



Season 8 Podcasts

In the Defense and Confirmation of the Gospel

By

Mark McGee

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” Mark 1:15

Jesus Christ spoke these words following His baptism in the River Jordan and Satan’s testing in the wilderness. The Son of God had left Heaven and come to earth with a purpose. His purpose was to ‘save and destroy:’ save those He had chosen for eternal life and destroy the works of the devil.

Jesus chose twelve men to take His Gospel, His ‘Good News,’ to Jews “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Jesus chose Saul of Tarsus to take the Gospel to “Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.” (Acts 9:15)

Jesus taught them both the ‘salvation and destruction’ that would come from the preaching of His Gospel. Those men, led by the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, took that message wherever they were sent.

“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.” Acts 13:2-3

Saul of Tarsus, also known as the Apostle Paul, became the leading preacher of the Gospel of Christ in the Gentile world. He preached a message of salvation and of destruction, just as Jesus taught him:

“Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” Ephesians 1:3-5

“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus

Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”
Ephesians 2:11-21

“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders.” 2 Thessalonians 2:7-9

Christians since the 1st Century AD have preached and lived the Gospel of Jesus Christ. One of the blessings we have in the New Testament are the many 'letters' the Apostle Paul wrote to churches and individuals. God gave Paul many 'visions and revelations of the Lord' (2 Corinthians 12:1b), which he received prior to the Holy Spirit calling Barnabas and Saul (Paul) to begin their journey to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles and plant Christian churches. We find details concerning many of those journeys in the Book of Acts.

As we see Paul's ministry in Acts and read his letters we are learning what God wanted Paul to do and say. We are the beneficiaries because we know how the story ends. The Gospel saves and destroys.

One of my favorite writings of Paul is his letter to the Christians living in Philippi, Macedonia (Greece). As you will see in this series Paul emphasized many aspects of the Gospel and how God wants His people to live it and preach it. God placed us here to do His will and to please Him. I pray Paul's words will encourage you in doing that throughout your life on earth.

These studies are for you to read, download, and share as God leads. You may want to use them for personal study, group study, or even a church study.

I have also included a Podcast of each individual study. I've been told through the years that some people prefer 'listening' than 'reading,' so the Podcasts are available for that or any other purpose God may place on your heart.

In Christ's Love and Grace,

Mark McGee

GraceLife / Faith and Self Defense / Grace Martial Arts /
Substack

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The Heart of the Gospel

You are saved and learning how to study the Bible. You are learning the 'rules' God established for those who serve Him. Wonderful! What are you learning about what happens next? It's fairly simple –

- Love God
- Obey God
- Serve God

That's it in a nutshell. There are a lot of specifics in how we accomplish those three things, but those three things are basically what God wants us to do. He saved us. He redeemed us. He bought us. He owns us. Doing what He tells us to do is the least we can do. God is our Savior and Lord. He is the Master. He is our Heavenly Father. We are His servants. We are His children. We are His treasure and He is ours. That is the 'heart of the Gospel' of Jesus Christ.

Where the Heart Leads

Jesus Christ died on the Cross, rose from dead, promised eternal life to those who believe, and told His disciples where they would go next (from Matthew 28 and Acts 1):

- Make Disciples of All the Nations
- Baptize Them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
- Teach Them to Observe All Things That I Have Commanded You
- Be Witnesses of Christ in Jerusalem, and in All Judea and Samaria, and to the End of the Earth

Paul's Service

Jesus chose Saul of Tarsus a few years later and told him through Ananias what would happen in his ministry (from Acts 9):

- He is a Chosen Vessel of Mine
- To Bear My Name Before the Gentiles, Kings, and the Children of Israel
- He Must Suffer for My Name's Sake

Jesus later prepared Paul (Saul) for his ministry (service) to God by doing the following (2 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 3):

- Paul was Caught Up Into Paradise
- Paul Saw Many Visions and Received Many Revelations from God
- Paul Heard Inexpressible Words

- Jesus Gave Paul the Dispensation of the Grace Of God
- Jesus Made Known to Paul the Mystery By Revelation
- Paul Received Knowledge in the Mystery of Christ
- God Gave Paul a Thorn in the Flesh So That He Would Not Be Exalted Beyond Measure
- Paul Asked God to Remove the Thorn, but God Told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”

