Him. With Him, nothing ever needed to be corrected. With Him there was no insubordination; 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 a 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 ended His path this way on 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 humiliation, by which the Lord Jesus went down. Praise Him for that and ask Him to help you to follow His example in His mind.

Phil 2:9-11 | The Exaltation of the Lord Jesus

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 applicable 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 raised 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 2:17). 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 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 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 indeed speaks about men of renown (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 usually to recall the stay of the Lord Jesus on earth. It is the name that is reminiscent of His humiliation.

As He was on 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 humble Man. No, then the Lord Jesus comes "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 we read that every knee shall bow before God, Yahweh (Isa 45:21-23). 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 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. For all eternity, His praise will be sung there. 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 his

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 had against Him all appearance.

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 6:1-11). 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 subjection 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 no voice of protest is heard. 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 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.

Phil 2:12-16 | Light Bearers

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 refers to 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 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 judging 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. If 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 (cf. 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. If 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 receives the blow. You think that you always have to do the least of the jobs and if you do something good you do not get the recognition that you deserve.

The step from grumbling to disputing is taken quickly. You start disputing and discussing everything you ought to do. The tone is set for discontentment and disagreement. The mind of the Lord Jesus is completely out of sight, mutual unanimity is far away, salvation is endangered.

Because Paul so clearly sees this, he urges to do “all things without grumbling or disputing”. So not only things that you see the benefits of or for which you get due credit. In this context, “all things” refers to anything that promotes mutual unity. Remember the example of the Lord Jesus.

V15. If 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. In this way 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. However, 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 above reproach. 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 purpose 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 if you present “the word of life”, that means if you show Christ in your life (1Jn 1:1-2). In John 1 you also do find that special combination of light and life (Jn 1:4).

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 before God, before my fellow believers and before the world.

Paul connects the practice of the Philippians with the account he must give 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?

Phil 2:17-24 | Paul Sets Aside His Own Interests

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 reason to glory 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. This 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 valuable offering. Wine is a symbol of joy (Jdg 9:13). All offerings point toward 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 also included 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 own life. His martyrdom would be poured out over it as a much smaller drink offering (2Tim 4:6).

Paul was not after 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 (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 exclude the practical expression of your love and faith.

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.

True interest is not satisfied with a general impression of the situation, even though there are no reasons for concern. True interest is not transient but profound and rejoices to know the details of the objects of love. Paul was not afraid of hearing negative messages, 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 lim-

ited 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 concerned for welfare, but not for his own welfare, but for the welfare 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 concern for the Philippians was 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 (cf. 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.

Timothy's faithfulness also stems from 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?

Phil 2:25-30 | The Work of Christ

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 (Phil 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 maintained 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 also cannot 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 Epaphroditus. He was someone like you and me, that is, things are said of him that should 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 applies at least to 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.

He was also a "fellow soldier". If 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 service as written in the New Testament.

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 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 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 recovery of Epaphroditus was evidence of God’s mercy both on Epaphroditus and on him. 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 purposes and Paul submitted to it (cf. 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. It cannot fail to produce a desire to live that way as well. 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 brethren (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. If you risk it, it means 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

Phil 3:1-6 | Confidence in the Flesh

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.

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, while you consider 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 through Him. Whoever rejoices in the Lord is kept from being busy with himself. 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 “the 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 (Phil 1:15). In the following verses he talks at length about it. If it is about joy Paul however does not present a new method in order to make faith more cheerful. If 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. If 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 is mentioned such category 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”, literally “mutilation”. This is a word-play on circumcision by which he means, by reintroducing the law, people mutilate, i.e. cut in pieces, 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 kinds of practices of the law in the Christian church, including 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 ordered by God given (Gen 17:9-14). It belonged to the Jewish people as an outward sign of God's covenant with His earthly people. If 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 on 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 professing Christianity 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 sinful flesh, from which lust comes out. What is meant is something which you can touch and can lead to get honor.

V4. Paul knew what he was talking about. When it is about flesh he can enumerate a lot. In seven points he mentions his privileges about which he can boast. He possessed four privileges without having had to work for it; they were just thrown into his lap, so to speak. 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.

He can compete with anyone in all these things and would then be a winner on all fronts as well. 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 give up.

V5. First, he mentions that he was "circumcised", by which he was incorporated into the covenant God made with His people.

Second, 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).

Third, among this nation he belonged to the "tribe of Benjamin" and was therefore a descendent of Jacob's family and his favorite wife Rachel.

Fourth, 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 'passer by'. 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.

Fifth, no one knew the law like him and lived according to the law like him (Acts 26:5; Gal 1:14).

V6. Sixth, 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 on 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. Country borders did not count for him (Acts 26:11).

Seventh, with all his knowledge of the law, even in persecution of the church, he remained within the bounds of the law. He was “found blameless”. He was like the young rich ruler (Mk 10:17-20). Paul and the rich young man were blameless before the eyes of men, but not in the eyes of God (Ecc 7:20).

Now read Philippians 3:1-6 again.

Reflection: Are there things which you can boast about?

Phil 3:7-11 | Gain Christ

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. This verse 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 puts aside everything a person can boast of.

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 even as "rubbish". Do you find it difficult to dispose of "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 really gave all 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.

Knowing Christ results in a desire to gain Christ. By this, of course, he does not mean an effort to be saved. He is saved, and that is by faith alone and not by any achievement of his own. What Paul is saying here is what

someone says who is engaged in a race and wants to win it. He wants to be conformed to Christ as much as possible. He wants Christ to become more and more visible in his life. He talks about that in the next verse.

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 image 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 that is not what I want.’

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 fellowship with Christ in order to know Him as good as possible. You may know Him as a new convert; nevertheless if 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. What's more: you get to know Him better and better in the place He now occupies in heaven, and you see more and more of His glories.

