



## Philippians - Chapter Four

### Summary of Chapter Four

Paul commences this final chapter with further appeals calling for perseverance and unity, naming two individuals in particular who, like the rest of the church, need to be of one mind in the Lord. This means humbling, sacrificial giving of oneself for the sake of others; but then that is what the Gospel is all about.

Paul begins his concluding matters with a series of exhortations, including an acknowledgement of their partnership in spreading the Gospel, before thanking the Philippians for their gift, which Paul clearly received as a sacrificial offering pleasing to God. Above all, Paul calls upon the community of faith to celebrate God's goodness in their lives through prayer and praise. There is the familiar Pauline doxology.

Paul finishes this letter with his greetings, including those of his unnamed co-workers, the local community of faith and those in Cæsar's household. Paul's final word is a benediction.

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Verse one was commented on at the end of Chapter Three as it concluded the previous major section.

### **IV      Philippians 4:2-23 - Concluding Exhortations and Thanksgiving**

Paul encourages the Philippians, calling for reconciliation, joyful faith, and disciplined thinking (vv.2-9), and is thankful for their loyal support in helping him in his ministry (vv.10-20). Paul concludes with his personal greetings, those of others with him and a benediction (vv.21-23).

#### **V.a      Philippians 4:2-9 - Exhortations**

Paul encourages the Philippians, calling for reconciliation, joyful faith, and disciplined thinking.

## V.a.i Philippians 4:2-3 - Standing together for the Gospel

Paul entreats the Philippians to stand unified in the Lord for the sake of the Gospel of Christ.

<sup>2</sup> I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

### Philippians 4:2

Paul does not reveal the source of tension between the two women, Euodia and Syntyche. He exhorts them to apply the principle stated in 2:2; that is, to be of the same mind or 'have the same mindset', Greek *phronein*. Other than in his greetings it is rare for Paul to name individuals. There are occasions where he does so almost in a condemnatory manner: <<***By rejecting conscience, certain persons have suffered shipwreck in the faith; among them are Hymenæus and Alexander, whom I have turned over to Satan, so that they may learn not to blaspheme***>> (1 Timothy 1:19b-20). Here, however, Paul offers no judgement nor does he take sides, indicating that these women are held in equal high esteem by him. By making his appeal through a public forum, the letter was intended to be read out in church, it is clear that Paul considered true reconciliation to be the most likely outcome.

<sup>3</sup> 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 4:3

Reconciliation often requires third party intervention, in this case a loyal companion. This person is unnamed although the singular word, Greek *syzygos*, also 'true yokefellow', could be read as a proper name. This could refer to a local church leader or quite possibly one of Paul's co-workers who was currently in Philippi. This reference would have been clear to the local church.

Help these women. Paul is especially eager to see Euodia and Syntyche reconciled because they have struggled beside him in the work of the Gospel. This is confirmed by: <<***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***>> (Philippians 1:27), where Paul also encourages unity among those who are 'striving side by side' for the Gospel, Greek *synathleō*, the same verb that is used here. Paul did not isolate himself and minister alone; he deliberately worked with many others. In view of 1<sup>st</sup> Century culture, Euodia and Syntyche probably ministered mainly among women. Various comments made on Acts 18:26, Romans 16:7, and 1 Timothy 2:12 provide guidance to the possibility that women could also explain the Gospel to men in certain circumstances.

There is much speculation over Clement. Clearly, he had worked with Paul in Philippi and his mention here seems to imply he was with Paul when this epistle was written. Therefore, Clement of Rome is favoured by many. There is equally as

much debate of the role of Clement. Many believe he was the fourth bishop in Rome and the Pope towards the latter part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. He is attributed as being the author of an epistle to the troubled Corinthian church, which makes many references to the OT and several NT epistles by Paul, Peter, James, and especially to the book of Hebrews, which some believe he also wrote.

The book of life has OT roots: <<*But the Lord said to Moses, ‘Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book’*>> (Exodus 32:33), <<*Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous*>> (Psalm 69:28), and: <<*At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book*>> (Daniel 12:1); as well as being referred to on several occasions in Revelation. It refers to God’s record of those who belong to him.

#### V.a.ii Philippians 4:4-9 - Rejoicing in faith

Paul calls the Philippians to attitudes of joy and reason, so that they replace anxiety with expectant, grateful prayer. He also calls them to think upon and practice Christian virtues.