Our Loving Service

So, how do we lovingly ‘serve’ God as His children? Remember that God gave Paul knowledge in the ‘mystery of Christ.’ Read what Paul said in the Book of Acts and what he wrote in his letters to churches (e.g. Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians) and to church leaders (e.g. Timothy, Titus). What you will find in Paul’s writings about how we are to serve God is fairly simple. Here are several examples:

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!” Romans 10:14-15

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” 2

Corinthians 5:17-19

“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”

Romans 12:10-11

Our service to God includes:

1. Doing the good works which God prepared beforehand for us to do
2. Preaching the Gospel of Peace to the unsaved
3. That preaching will lead to men being reconciled to God
4. Loving those who are reconciled to God

While this is not difficult to understand, it is apparently difficult to do because less than a third of Christians do it:

“Only 3 in 10 unchurched Americans (29%) say a Christian has ever shared with them one-on-one how a person becomes a Christian.” [Lifeway Research](#)

“Ninety-five percent of all Christians have never won a soul to Christ. Eighty percent of all Christians do not consistently witness for Christ. Less than two percent are involved in the ministry of evangelism.” [Evangelism Statistics](#)

“In our study, we found that 85% of all believers ages 18-29 agree that they have a responsibility to share the gospel with unbelievers, and that 69% of those same people feel comfortable sharing their faith. However, only 25% of them look for ways to share the gospel and only 27% of them intentionally build friendships with unbelievers in order to do so.” [The State of Evangelism](#)

This lack of interest among Christians to obey and serve God should be cause for great alarm by church leaders. However, it seems that pastors are also unable to lead people to share Christ – either by words or their own example:

“Just 12% of Pastors Say They Are Very Effective in Encouraging Christians to Share Their Faith” [Barna](#)

I’ve spent a lot of time through the years working with pastors and evangelists from the United States and many other countries, so the statistics I’ve seen don’t surprise me. Unfortunately, it’s a very sad situation across the world. Here’s another sad fact:

“70% of pastors are untrained in evangelism.”

Evangelism Statistics

Think about that for a moment. 70% of Christian pastors across the world are untrained in evangelism. Does that shock you? It should, especially in light of what we read in the New Testament. Evangelism is not a ‘suggestion.’ It is a direct ‘command’ from God.

That terrible statistic takes me back to what Paul wrote the Christians in Rome:

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!” Romans 10:14-15

If more than two-thirds of pastors across the world are untrained in evangelism, is it any wonder that only a small percentage of Christians have any interest or training in sharing the Gospel of Christ with their friends, neighbors, co-workers, or even members of their own family?

This must change! Who says? Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church. If we love Jesus – I mean REALLY LOVE JESUS – we will do what He wants us to do. The fact that the vast majority of Christians and their leaders are not doing what our Lord wants us to do says much about the sad state of the ‘church’ in these last days. My prayer, and I hope your prayer, is that we will come to our senses and do God’s Will.

[Play Podcast](#)

Defending and Confirming the Gospel

The Apostle Paul spent many years in prisons across the Roman Empire for simply preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He wrote many of his best-known letters to churches and individuals from prisons. I can only imagine how difficult living in a Roman prison would be for Paul, but his commitment to Jesus Christ never wavered. He was honest with the Philippian Christians that his personal desire after almost 30 years of suffering for the Gospel was ‘to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.’ I can understand that as a human being. Suffering is not easy. However, Paul had something none of the rest of us have had. God had taken Paul to the ‘third heaven’ many years earlier and shown him amazing things that were and were to come (e.g. visions and revelations – 2 Corinthians 12). Paul knew things about God, His plans for the spread of the Gospel, and the end of the age that no one else knew at that time. Paul did reveal many things that God revealed to him during his ministry, but was not allowed to share some of what he saw. He said that he had been ‘caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible

words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.’ I think that event, plus the ever-present Spirit of God who inspired and led Paul during his ministry gave him the strength to suffer through the many imprisonments, beatings, and other terrible things he faced (2 Corinthians 11).

One of the great lessons for me personally came from what Paul said next to the Philippians – ‘Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.’ Even though Paul knew that going on to Heaven to be with Jesus was ‘far better’ for him personally, he knew that ‘remaining in the flesh’ and continuing his ministry on earth was ‘more needful’ for the Christians in Philippi. Paul was eventually released from prison and continued to travel, preach the Gospel, and oversee the establishment and oversight of more churches. However, he was arrested again four or five years later, imprisoned in Rome, and killed (martyred) by the government. We learn more about what happened during those years between imprisonments from Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus.

