



Philippians - Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

The first part of the letter is a long, flowing greeting of thanksgiving as Paul shows how much he values the Philippians and that he knows how much they value and love him as well, even though he is a prisoner. His prayer is that they will continue to remain faithful and steadfast in their witness to Christ, and indeed that they will grow in love, wisdom and knowledge in a way that will overflow into the lives of others. He reassures them that the work of grace that God has started in them will continue right until the end.

Paul then goes on to state that his imprisonment is actually something that is benefitting the advancement of the Gospel, for he has reached an audience within Cæsar's guard and household, and this has encouraged other believers to continue the work despite the fear of their own arrest and imprisonment. Paul writes of two distinct groups who are spreading the Gospel: those who do so genuinely out of love and those who do so selfishly and to spite Paul. This is not something that concerns Paul providing it is the authentic good news Gospel that is being spread.

Paul speaks clearly that he knew he would be rescued from his imprisonment, either by release to continue his work, or through death to be with his Lord. He had no particular preference, for to be with Christ would be better but he also knew that to continue living would enable him to visit the Philippians and to strengthen further their faith.

Paul concludes the chapter with a reminder that their public behaviour must match the Gospel message for they are not to be intimidated by their opponents but are to remain resolute in their faith, being prepared to suffer if necessary just as Paul was.

I. **Philippians 1:1-11 - Greeting and Prayer**

Paul greets his readers, expressing his gratitude (vv.3-6), and affection for them (vv.7-8), followed by a prayer that their love would abound and their holiness increase (vv.9-11).

II.a Philippians 1:1-2 - Salutation

Paul, along with Timothy, provides a standard early Christian greeting of grace and peace. Paul does not identify himself as an apostle but designates Timothy and himself as servants.

¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

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

Philippians 1:1-2

Paul and Timothy. Assuming Paul was in Rome then the opening address identifies that Timothy was there with him and that Timothy most probably acted as his secretary in writing the letter. Timothy was with Paul during his two recorded visits to Philippi in Acts 16:11-40 and Acts 20:4-5. Timothy probably visited Philippi with Silas while Paul remained in Athens (1 Thessalonians 3:1-3), and they rejoined him in Corinth (Acts 18:5). Therefore, both men were well known in Philippi.

Timothy appears in six of Paul's letters but the pattern of address can be different. For example, in: <<Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother>> (Colossians 1:1), their names are separated out as Paul is an apostle and Timothy is not. However, here and elsewhere Paul can join their two names for both are equally servants of Christ and his church.

Servants of Christ Jesus. The emphasis on service anticipates the rest of the letter, and this emphasis is seen especially in what is said of the humiliation of Christ Jesus (2:5-11). Paul makes no reference to his apostolic authority which he does in many of his letters, perhaps to emphasise his servanthood or perhaps because it was an established, unchallenged fact in Philippi, just as it was in Thessalonica. This was not the case in places like Corinth and Galatia where the false teachers were trying to usurp Paul's authority.

The Roman institution of being a servant, bondservant or slave, Greek *doulos*, was different from the institution of slavery in North America and Europe during the 17th-19th Centuries. Slaves, bondservants and servants generally were permitted to work for pay and to save enough to buy their freedom. Refer to the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30, where the servants, again Greek *doulos*, were entrusted with immense amounts of money and responsibility by their owner. However, those not familiar with the OT and themselves free would struggle with the idea of willingly being a slave to anyone, including a god, as the thought was alien in Roman culture, where the hope of all slaves was their freedom. This designation indicates that Paul, Timothy and all who profess the faith are slaves of Jesus Christ, placing him as their Lord, and thus giving him the same status as the God of Israel. At the same time the title recalls some of the honoured servants of God in the OT, such as Moses, Joshua, David, and the prophets, see Joshua 14:7, Joshua

24:29, 2 Kings 17:23, and Psalm 89:3 respectively. Paul does not put himself in a place of honour with these men by perhaps announcing himself as a Roman citizen or as a Pharisaic Jew, but it is more of an identification of his dedication to God. His pattern of argument in his servanthood is clearly Isaiahic.

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi. Paul is writing for the benefit of the entire church in Philippi, which most likely consisted of several house groups, including the one that had been established in Lydia's home: <<*After leaving the prison they went to Lydia's home; and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed*>> (Acts 16:40).