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

#### Philippians 4:4

Rejoice. The joy that Paul calls for is not happiness that depends on circumstances but a deep contentment that is in the Lord (see also v.2), based on trust in the sovereign, living God, which therefore is available always, even in difficult times. Paul shows that it is not complicated: <<*Rejoice always*>> (1 Thessalonians 5:16). Unmitigated joy is or should be the distinguishing mark of the Christian believer.

<sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

#### Philippians 4:5

Gentleness is crucial for maintaining community; it is the disposition that seeks what is best for everyone and not just for oneself. It is manifested as 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). Such gentleness marked the character of Christ and was reflected in the words of another apostle: <<*When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly*>> (1 Peter 2:23). It is this gentle forbearance to which Paul appealed: <<*I myself, Paul, appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ – I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold towards you when I am away!*>> (2 Corinthians 10:1), which he here calls the believers to exhibit in Philippi.

The Lord is near emphasises the fact that Jesus is with each believer by his Spirit: <<*The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth*>> (Psalm 145:18). It may also indicate that his return is near: <<*Be silent before*

*the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is at hand*>> (Zephaniah 1:7a), and that he will surely return as judge to hold people responsible for their deeds: <<*Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors!*>> (James 5:9). Paul does not specify when this will happen although it is a well documented fact that Christ will return. Refer to Matthew 24:36-44, 2 Peter 3:1-13, and the associated comments.

On the whole it seems likely that this is primarily intended as the last in the series of eschatological words to this suffering congregation, again reminding them of their sure future despite present difficulties. It thus functions as encouragement and affirmation. Since the Philippians' present suffering is at the hands of those who proclaim Cæsar as Lord, they are reminded that the true Lord is near. Their eschatological vindication is close at hand. At the same time, by using the language of the Psalter, Paul is encouraging them to pray in the midst of their present distress, because the Lord is near in a very real way to those who call on him now.

<sup>6</sup> Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

#### Philippians 4:6-7

Paul echoes Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, refer to Matthew 6:25-34, that believers are not to worry but are to entrust themselves into the hands of their loving heavenly Father, whose peace will guard them in Christ Jesus. Paul's use of guard may reflect his own imprisonment or the status of Philippi as a Roman colony with a military garrison. In either case, it is not Roman soldiers who guard believers – it is the peace of God Almighty. Because God is sovereign and in control, Christians can entrust all their difficulties to him who rules over all creation, and who is wise and loving in all his ways; refer to Romans 8:31-39. An attitude of prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving contributes directly to this inward peace.

Peace is not just the absence of conflict but echoes the OT concept of *shalom*, where a person's life with God and with everything else is in ordered harmony, both physically and spiritually, and 'all is well'.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding. This is a concept revealed by the prophet: <<*Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace – in peace because they trust in you*>> (Isaiah 26:3), and is offered by Jesus: <<*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid*>> (John 14:27). Many believers, and indeed the secular world, try to analyse God. Paul clearly understood that God is above and beyond mere human comprehension, a sentiment expressed by King Solomon: <<*He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover, he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end*>> (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Yet God continually demonstrates his unfailing love for all his people, his treasured possession: <<*When I look at your heavens, the work of*

*your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?>>* (Psalm 8:3-4), and: <<*But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him'>>* (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Guard your hearts links to the words of Solomon: <<*Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life>>* (Proverbs 4:23), for the Hebrew view is that the heart is the centre of one's being, out of which flows all of life, both good and bad: <<*For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly>>* (Mark 7:21-22).

Anxiety was as much a way of life in Philippi as it is in the modern world. Their pagan background meant they would have always been anxiously trying to appease a whole range of gods and goddesses for peace in their lives. Paul is careful not to promise that the creator God revealed in Jesus will protect believers from all suffering. What he is saying is that all things matter to God and therefore nothing is too trivial to ask of God and in all situations God deserves the praise, whatever the outcome.

<sup>8</sup> Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

### Philippians 4:8

Finally marks the start of the final part of the main body of the letter.

Think about these things. The Philippians are to fill their minds with things that will inspire worship of God and service to others. The list of values and virtues is not exhaustive, nor is it simply a list to be noted then forgotten. Paul intends his readers to take careful note of what they are called to do and how they should live their lives to reflect Christ.