That leads me to an interesting verse in Philippians 1:7 – ‘just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.’

Paul spoke about his ‘chains’ (being in prison) and his ministry of the ‘defense and confirmation of the gospel.’ The Greek word Paul used for ‘defense’ was *apologia*. It is a noun that means ‘an answer for clearing one’s self, a reasoned defense, a vindication, evidence that is supplied to compel proof.’ The English word ‘apologist’ comes from the Greek *apologia*. The word is used eight times in the New Testament – six times by the Apostle Paul and twice by the Apostle Peter. A verb form of the word, *apologeomai*, was used eight times by the Apostle Paul and twice in the Gospel of Luke. It was well-known in the Greek and Roman world of the 1st century AD as a formal speech of defense or a ‘reasoned reply’ that a defendant would make to refute the accusations of someone in a legal or rhetorical setting. One of the best-known in that world was when Socrates defended himself

against charges of corrupting young people. You can read more about that in Plato's *The Apology*.

The word 'confirmation' comes from *bebaiósis* that means 'that which upholds, sustains, validates as guaranteed, to establish, confirm.' It's used only twice in the New Testament as a noun. Here in Philippians 1 and in Hebrews 6. The verb form, *bebaioó*, means 'to make firm, steadfast, reliable, guaranteed.' It's used once in the Gospel of Mark, twice in Hebrews, and five times by the Apostle Paul.

We should notice that Paul connected both words, 'defense' and 'confirmation' to 'the Gospel.' That was the apostle's primary concern. I believe it's important for Christians who actively share the Gospel with unbelievers to understand that they can both 'defend' and 'confirm' the Message of Christ's life, death and resurrection.

As Paul wrote in that context: ‘you all are partakers with me of grace.’ The Greek word *sugkoinónos* means ‘a co-participant, close companion, a joint-sharer.’ Paul knew the importance of ‘sharing’ the Gospel ministry with the people who had received the benefits of God’s grace. It is as we all appreciate God’s great ‘gift’ that we can respond to what how He will ask us to serve Him.

The Apostle Paul gave many years of his life to defending and confirming the Gospel and would eventually die for his commitment. If an apostle of Jesus Christ thought that highly of the ‘Gospel of Christ,’ so should we. That’s what Paul was telling the Philippians.

I’ll have more to share with you about why Paul emphasized that to the Philippian Christians in our next podcast.

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Your Fellowship in the Gospel

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.” Philippians 1:3-5

The Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Christians in Philippi (located in Eastern Macedonia, Greece in the 1st century AD) while he was imprisoned in Rome. The year of Paul's writing the letter is estimated to be about 61 AD. That would have been about a decade after starting the church there. Paul wanted to 'preach the word in Asia,' but the Holy Spirit would not allow him to do that at the time. Paul arrived in Mysia and attempted to go into Bithynia with Silas and Timothy, 'but the Spirit did not permit them.' So, Paul and the others went to Troas where Paul received a vision in the night:

“A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.” Acts 16:9-10

When Paul, Silas, and Timothy arrived in Philippi they met several women who were praying at the riverside on the Sabbath day. God opened one of women’s heart to believe what Paul taught. Her name was Lydia. She and her entire household believed and were baptized.

Paul and Silas walked through Philippi preaching the Gospel of Christ until Paul cast a demon out of a woman who was a fortune-teller. Once the demon left her the woman lost the ability to tell people’s fortunes. When her masters ‘saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.’ The magistrates listened to the men’s complaints, then ordered that Paul and Silas be beaten with rods. After that the magistrates had them thrown into prison.

Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns to God from their prison cell. At about midnight a ‘great earthquake’ struck the prison so hard that the prison doors opened and ‘everyone’s chains were loosed.’ The chief jailer had been sleeping, but woke up and saw that the prison doors were open. He thought the prisoners fled, so he drew his sword intending to kill himself. However, Paul cried out with a loud voice – “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.” The jailer ran in and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. The jailer said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” This was Paul’s answer:

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Acts 16:31

The jailer did believe and took Paul and Silas to his house where they shared the Gospel of Christ with everyone there. The jailer’s entire family believed and were baptized. Paul and Silas were eventually freed and stayed for a short time at Lydia’s house before leaving Philippi. Paul returned to visit the Christians at Philippi at least twice after that, possibly three times (e.g. Acts 20:1-2, 6; 1 Timothy 1:3).