The NT writers derived this term from the understanding of Israel being God's people, his holy nation, which now applies to all who accept the Gospel of his Son. Its OT use can be clearly seen from Daniel's vision: <<*But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever, for ever and ever*>> (Daniel 7:18 ESV). They are holy people only because they are in Christ Jesus.

It is uncertain what level of formal church governance is implied by bishops and deacons. The former are presumably elders, who would be charged with spiritual oversight of the congregation, as seen in Paul's first missionary journey: <<*And after they had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe*>> (Acts 14:23); refer to the comments made there. It is also written about in other epistles, such as 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, James 5:14, and 1 Peter 5:1-4. Deacons would be entrusted with matters of practical service; refer to Acts 6:1-7 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

It would be the bishops and deacons who would take receipt of this letter and would be the ones charged with reading it out to the various congregations. Interestingly, other than using the term 'deacon' to describe Phoebe in Romans 16:1, this is the first time Paul uses this form of address in any of his letters; he would use the term later in letters to Timothy and Titus, where they are described as a position of service and not as an office. Paul does not refer to them again in this letter, indicating his message is for the church, not just its leaders.

It should be noted that Paul always uses the plural forms of these terms, which indicates a plurality leadership model for the church. This seems to have been Paul's understanding right from his earliest letter: <<*But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labour among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves*>> (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13), and is a continuation of the OT model: <<*Choose for each of your tribes individuals who are wise, discerning, and reputable to be your leaders*>> (Deuteronomy 1:13). However, since Paul is addressing the whole community, it also reveals that the leaders were viewed as part of that community, chosen to serve in it.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This call for God's continued unmerited favour and blessing upon the church was a familiar opening address in Paul's epistles and is also found in Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians

1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, 1 Timothy 1:2, Titus 1:4 and Philemon 3. It was also a feature in the greetings of other apostolic letters: 1 Peter 1:2, 2 Peter 1:2 and 2 John 3. That it comes from both the Father and his Christ implies their equity in deity.

In a profound sense this greeting nicely represents Paul's larger theological perspective. The sum total of God's activity toward his human creatures is found in the word grace; God has given himself to his people bountifully and mercifully in Christ. Nothing is deserved, nothing can be achieved. The sum total of those benefits as they are experienced by the recipients of God's grace is peace, God's *shalom*, both now and to come. The latter flows out of the former and both together flow from God the Father, being made effective in human history through the Lord Jesus Christ.

II.b Philippians 1:3-11 - Paul's Prayer for the Philippians

Paul's letters frequently begin with thanksgiving and prayer. The prayer here helps establish the major themes and concerns of the letter.

These concerns predominate in Paul's thanksgiving and prayer. First, he is genuinely grateful for them; indeed every time he thinks about them in prayer, he both thanks God for them and for their lifelong partnership with him in the Gospel, and prays for them with great joy, confident that God will bring his own good work in them to full fruition (vv.3-6). Second, Paul's present joy and confidence stem from his deep sense of personal relationship with them, evidenced both by their partnership with him in the Gospel and his profound affection for them (vv.7-8). They share in God's grace with him even in his present chains.

Finally, he reports the content of his prayer, whose concern is primarily for an increase in their love for one another, and thus that they be filled with the fruit of righteousness now and blameless at the coming of Christ (vv.9-11). Thus through prayer and thanksgiving he anticipates the various concerns of the letter, their partnership with him in the Gospel, his deep concern for them, and the need for love to replace internal bickering.

³ I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴ constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵ because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.

Philippians 1:3-5

I thank my God every time I remember you. The Philippians had uniquely supported Paul's ministry financially, but it is implied that he is giving thanks for their spiritual support and the work that God has done amongst them in giving them the right heart to serve in the way they did.

Paul was constantly praying for the Philippians with joy, a word that will become a keynote theme in Chapter 4. This joy springs from their partnership or sharing in the Gospel, which involves not only their financial support of their apostle: <<*You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for*

my needs more than once>> (Philippians 4:15-16), but also their deep personal concern for his well-being.

Joy is not about happiness, for it goes much deeper. Joy lies at the heart of the Christian experience of the Gospel; it is the fruit of the Spirit in any truly Christian life, serving as primary evidence of the Spirit's presence: <<*For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*>> (Romans 14:17). Precisely because this is so, joy transcends present circumstances; it is based altogether on the Spirit, God's way of being present with his people under the new covenant. Hence joy prevails for Paul even in prison; he will urge that it prevail for the Philippians as well in their present suffering in the face of opposition.