There is nothing else like this in Paul's extant letters. It reflects a world with which the Philippians were familiar before they had ever become followers of Christ and friends of Paul; for although some of these words are common stock in Jewish wisdom, they are especially the language of Hellenistic moralism. In effect Paul tells the Philippian believers to take into account the best of their Greco-Roman heritage, as long as it has moral excellence and is praiseworthy.

There is an interesting contrast between what Paul is calling for here and what is so often portrayed in the media, which seems to focus on what humans have made bad and ugly in the world. Paul calls believers to see beyond such things in order to focus on the goodness of God's provision.

<sup>9</sup> Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

## Philippians 4:9

Keep on doing the things. Beyond having a proper spiritual outlook (v.8), the Philippians are to practice what they have seen Paul doing and heard him teaching. As they make progress in this way, they will find that it is not simply *the peace of God* (v.7), but the God of peace himself who will be with them.

The God of peace is referenced on several occasions in the NT: <<*The God of peace be with all of you. Amen*>> (Romans 15:33), <<*The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you*>> (Romans 16:20), <<*May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*>> (1 Thessalonians 5:23), and: <<*Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen*>> (Hebrews 13:20-21).

This verse provides one of the most challenging ethical demands in the bible, not so much for the reader, but for the one who wrote it. The same is true in all ages for those called to lead in churches, and indeed all believers, who are to reflect Christ in all that they are, do and say.

### V.b Philippians 4:10-20 - Acknowledgment of the Philippians' Gift

Paul thanks the Philippians for their gift to him and assures them that God will in turn supply all of their needs.

<sup>10</sup> I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup> Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have.

### Philippians 4:10-11

At last you have revived your concern for me may sound like a rebuke as if they had not considered Paul's situation or sacrifices for the sake of the Gospel, but Paul clearly tempers his statement by acknowledging they were concerned for him but had no opportunity to show it in any practical way.

Paul is grateful for the Philippians' financial support, but he wants them to know that, even in difficult circumstances, he has learned to be content. Many philosophers of Paul's day advocated contentment but developed the idea from the perspective of self-sufficiency. Paul will go on to show that it is a contentment based on the sufficiency of knowing God through Christ. Paul writes of such contentment to Timothy: <<*Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these*>> (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

<sup>12</sup> I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

### Philippians 4:12-13

The secret of living amid life's difficulties is simple: trusting God in such a way that one can say, I can do all things through him who strengthens me. This does not mean God will bless whatever a person does; it must be read within the context of the letter, with its emphasis on obedience to God, and committed service to God and others.

Paul experienced significant trials and tribulations during his ministry of the Gospel as the Book of Acts and many of his letters reveal. In particular, the list in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, written about halfway through his work, gives an indication that Jesus' words to Ananias about Paul before he even started his ministry were not an exaggeration: <<*But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name'*>> (Acts 9:15-16).

<sup>14</sup> In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once.

### Philippians 4:14-16

It was kind of you to share my distress seems muted praise in comparison to the praise Paul had offered the church in his references to them in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, which is a glowing report of their generosity some years earlier with regard to an offering for the poor in Jerusalem.

The early days of the gospel. Paul had already achieved much in modern day Turkey, Cyprus and Syria before he went to Philippi as part of his second missionary journey. However, this was the first time that an evangelist had come to this part of the Greek speaking world that was also an important region in terms of the Roman Empire, and therefore it held great significance.

No church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving. Although Paul is not indirectly admonishing the other churches for failing to give in response to the Gospel they had freely received, Paul's message is clear and in line with the teaching of Jesus: <<*Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give*>> (Matthew 10:8 NIV).

The Philippians share in Paul's ministry, not just at the spiritual level but at the practical level of financial support; refer to the comments made on 1:3-5. They contributed to his work after he had left Macedonia as well as when he was in

Thessalonica, which was also in Macedonia: <<After Paul and Silas had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews>> (Acts 17:1).

In addition to the Philippians' support in Thessalonica, Paul undertook manual labour to help support his ministry: <<You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God>> (1 Thessalonians 2:9), and: <<For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labour we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate>> (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9). Paul always sought to ensure that the Gospel was given freely: <<If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ>> (1 Corinthians 9:12), so that no one could claim he was peddling for trade as did many of the travelling philosophers of his day.

<sup>17</sup> Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account.

#### Philippians 4:17

Not that I seek the gift. Paul did not request financial support from his churches, although he indicated the justification to receive such gifts: <<If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits?>> (1 Corinthians 9:11).