The reason I share that information with you is to demonstrate just how precious the Christians in Philippi were to him personally. Paul loved all of the Christians in all of the churches, but Philippi stands out to me because of how the Holy Spirit moved him to go there. Paul wisely obeyed the Spirit's guidance and the church in Philippi was born.

Fellowship

A major part of Christianity is ‘fellowship.’ Paul wrote the Philippians that he thanked God ‘upon every remembrance’ of them and how he prayed for them all ‘with joy.’ He then wrote – “for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.” The word ‘fellowship’ in the Greek is the noun *koinónia* and means ‘partnership, partner, what is shared in common as the basis of fellowship, community, partaker, companion, joint-participant.’

The meaning of the Greek word helps us understand how deeply Paul was involved in the lives and ministries of the Christians in Philippi. They had shared so many spiritual adventures together. They had learned together. They had ministered together. They had suffered together. They had rejoiced together. That’s the meaning of ‘fellowship’ in a Christian community.

Another reason I shared the story of how the Philippian church was started is because of these words from the Apostle Paul:

“for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.”

Notice that Paul put a beginning time on their ‘fellowship’ in the Gospel – ‘from the first day until now.’ Paul remembered every moment of his long relationship with the people of Philippi. They were so precious to him that he didn’t forget how they started together. From the moment he met Lydia and her family, then the jailer and his family, Paul remembered every moment ‘with joy.’

Christian ‘fellowship’ (*koinónia*) should be ‘joyful and memorable.’ We should never take for granted any of our experiences with each other, including the first day. Every day, every week, every month, every year is special and precious as we ‘partner’ together in the amazing Gospel of Grace. It is a ‘gift’ God has given us. Don’t abuse it. Don’t misuse it. Don’t miss it. Enjoy each and every moment as we serve God together.

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The Completion of the Gospel

“... being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Philippians 1:6

Paul was ‘confident’ (*peithó* – persuaded, convinced, trust) that God, who had ‘begun’ (*enarchomai* – commence, make a beginning, start – aorist tense) a ‘good work’ (*ergon agathos* – a deed, toil, labor, that is beneficial, good in any sense) in the Philippian Christians ‘will complete it’ (*epiteleó* – accomplish, finish, make perfect – future tense) ‘until the day of Jesus Christ’ (*achri héméra Christos lésous* – until or up to, the day, period, time, of Christ Jesus).

Each true Christian (by that I mean someone who really believes, has faith and trust, in Jesus Christ) has a beginning. We are not 'born' saved, even if our parents are saved. Every true believer has a beginning. From that 'beginning point' we find ourselves on a journey toward an 'end point.' That includes what Paul wrote years earlier to the Christians in Corinth:

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” 1 Corinthians 15:51-54

The Apostle Paul wrote this in his letter to the Christians in Rome years before he wrote to the Philippians::

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” Romans 8:29-30

What Paul explains throughout his letters to churches and individuals is the ‘process’ of ‘being conformed’ to the image of Christ Jesus. Paul said the process began when God ‘foreknew’ us. Here’s the process:

- God ‘foreknows’ the believer (*proginóskó* – knew beforehand)
- God ‘predestines’ the believer to be ‘conformed’ to the ‘image’ of His son (*proorizó* – determined beforehand, predetermined, preordained ... *summorphos* – jointly formed into, fashioned into by sharing the same inner

essence-identity (form) ... *eikón* – likeness, representation, image))

- God ‘calls’ the believer who He going to conform to the image of Christ (*kaleó* – call aloud, call forth, invite, bid, summon)
- God ‘justifies’ the believer who He going to conform to the image of Christ (*dikaioó* – rendered just or innocent, legally approved, made righteous)
- God ‘glorifies’ the believer who He going to conform to the image of Christ (*doxazó* – rendered glorious, honored, magnified, to ascribe weight by recognizing real substance (value))

That’s a process that began in eternity and will ‘finish’ (completion) in Glory. We will have the ‘gift’ of eternal life. We will be changed. We will be immortal and incorruptible. We will be ‘like’ Christ and with Him forever. That was Paul’s ‘confidence’ about the Christians in Philippi – the completion of the Gospel.