For Paul, sharing in the Gospel is not about a body of teaching or even its proclamation, it is about Christ: his person, his lifestyle and his teaching. The Philippians were not only sharing in Paul's material needs, they were sharing in the Gospel through the way they were living their lives for Christ.

In fact, the word translated sharing, Greek *koinonia*, most often translated as fellowship, is a term used for business partnership that implies that all those involved would equally take on the work of the business and accept all the financial implications of the partnership as well.

From the first day until now. On the first Sabbath when the apostolic group were in Philippi, Paul had met with a group of women who were worshipping God and they responded immediately to the Gospel: <<*On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshipper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptised, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.'*>> (Acts 16:13-15). It appears their enthusiasm for Christ had never waned during the subsequent years, despite the opposition in the region.

⁶ I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:6

Paul is confident of God's commitment to the Philippians. The foundation for spiritual growth is recognising that it is God who began a good work among you and will bring it to completion. Genuine spiritual progress is rooted in what God has done, is doing, and will do. His faithfulness ensures that he will be with believers until Jesus returns, i.e. the day of Jesus Christ: <<*It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labour in vain*>> (Philippians 2:16); refer also to 1 Thessalonians 5:2-11, 2 Peter 3:10-13 and Revelation 20:11-21:8. They can have confidence that the God who has saved them will never let them go, and that they will inherit their eternal reward. This was the sentiment and understanding of David: <<*The Lord*

will fulfil his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures for ever. Do not forsake the work of your hands>> (Psalm 138:8).

This verse refers to God's good work of salvation itself, of creating a people for his name in Philippi. If so, the sentence anticipates 2:12-13, where Paul urges them to keep working out their common salvation in the way they live together as God's people in Philippi, since God is at work in them both to will and to do for the sake of his own good pleasure. Thus the concern is for their participation in the Gospel in yet another sense, not so much their sharing it as their experiencing it and living it out in Philippi.

⁷ It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel.

⁸ For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:7-8

You hold me in your heart, you share in God's grace with me. The Philippians had sent financial support to Paul, taken to him in Rome by Epaphroditus (2:25), at a time when he could not supply his own needs. Again, the word share implies partnership, which is also an expression of unity in the faith. Paul had sought a similar relationship with those in Corinth: <<*I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together*>> (2 Corinthians 7:3).

Again, Paul expresses his warm thoughts about the Philippians and the fellowship they enjoy in God's grace. Paul's imprisonment would have been a source of great shame in the ancient world, but the Philippians have nevertheless stood in solidarity with him. This was no doubt an encouragement as he shared the good news with his captors and judges.

For God is my witness is the strongest of oaths that a man like Paul or indeed anyone else could make. He describes his love for them as similar to that of Jesus when he gave up his life for all of mankind. Paul is likewise prepared to give up his life for them in faith, in the bond of love and truth of that faith in Jesus (2:17). Paul had called God as his witness before: <<*For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers*>> (Romans 1:9).

How I long for all of you. Paul's affection for the Philippians is genuine and heartfelt. He knows there are issues to be addressed and he is unable to be with them in person to help them deal with those issues. All he can do is pray, and pray he does!

With the compassion of Christ Jesus. Such an uninhibited display of affection makes it clear that Paul was not an academic! He was, in fact, a passionate lover of Christ, which made him an equally passionate lover of Christ's people. Much can be learned here by those who have pastoral care of any kind, including parents for their children. Paul's emotion, after all, is simply the outflow of his theology and

the spirituality that issues from such theology. His theology has to do with the Gospel, which has God as its source and sustainer.

⁹ And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰ to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹ having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:9-11

The first petition in Paul's prayer is that God would cause the cardinal Christian virtue of love to overflow more and more, an allusion to a river breaking its banks to flood over a much wider area, and that it would be accompanied by knowledge and full insight or all discernment, so that the Philippians' love would find expression in wise actions that would truly benefit others and glorify God: <<*I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him*>> (Ephesians 1:17). As Christians grow in their understanding of what it means to follow Jesus, they will increasingly be able to affirm and practice what is best, i.e. moral discernment.