Lest they imagine he has moved away from the service-centred perspective of the earlier chapters, Paul reminds the Philippians that even his reception of their gifts is ultimately for their benefit. Likely using a business metaphor, he is seeking the profit that accumulates to your account or the fruit that increases to your credit. God sees their sacrifice and is pleased.

Once again, Paul is not indicating that pleasing God is a method of achieving salvation by works. He is stating that God is pleased with those whose faith, hope and love find a practical expression.

<sup>18</sup> I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

#### Philippians 4:18

I have been paid in full. Paul makes it clear that he is not complimenting them with the intention that they should send further gifts. Paul is fully satisfied by the Philippians' gifts, brought to him by Epaphroditus, who is commented on in 2:25-30, and because it has been offered to him for the service of the Gospel, he can return to images drawn from Israel's worship.

The gifts are a fragrant offering and a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. Note that the Greek *osmēn euōdias* occurs often in the Septuagint in connection with the pleasing aroma of sacrifices to God: <<*And when the Lord smelt the pleasing odour, the Lord said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done*>> (Genesis 8:21), <<*Then you shall cut the ram into its parts, and wash its entrails and its legs, and put them with its parts and its head, and turn the whole ram into smoke on the altar; it is a burnt-offering to the Lord; it is a pleasing odour, an offering by fire to the Lord*>> (Exodus 29:17-18), and: <<*He shall remove all its fat, as the fat is removed from the offering of well-being, and the priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar for a pleasing odour to the Lord. Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf, and you shall be forgiven*>> (Leviticus 4:31); while the literal offerings of the OT system have been done away with through Christ, the principle behind them of costly devotion to God remains.

Paul's language would sit well with that of the psalmist for God is not really impressed with the fragrant smell of the offering or the motions of the Temple cult, as indicated in Psalm 50:7-15. What pleases God is the spirit of generosity that comes from a faithful, trusting and loving heart.

<sup>19</sup> And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

#### Philippians 4:19

Those who are generous toward God and his people will find that he is generous toward them and will fully satisfy their every need in Christ Jesus. Financial aid to the church had always been a requirement of God: <<*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing*>> (Malachi 3:10).

<sup>20</sup> To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

#### Philippians 4:20

Just as the 'hymn of Christ' (2:5-11) ended with: <<*to the glory of God the Father*>>, so Paul concludes the body of his letter with a doxology: To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

#### V.c Philippians 4:21-23 - Final Greetings and Benediction

Paul's farewell is brief yet heartfelt. It contains a tantalising reference to there being converts from within Cæsar's own palace complex.

<sup>21</sup> Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The friends who are with me greet you. <sup>22</sup> All the saints greet you, especially those of the emperor's household.

### Philippians 4:21-22

The exhortation to greet every saint reinforces the personal nature of Paul's communication and shows that the truths of the letter were to be lived out by real people in the real world.

The friends who are with me is a reference to Paul's co-workers and companions, who are unnamed here but would have included Timothy and probably Luke, along with others who are mentioned in Acts or other epistles. Paul did not always name those working with him: <<*Paul an apostle – sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead – and all the members of God's family who are with me, To the churches of Galatia*>> (Galatians 1:1-2).

All the saints greet you is most likely a reference to the church in Rome where Paul was imprisoned, which is a similar reference to: <<*But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem'*>> (Acts 9:13), although it could also be used to refer to the global church.

The emperor's household could refer not only to the royal family but to anyone connected with the emperor's service, including soldiers, slaves or freedmen. It is likely that some of the latter group had responded positively to Paul's message; there is no evidence that the emperor's actual family were believers at this point. The fact that some within Cæsar's circles had believed would have had particular resonance in Roman Philippi, a loyal garrison city.

The fact that Nero was a fierce opponent of the Christian faith did not prevent some of his servants, guards and possibly relatives from coming to faith. This indicates the level of faith it takes for believers who live under such persecuting regimes.

There is a popular account that Paul had returned to Rome freely to rebuild the ailing Roman church during the time of persecution in the mid-60s AD, as many of its senior church leaders had been martyred. During this time, it is alleged that his teaching brought one of Nero's mistresses to faith, who then repented of her former life. This upset Nero, who had Paul arrested and beheaded. It makes for an interesting story but has no supporting historical evidence.

<sup>23</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

### Philippians 4:23

Paul ends his letter with a reminder that true progress in life is a gift of God through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a familiar benediction: <<*May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen*>> (Galatians 6:18).