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The Affection of the Gospel

“For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.” Philippians 1:8

Paul’s letter to the Philippians demonstrates how deeply he loved the church in that city. I shared some of the history Paul had with the Christians in Philippi in an earlier podcast (The Fellowship of the Gospel). He was truly thankful for them and prayed regularly for them – ‘I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy.’

In verse 8 Paul wrote that God was his witness of how greatly he longed for them ‘with the affection of Jesus Christ.’ The Greek word for ‘long for’ is *epipotheó* and means ‘earnestly desire, yearn for, dote upon.’ The root word *epipoth* means ‘yearn affectionately, have a great affection for.’ Paul used an interesting turn of words when he wrote, ‘I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.’ Paul first expressed his personal deep yearning and affection for the Philippians, then

used a different word to express the affection that came from Jesus Christ. I think that's something many Christians either miss or forget. Feeling a deep 'yearning of affection' for another Christian isn't something that emanates from us. It comes from the 'affection' that Jesus Christ has for His people. The Spirit of Christ living in us shares the Lord's deep affection in and through us toward others.

The Greek word for 'affection' is *splagchnon* and means 'tender mercy, inward affection, pity.' The idea of the word in an emotional sense was a feeling of deep 'empathy' and 'sympathy' for others. The word in a physical sense was about 'internal organs' and carried the idea of 'gut level compassion.' That explains why the King James Version chose the word 'bowels' in translating the Greek.

Paul loved the Philippians and felt deep compassion and empathy for them and what they were facing as Christians living in a pagan society. As we read through Paul's letter to the Philippians we learn that the Christians in Philippi were also dealing with many 'adversaries,' including internal strife within the church. Though we are living almost two thousand years after Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Philippi, not much has changed. Christians across the world find themselves living in a pagan society facing many adversaries, including internal strife within their churches.

That's one reason I'm so committed to sharing this podcast series with you. The lessons we can learn from Philippians, and the other letters that Paul wrote, are as meaningful and helpful to Christians today as the day he wrote them. We need to look deep into the Word of God, and deep into our own hearts and minds, to see if we are learning and living out those lessons.

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The Discernment of the Gospel

After expressing how greatly he longed for the Philippians ‘with the affection of Jesus Christ,’ Paul shared a specific prayer he had for them:

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment ...”

Philippians 1:9

Paul wanted the ‘love’ of the Christians in Philippi to ‘abound’ more and more in ‘knowledge and all discernment.’ We already have a good sense of the context in the first eight verses, so let’s look at this particular verse to see why Paul was praying this particular prayer for them.

The word ‘love’ is *agapé*, which Christians recognize as that special kind of love that emphasizes ‘preference’ for others. That’s the kind of love Jesus Christ has for us, and it’s the kind of love He wants us to have for each other. Paul knew that, so he prayed that their ‘*agapé*’ love would ‘abound still more and more.’

The words ‘may abound’ come from the Greek word *perisseuó*. It means ‘to superabound, be in excess, overflow, have in excess, have in abundance, have a surplus.’ Paul’s prayer for the Philippians was that their ‘love’ for Christ and each other would overflow in superabundance and never run out. However, Paul was specific in the kind of love he had in mind for the Christians: ‘in knowledge and all discernment.’

The word ‘knowledge’ is *epignósis* and means ‘true knowledge, to be fully acquainted with something, perceive, to ascertain, recognize, understand, be aware.’ Combining two Greek words, *epí* and *ginōskō*, strengthens the idea of the ‘knowledge.’ It’s a knowledge that we can experience in a personal way. Paul did not want the Philippians to have just a ‘head’ knowledge about the love of Christ; he wanted to have a deep, personal, experiential knowledge about that love. Unfortunately, too many people in churches today have only a ‘head’ knowledge about Christ. They have little depth of understanding of what it means to be a child of God. Paul wanted more than that for the Philippians.

The words ‘all discernment’ are *pas aisthésis* and mean ‘every type of, all manner of, to make a judgment, to perceive and know with one’s senses, to notice and apprehend using one’s senses.’ Paul prayed that the Philippians would use a combination of experiential knowledge and their perception that came from an ability to use one’s senses to make a judgment. That’s the kind of ‘love’ Paul wanted for the Philippian Christians. I might add that the word *aisthésis* is used only once in the New Testament, here in Philippians 1:9.