Most people would understand love to be an emotion of the heart, whereas knowledge and insight are matters of learning, i.e. of the head. Matters of the head and the heart are often portrayed as separate in human understanding, yet Paul sees them as bound closely together. If Christian love is to be true, i.e. love for God and love for everyone else, it is bound to work its way out in knowledge and understanding, in a way that head knowledge or academic education cannot achieve. Love should be understood here to refer to God's character; it is the kind of love that places high value on a person and actively seeks that person's benefit.

Such joyful obedience to God will give them the confidence of being found pure and blameless when Jesus returns, a characteristic Pauline prayer: <<*He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*>> (1 Corinthians 1:8), which are words that would be used to describe the OT priests serving in the temple and which Paul applies to his own team: <<*You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was towards you believers*>> (1 Thessalonians 2:10). This does not imply instantaneous spiritual perfection but rather an increasing likeness to Christ.

However, the harvest of righteousness is not produced in the believer's own power. Because that fruit comes through Jesus Christ, it will result in the glory and praise of God.

Paul's language here indicates that the harvest of righteousness will produce peace: <<*And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace*>> (James 3:18), and spiritual fruit: <<*By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things*>> (Galatians 5:22-23).

Righteousness here is a word that implies God's own faithfulness and the believer being a member of God's family, with all of its privileges, such as the forgiveness of sins, which is God's gift to those who accept the Gospel of his Son.

II. Philippians 1:12-30 - Paul's Present Circumstances

Paul assures the Philippians that, although he is imprisoned, the Gospel is still advancing (vv.12-18). He is joyfully confident that no matter what happens, he will be delivered and Christ will be honoured, because to live is Christ and to die is gain (vv.19-26). Paul then encourages his readers to walk worthy of the Gospel, especially amid suffering (vv.27-30).

II.a Philippians 1:12-18a - Paul's imprisonment has meant progress for the Gospel

Paul realises that the Philippians are grieved over his imprisonment, so he encourages them by pointing out that his circumstances are furthering the proclamation of the Gospel. His joy in difficult circumstances is meant to be an example to the Philippians to likewise rejoice even in difficult times. Further, Paul's charitable attitude toward fellow believers who make life hard for him is also to function as a model for the Philippians, since it is evident that there is some disunity in the congregation: <<*I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life*>> (Philippians 4:2-3).

¹² I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; ¹⁴ and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.

Philippians 1:12-14

What has happened to me has actually helped. Paul is not bitter about his incarceration as he realises that it is part of God's plan to advance the spread of the Gospel. His faithful attitude is similar to that of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers and then imprisoned because of the false claims made by Potiphar's wife. When Joseph was subsequently released, he organised the famine relief effort that saw his own family finally settle in Egypt. After the death of his father Jacob his brothers feared he would avenge himself of their betrayal but instead he said: <<*Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today*>> (Genesis 50:20). Recognising that one's own perilous position may be by the will of God takes great courage and faith in his promises!

The word Paul uses for the advance or spread of the Gospel, Greek *prokopēn*, is the same word he will use in v.25 for the Philippians' progress in faith. He thus

underscores the need to push God's Kingdom forward rather than dwelling on past or present problems.

The Gospel has advanced because Paul has let the whole imperial guard, Greek *praetorian*, know that he is imprisoned only because of his testimony that Jesus is Lord. The Latin word *praetorium* could refer to a governor's residence and by extension those living in the residence, i.e. to everyone else, a phrase that also includes the Roman Jews: <<*After they had fixed a day to meet him, they came to him at his lodgings in great numbers. From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets*>> (Acts 28:23). Those who believe that Paul wrote from Caesarea would understand the word in that sense here: <<*On reading the letter, he asked what province he belonged to, and when he learned that he was from Cilicia, he said, 'I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive.'* Then he ordered that he be kept under guard in Herod's headquarters>> (Acts 23:34-35). However, the word could also refer to the special guard of the emperor in Rome, as the translation above suggests. The *praetorium* was also part of the residence of Caesar in Rome and the place where he held judicial hearings.

In Rome Paul was under house arrest, which almost certainly meant he was guarded by men from the imperial guard. Thus, over time, they would have come to know Paul well and would have been witness to his many meetings with others, during which time he would continue to enthusiastically speak of the Gospel of Christ. The guards would have known of the Gospel of Caesar and of their many pagan gods. They would have listened in wonder to this well educated man, awaiting a tribunal hearing that could end in his death if he continued to speak of something that seemed to oppose the traditions of Rome, speaking so boldly and positively of the things that had got him into prison in the first place. It must have made them sit up and think!