When you are busy 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 if you are faithful to the Lord. With the mind of Paul you do not accept suffering as something from which you can not escape. 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 if he has no more interest on the earth than only Christ. It was enough for him that the servant becomes 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). After all, he has wholeheartedly renounced all these things, and in this sense there is nothing that still binds 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 the way might 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?

Phil 3:12-16 | One Thing

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 be 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 crowning 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:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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 the Lord Jesus 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 preached 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; cf. 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 yourself in a field of tension. 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"

shows 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 about whom Paul speaks in contrast to the strong (Rom 14:1; 15:1).

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 toward 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 fellowship 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 (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'?

Phil 3:17-21 | Our Citizenship Is in Heaven

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 you do anything together, look at the same example together and follow it, you 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 Christians 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 cer-

tainly 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 their everyday 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; 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 true 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 to you and me as confessors of Christ.

He who lives as an enemy of the cross lives for himself, for his own "appetite", literally "belly" (Rom 16:18). His life is for the satisfaction of all kinds of physical needs like food and drink, and often 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 their due to everyone. However, they do everything for themselves. They put all kinds of earthly things first. Their life is not 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 if 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 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 toward 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, 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, on 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 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, handle it responsibly.

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 kinds 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 forever and ever. The believers will receive a body with which they will be in heaven forever to praise Him forever and ever.

Now read Philippians 3:17-21 again.

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

Philippians 4

Phil 4:1-5 | Of the Same Mind and Joy in the Lord

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.

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 firm. It is a conclusion: you find your spiritual strength in Christ alone. You will discover that, if you look for things outside of Christ, you will begin to wander. 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 gets 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.

It can happen that you become jealous of a brother with whom you do a work for the Lord and who gets more honor than you, at least that's how you feel it. When sisters prepare something for a love meal they can be jealous of one another if people take more from the dish of another sister. 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 spread 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 special 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 'yokemate'. This makes it clear that it is about someone with whom Paul carried the yoke in the preaching 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 preaching 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 above 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 chosen ones are written.

V4. The assurance of being in it is again a reason for his call to “rejoice 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 heaven. 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 alone is the source of your joy.

V5. This joy benefits others with whom you are associated. If the Lord alone 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 (Jam 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 claimed 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 (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 nearness now and His soon coming preserve you from being troubled by things down here or preoccupied with yourself.

Now read Philippians 4:1-5 again.

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

Phil 4:6-9 | The Peace of God and the God of Peace

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. There is no limit, there is no restriction. For God ‘nothing’ really means ‘nothing’. So there is not a thing you have to worry about. For God everything really means everything, and there is not a thing that you cannot place before Him.

Therefore, come 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 connected by grace to the loving and almighty God. 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 will grant. You say thanks in advance for the attention and reaction. This is the way you are allowed to make all your requests 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 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).

If we put our trust in Him we receive His peace. That is why Peter could sleep quietly in 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 also applies to you. It does not state that our hearts will keep His peace. That is something we cannot

do. It is the other way around, 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 kinds 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 toward 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, if you are in school and the teacher or a classmate is being bullied; or if in the workplace someone cracks a dirty joke or some obscene photos are hanging there; or if 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 are fully present.

1. If you dwell on “whatever is true”, lie has no chance.
 2. “Whatever is honorable” speaks of dignity that befits what we are: kings and priests.
 3. If you dwell on “whatever is right”, you will handle according to the rules of what is right, in everything honest.
 4. Dwell also on “whatever is pure”. God had told Israel what animals they should eat (Lev 11:2-3,9,21-22). Those 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).
 5. “Whatever is lovely” means what is worthy to be loved. How do you think of your brothers and sisters? 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.
 6. “Whatever is of good repute are things which should be passed on as it is good to hear. There is no room for ill repute or gossip, or slander.
 7. To dwell on “any excellence” is that you have an eye for spiritual courage to fight the good fight of faith. This is applicable both to yourself and to 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.
 8. 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 dwelling on 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 from on high, 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.

Phil 4:10-14 | All Things Through Him Who Strengthens

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 about their loving care for him expressed in a 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 anyone. 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). If 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 how to deal with humble means, or to be humbled. 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 (cf. 2Cor 11:24). He also knew of prosperity or get a lot of honor (Acts 14:11; 28:6). He was initiated in all the situations of life as if it were 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).

If 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 veneer is peeling off more and more of 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— at least for us who live in the prosperous West. 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 suffering need. Here we hear a man talking of his experience of hunger and suffering need during the course of his work for God.

If you can have a say on hunger and suffering 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 was hungry 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 speaks in the “I” form for a 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. You can sometimes get so used to that, too, that you are no longer open to instructions from the Lord 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, constant fellowship with Christ. 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 the circumstances having 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 fellowship with Him. Then your life is a testimony to His strength. 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 if your bank account has sufficient funds and your refrigerator is full. If we speak about spiritual truths it carries no meaning unless there is a true change in our life. 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. Speaking about our dependence on Him and our desire to be with Him can in some cases seem 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 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 strength 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 (cf. 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 strength encouragement of the fellow believers gives. 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?

Phil 4:15-23 | Supply All Needs and Salutations

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 a gift 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 preaching 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 if you keep it fresh in your mind. Otherwise it can happen to you as it happened with the Israelites. It was a wonder 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 God's wonders. 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 also means the spiritual fruit for the giver to 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 a 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 (Heb 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 gave 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 personal, that he wants to send as a 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 if 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 'ravens', 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 of this wealth to those who give

to another at His command. 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 earthly economic tides. In Malachi 3 God challenges you to trust in the promise that He will give back much more in spiritual blessing, than you give in money and goods (Mal 3:10; 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 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 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 goal: 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.

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