Discernment is so important in life, but the fact that only Paul used the word and said it was part of his prayer for the Philippian Christians makes this even more important that we understand the part it plays in our relationship to Christ, His Gospel, to each other, and to the spiritual needs of an unbelieving world.

Unfortunately, the kind of love many Christians express today resembles ‘worldly’ love rather than ‘godly’ love. They are more concerned about demonstrating a love that is devoid of any kind of ‘true knowledge and discernment,’ It would be baffling for Christians who do have a true knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and an ability to judge and perceive what is true except that Jesus and His apostles warned us that this would happen.

“For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money ...” 2 Timothy 3:2a

Too many Christians love themselves and money more than they love the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. I find that extremely sad, though I shouldn't be surprised. I think the best thing we can do is pray the same prayer that Paul prayed for the Philippian Christians, and remind our brothers and sisters in Christ what could be their's if they would pay attention to 'true knowledge' and the 'discernment' that God wants all of His children to express.

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The Excellence of the Gospel

Paul continued his letter to the Christians in Philippi by writing:

“... that you may approve the things that are excellent
...” Philippians 1:10a

Just a quick reminder of four of the 8 Rules for Bible Study:

1. Text
2. Within context
3. From the original language
4. To the original reader

If this is the first podcast you've heard in Season 8, I invite you to go back to at least 'Defending and Confirming the Gospel' to get the context of what Paul was communicating to the Philippians. Knowing the context helps keep us 'rightly divide' the Word of God so we don't get off track and veer close to the edge of either wasting our time or possibly falling into the pit of error. 'Rightly dividing' means 'cutting a straight line.' If we don't 'rightly divide' God's Word, we will cut a 'crooked line' and find ourselves miles away from God's truth at some point in our lives .. if we're fortunate enough to realize our mistake before we die. Many Christians through the centuries have gotten 'off track' and never found their way back to the Truth of the Gospel. That is sad because every generation of Christians that follows the path of a previous generation that has veered away from the 'truth' will find themselves even further from the truth. Given enough generations of going in the wrong direction will lead to a place of ruin – which is where Christianity is quickly headed today across the world.

Many churches, denominations, universities, and seminaries that began with a desire to preach the truth of the Gospel are today in ruins. Many deny the most basic truths of the Bible. I dealt with some of those errors of the modern church in an earlier podcast entitled ‘The Heart of the Gospel.’ I recommend you read that and consider how far the ‘church’ has fallen. It reminds me of how far Israel fell from God’s commandments in the days of what we read in the Old Testament. Paul knew the same thing would happen to the Christian Church and warned that the time of ruin was approaching:

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” 2 Timothy 4:3-4

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” Acts 20:28-31

Back to our text in Philippians 1:10. The word ‘approve’ in the Greek is *dokimazo*. It’s a present tense verb that means ‘to test, examine, approve through the process of testing, show that something is acceptable through testing.’ Paul wanted the Philippians to ‘approve’ the ‘things’ that were ‘excellent.’ What things? That’s where the importance of ‘context’ comes into studying the Bible. Paul may have been referring to the ‘things’ he had already written, the ‘things’ he was going to write, or both. I think it’s probably both, but we’ll see as we continue with the series.

The word ‘excellent’ is *diapheró*. It is also a present tense verb. It means ‘to take all the way through, to bear through, distinguishing what differs, that which surpasses.’ The word *diapheró* is present tense and also a participle in the active voice. That means it’s a verbal adjective that indicates simultaneous, ongoing action.

Paul told the Philippians to approve (test, examine) things that are ‘excellent’ so that they could distinguish or compare one thing from another (in the sense of its value). That’s something churches, denominations, and seminaries desperately need to do today. Christians have struggled with that for almost two thousand years. That’s why Paul emphasized it early in his letter to the Philippians. He knew that his time on earth was limited (remember that Paul was a prisoner of Rome when he wrote this letter), so he wanted to be sure to address the issues of most importance to the churches – not just the churches that he existed at the time – but all the Christians and churches that would come into the world for many years to come.