The image shows Herod's palace in Cæsarea, which was also called the *prætorium*. It was built by Herod the Great, who had a reputation for building some magnificent structures all around the eastern Mediterranean Sea countries, and it served as the quarters of the Roman governor. Cæsarea was the seat of Roman government for the whole region of Judæa, and also had its own cohort of Roman soldiers, and those who believe that Paul wrote from this location understand he is referring to them here.

Dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear. When the Christians in Rome, where Paul was most likely imprisoned, saw his boldness even as his life was in danger, his example inspired them to be more courageous as well, so that they too became much bolder in proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

¹⁵ Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. ¹⁶ These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defence of the gospel; ¹⁷ the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. ^{18a} What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.

Philippians 1:15-18a

The identity of those here who proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry is difficult to determine. They are clearly antagonistic to Paul, and thus one could imagine they are the same Judaising people mentioned in Chapter 3. However, it is hard to see how Paul could rejoice in the proclamation of something, namely, a return to the old covenant, which he saw as a betrayal of the good news; see especially the letter to the Galatians.

These proclaim Christ out of love refers to those who remained faithful to the truth of the Gospel and, out of love for both Paul and Christ, they were content to continue to spread the word despite the potential personal danger.

Intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment could indicate that either these people were stirring up trouble for Paul with both the Jews and the Roman authorities, or that Paul was frustrated that, because of his imprisonment, he could not dispute their claims face to face.

It seems most likely that these were other Christians who preached a generally sound Gospel but were personally at odds with Paul. They may have dismissed him because of his poor speaking abilities (1 Corinthians chapters 1-2), or his constant suffering and weakness, a key theme in 2 Corinthians; whatever their rationale, they were not motivated by love but only by a desire to harm Paul in some way. However, Paul, like Jesus, is not concerned for his own interests: <<**Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others**>> (Philippians 2:4), and he will rejoice as long as the Gospel is advancing.

What does it matter? Paul is strong enough, both in his faith and his own strength of character, to realise that his predicament is not about him per se but about the

opportunities it is affording the advance of the Gospel and the strengthening of the resolve of so many others who are then willing to emulate Paul.

Paul's theology really comes to the fore in this letter. Everything, whatever human emotion it may illicit, whether it brings joy or hardship, can be seen in the larger picture that was revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as the Christ of God. That is, everything is Christ centred.

II.b Philippians 1:18b-26 - To live is Christ

The passage comes in three parts, held together by the anticipation of his impending trial (vv.19-20). This offers the reason for his continuing joy; his earnest expectation that Christ will be magnified whatever the outcome, i.e. life if released, or death if executed. Even though he has no real choice in the matter, in vv.21-24 he ponders the options of life and death.

Paul's clear preference is death, since that means to gain the final prize of Christ himself. But he expects the outcome to be life since that is what is best for the Philippians. Verses 25-26 then offer the end result of his being given life: to support their progress and joy in the faith.

^{18b} Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will result in my deliverance.

Philippians 1:18b-19

I will continue to rejoice. Paul's personal plight was not the issue for him. He was only motivated to see that the work of spreading the Gospel should continue.

The Spirit of Jesus Christ is a reference to the Holy Spirit, indicating the deity of each person in the Trinity. Paul refers to him elsewhere: <<***But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him***>> (Romans 8:9), and by Peter: <<***Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated, when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory***>> (1 Peter 1:10-11).

Paul, who has prayed for the Philippians, now solicits their prayers for deliverance, Greek *sōtēria*, a term that could mean deliverance from prison: <<***One thing more – prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you***>> (Philemon 22), as some commentators understand it, or that could mean deliverance in the ultimate sense of eternal salvation, as others understand it. It seems likely that Paul intentionally left some ambiguity here, in light of the mention of his imprisonment in the preceding verses (vv.12-14), and in light of the eternal focus in the verses that follow, e.g. Paul's <<***desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better***>> (v.23).