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The Sincerity of the Gospel

Paul continued his letter to the Christians in Philippi by writing:

“... that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ ...” Philippians 1:10b

Always remember the context.

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ.”
Philippians 1:9-10

We know that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is about God’s ‘love,’ but have you thought about it being ‘sincere?’ Paul prayed that the Philippian Christians would be ‘sincere and without offense till the day of Christ.’ What does that mean and why would Paul pray that for a group of Christians?

The Greek word for 'sincere' is *eilikrinés* and means 'pure, judged by sunlight, tested as genuine, sincere.' The idea of the word is that something judged 'rightly' because it had been seen in 'full light' like the light that comes from full sunlight. Paul wrote Timothy at the end of his life that even as his salvation was genuine, so his ministry should be genuine. Being genuine is an important aspect of being a follower of Jesus Christ and a servant of the Gospel of Christ. There is no room for insincerity in Christianity, though we find ourselves surrounded in churches and denominations by members and leaders who are insincere and not genuine. It is an easy thing for Christians to fall into traps of 'insincerity' and Paul knew that. It's why he included being 'sincere' in his prayer for the Philippians.

Paul also prayed that the Christians in Philippi would be 'without offense' until the day of Christ. The Greek for 'without offense' is *aproskopos* and means 'blameless, inoffensive, without offense, not stumbling, not causing to stumble.' I think it's important we understand that the word was understood by ancient Greeks as active and passive. That means they should not actively cause someone else to

stumble, and they should not passively stumble themselves. Both happen in churches week after week, month after month, year after year, century after century. Christians often stumble into sin, while others in churches cause them to stumble.

Jesus warned in Mark 9 what would happen to people who caused others to stumble spiritually. Paul warned Christians in Romans 14 that they should not cause their brothers in Christ to stumble spiritually over minor issues. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 8 that it was wrong to use the liberty Christians had to become a stumbling block to those who were weak in their faith. He said that if certain food made his brother stumble, he would never eat that food again.

Paul wanted the Christians in Philippi and all churches to have that kind of love and concern for one another that they would be 'without offense' until Jesus Christ returned for His Church. That could be any day, any minute, so we need to pay particular attention to what the apostle to the Gentiles wrote two thousand years ago. We should believe in and practice a 'sincere,' genuine Gospel, and cause no offense.

We should do that until Jesus returns. Even so come, Lord Jesus!

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The Fruit of the Gospel

Paul continued his letter to the Christians in Philippi by writing:

“... being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Philippians 1:11

The words ‘being filled’ come from one Greek word – *pléroó*. It means ‘to completely fill, to accomplish, be complete, make full, fill to capacity.’

The word for ‘fruits’ is *karpos* and means ‘a crop, produce, fruit as plucked.’ It can be used literally for fruit from a tree or figuratively as we see here in Philippians 1:11. The fruit that Paul is praying for the Philippians is the fruits of ‘righteousness.’ The Greek for ‘righteousness’ is *dikaiosuné* and means ‘just, justification, righteous, judicial approval, equity of act or character.’

Paul used the same idea in Ephesians 5:

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.”

Ephesians 5:8-10

Paul wrote his letters to the Ephesians and the Philippians during the same prison period in Rome, so it was apparently an important topic on his mind – a topic I’m sure the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to consider and share with churches.

Christians are supposed to bear ‘spiritual fruit,’ but that fruit should be of a certain ‘kind.’ It should be ‘righteous’ fruit – fruit that God approves. That’s what makes the ‘fruit’ of our lives – what we ‘produce’ during our time on Earth – ‘approved’ in God’s sight. That’s why Paul wrote – ‘to the glory and praise of God.’ Christians do not bear spiritual fruit to glorify themselves. If they do, then that fruit did not come from Jesus Christ. Look again at what Paul wrote – ‘which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.’

This ‘fruit of righteousness’ comes from Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

The word ‘glory’ is *doxa* and means ‘dignity, honor, worship.’ The word ‘praise’ is *epainos* and means ‘laudation, recognition, appropriate commendation, deep admiration.’ God deserves honor and praise from His people because of who He is and what He has done.