The tension between temporal deliverance and eternal salvation is, in fact, evident throughout this passage (vv.19-26), as evidenced by Paul's words:

<<*whether by life or by death*>> (v.20), and: <<*I am hard pressed between the two*>> (v.23). Although Paul seems to have alluded to his temporal deliverance, clearly his longing for eternal salvation is <<*far better*>> (v.23). In this regard, Paul alludes to Job 13:13-18 in this passage, where Job clearly speaks of his final destiny; and Paul speaks of his hope of not being ashamed, which is elsewhere related to the final judgment: <<*And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us*>> (Romans 5:3-5). Either way, Paul wants the Philippians to know that even if his expected deliverance from prison fails to materialise and he is executed, he will still be saved to eternal life by God.

Jesus had been put to death because the Jews had falsely claimed that he was an opponent of Cæsar and Paul was also charged with insurrection. Yet the Gospel message is that God's Kingdom is not of this world: <<*Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here'*>> (John 18:36), and therefore does not pose a threat to the civil authorities. Jesus had clearly taught that the civil authorities are to be duly respected by Christians: <<*Jesus said to them, 'Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.'* And they were utterly amazed at him>> (Mark 12:17), and Peter wrote: <<*Honour everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honour the emperor*>> (1 Peter 2:17), which was in line with Paul's own teaching: <<*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God*>> (Romans 13:1).

²⁰ It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death.

Philippians 1:20

It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way. Paul's tone is upbeat despite his predicament in prison and facing a possible death sentence. Yet elsewhere he shows that it is human nature to feel and to express one's feelings during the low points of life as well, such as he felt while in Ephesus: <<*We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again, as you also join in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted to us through the prayers of many*>> (2 Corinthians 1:8-11).

Commentators who believed Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus and wrote this letter from there point to Paul's comments to the Corinthians to support this, along with the known fact that he subsequently travelled from Ephesus to Corinth via Macedonia.

The crucial thing for Paul is not life or death. It is maintaining his faithful witness to Christ: <<*If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe betide me if I do not proclaim the gospel!*>> (1 Corinthians 9:16). Or by death indicates that Paul hopes to honour Christ even in the way he eventually dies.

²¹ For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.

Philippians 1:21

Paul's life is not a matter of seeking his own comfort or advancement. It is all about seeking the advancement of Christ's Kingdom, therefore, living is tantamount to serving Christ: <<*and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*>> (Galatians 2:20). Paul's life was all about serving God as a faithful witness and ambassador. In fact, dying should be seen as gain, because it would mean that Paul would be freed from his trouble-filled life on earth to rejoice in Christ's presence forever.

Since Paul's conversion Christ had become the singular pursuit of his life. Christ the crucified exalted Lord, present by the Spirit, the coming King; Christ is the name that sums up for Paul the whole range of his new relationship with God: personal devotion, commitment, service, the Gospel, ministry, communion, inspiration, everything. Such singular focus does not make Paul otherworldly; rather, it gives heart and meaning to everything he is and does as a citizen of two worlds, with his heavenly citizenship determining his earthly one.

Great care is needed in this passage, especially in the presence of vulnerable people, not to give the impression that death before one's time should be sought in order to gain Christ. Paul is careful to show that he has no choice in the outcome but must accept whatever happens. However, it also indicates that mortal death for the believer is not the tragedy that a modern way of thinking often portrays it to be! All told this is one of the apostle's finer moments, a passage to which God's people have turned over and over again to find strength and encouragement in times of difficulty. We all are the richer for it.

²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; ²⁴ but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. ²⁵ Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, ²⁶ so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

Philippians 1:22-26

If I am to live. Paul knew that as long as he was alive then he was to continue in the **fruitful labour** of Gospel proclamation in whatever location the Holy Spirit guided him to: *<<When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas>>* (Acts 16:7-8).

In light of v.21, Paul is **hard pressed** as to which outcome he should desire. Being with Christ now would be more attractive for him, while remaining alive **in the flesh** would enable him to help the Philippians further on their own spiritual journey. Since Paul knows that the way of Jesus is the way of service (2:5-11), he is **convinced** that his own preferences will be put aside so that he can **remain and continue** with the Philippians for their **progress and joy in faith**. Paul is not merely musing on his own crisis; he is giving the Philippians a model of the service-driven life.

My desire is to depart and be with Christ indicates that when Christians die they are immediately with Christ, long before their bodies are raised from the dead; refer to the comments on 1 Corinthians 15:23. However, this does not necessarily mean heaven, for nowhere in the NT does it say that is the destination for those who die. The closest confirmation came from Jesus on the Cross, when he spoke to one of the convicted men who were crucified beside him: *<<He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise'>>* (Luke 23:43). In Jewish understanding, Paradise was a place of peace and rest where the dead souls wait for the general resurrection. Paul's understanding is in line with this but he also knew that Jesus wanted his people to be with him: *<<Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world>>* (John 17:24).

I know that I will remain. When Paul would finally be tried by Nero there was the possibility that he would be put to death for he was charged with insurrection. Whether Paul had received reassurance from God, as he had done in Jerusalem: *<<That night the Lord stood near him and said, 'Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome'>>* (Acts 23:11), or it was just a matter of faith, Paul believed that his work was not yet completed and that he would visit Philippi as part of his future ministry, i.e. **share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.**

II.c Philippians 1:27-30 - Encouragement to walk worthy of the Gospel

In what is a rather convoluted single sentence in the Greek, Paul indicates that his sacrifice would be futile if the Philippians did not continue to live in a way that is 'worthy of the Gospel of Christ'.

²⁷ Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and are in no way

intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing.

Philippians 1:27-28

The Greek for only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ can also be translated 'only behave as citizens, Greek *politeuesthe*, worthy of the Gospel', a phrasing that nicely captures Paul's play on words here and in 3:20, 'our citizenship, Greek *politeuma*, is in heaven'. Philippi prided itself on being a Roman colony, offering the honour and privilege of Roman citizenship. Paul reminds the congregation that they should look to Christ, not Cæsar, for their model of behaviour, since their primary allegiance is to God and his Kingdom.

Whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit is both a call for church unity and a determination to continue to live Godly lives especially in Paul's continued absence. They need to stand together with one another and with Paul in striving for the Gospel, as also indicated by: <<***Beloved, while eagerly preparing to write to you about the salvation we share, I find it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints***>> (Jude 3). Paul's emphasis on unity may suggest some division within the Philippian congregation as also noted earlier from 4:2-3. Perhaps the disunity is one reason he mentions the 'bishops and deacons' at the outset of the letter (v.1), for they are required to minister in a way that promotes unity.

Intimidated by your opponents. It is remarkable that the Philippians were not intimidated; a word also used in relation to spooking horses, for they were professing a Lord and Saviour that was not Cæsar. Given that Philippi had strong links to the Roman military and that Cæsar was revered as their 'lord and saviour', and also given the fact that Christ had been executed by the Romans and was therefore deemed to be an enemy of the state, the local populace would not have taken kindly to those now proposing, from a Roman perspective, an opponent to all that they stood for.

As the Philippians maintain courage in the face of their opponents, these opponents will realise that such remarkable strength could come only from God, and thus anyone who continues to oppose God's people will be marked for destruction.

Destruction, Greek *apōleia*, here means eternal destruction, hence these are different opponents from those who antagonised Paul in vv.15-18, who seem to have been Christians. A different city is in view as well, for here Paul speaks about what is happening in Philippi, while in vv.15-18 his opposition is presumably in Rome. But God's sustaining grace amid trouble will assure the believers of their own final salvation. Paul follows the teaching of Jesus here: <<***Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you***>> (Matthew 5:10-12), reminding them that persecution is a sign that they belong to Christ.

²⁹ For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well — ³⁰ since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Philippians 1:29-30

Troubles will come, because the reality is that believers in Christ will suffer for him: <<*Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*>> (2 Timothy 3:12). Paul teaches that both suffering and faith are gifts of God; for both, Paul says, have been graciously granted you.

Suffering for the sake of Jesus is a great privilege, as just noted in Matthew 5:10-12 and demonstrated by the apostles when they were flogged on the orders of the Sanhedrin for proclaiming the Gospel: <<*As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonour for the sake of the name*>> (Acts 5:41). Paul again holds himself out as an example of one who has maintained his joy while experiencing the same struggle, i.e. opposition from hostile unbelievers.

You are having the same struggle that you saw I had. Paul and Silas had been publically flogged and imprisoned in Philippi: <<*but though we had already suffered and been shamefully maltreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition*>> (1 Thessalonians 2:2). Paul's remarks at the end of this first chapter make it clear that the persecution continued, both for Paul and for them, and indeed for many others: <<*But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings*>> (Hebrews 10:32). Paul wants to reassure them that it was not for any wrong on their part but for their faith in Christ, something that would bring honour and glory to God.