I can always tell what kind of fruit I and other Christians are bearing through a variety of observations. One of them is ‘who gets the credit,’ ‘who gets the praise,’ ‘who gets the adulation and attention, who gets the glory?’ Is it me or is it God? That’s one of the best ways we can ‘test’ the source of our ‘fruits of righteousness.’ If I walk away from some type of ‘ministry’ event – whether it be writing or speaking – and my first thoughts are about how well I did – I have my answer. I took praise away from God. God must always receive the credit, the praise, the honor, the adulation, the commendation. No matter what you and I do in service to and for God, He must be praised – not us. If someone praises us for something we’ve done in ministering for God,

we should point them to God immediately. Don't pause for a second to bathe in their praise. That can be the beginning of our ruin in ministry. Always praise God for everything He empowers you to do for Him and others.

As Paul wrote to the Galatians many years earlier, the 'fruit' of the Holy Spirit is 'love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.' That's what comes from bearing the 'fruits of righteousness,' and it's what Paul wanted the Philippians to live out in their families, in their church, and in their community. It's the 'fruit' of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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The Advancement of the Gospel

Paul continued his letter to the Christians in Philippi by writing:

“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

Philippians 1:12-14

The Christians in Philippi knew that the Apostle Paul was imprisoned in Rome. They were concerned about his welfare and prayed for him. Some may have also been concerned about the advancement of Gospel since the ‘apostle to the Gentiles’ was a prisoner of Rome. That’s what Paul was referring to in these verses. I believe his purpose was both to comfort and instruct them.

The Greek word for ‘furtherance’ is *prokopé* and means ‘advancement, make progress, profit, to proceed.’ Some Greek scholars explain the ancient understanding of the word this way: ‘advancement by chopping down whatever impedes progress.’ I believe that’s how the Philippians would have understood Paul’s use of the word based on both the definition as well as the ‘context’ of what Paul wrote next.

He wrote that two major things had happened because of his ‘chains.’

1. It (the Gospel of Christ) had become evident to the whole palace guard
2. Most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, were much more bold to speak the word without fear

Paul was imprisoned as an attempt to halt the ‘furtherance’ of the Gospel, but it actually helped to ‘advance’ the Gospel message. Members of the Roman palace guard became aware of the Gospel because many of them had to ‘guard’ Paul. Paul was an apostle, an evangelist, and a church builder. Nothing was going to stop him – not even being ‘chained’ to a guard. If Paul had just an audience of one, that one person was going to hear the Gospel.

The way Paul handled himself in such difficult situations – like imprisonment in Rome – encouraged ‘most of the brethren in the Lord’ and they became more confident which led to being ‘more bold’ to share the Gospel of Christ ‘without fear.’

Both of those outcomes were extremely positive, especially coming from something that outwardly appeared as so negative (being imprisoned and in chains). Paul wanted the Philippian Christians to also be encouraged, which is why he shared this information with them.

Whatever you're facing in your life right now, remember that 'advancing' the Gospel includes 'chopping down' whatever impedes your progress. That's what really important in this life – proclaiming the life-giving message of Jesus Christ to a world in great need of His grace.

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The Preaching of the Gospel

Paul continued his letter to the Christians in Philippi by writing:

“Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.” Philippians 1:15-18

Paul was a ‘preacher’ of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He began preaching Christ soon after he was saved (Acts 9), and the Holy Spirit called Paul to a special ministry of preaching and church building some years later (Acts 13). By the time Paul was imprisoned in Rome and wrote to the Philippians from there, he was very well known throughout the Roman world as a preacher of the Gospel. His letters were copied

and shared among churches and many people helped him in the ministry (e.g. Romans 16).

Paul was also well known for addressing false preaching with great boldness. The letters he wrote to the churches in Galatia are an example, as are the letters he wrote to the Corinthians, Thessalonians, and Romans. Paul warned Christians to ‘beware’ of false preachers and ‘avoid’ them. That historical background makes his comments to the Philippians even more interesting because what he said about preachers with ill-intent was different than what he had written before.

Paul did not tell the Philippians to ‘avoid’ the men who preached Christ out of envy and strife. Paul said he had been ‘appointed for the defense of the gospel,’ but he also wrote that ‘whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.’ Had something changed from his earlier days in Galatia, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Rome? He Paul mellowed in his old age or was this a different ‘type’ of preaching?

I believe it was a different ‘type.’ The Greek word for ‘envy’ is *phthonos*. It means ‘jealousy, spite, ill-will.’ The word was used to describe people who were happy when someone experienced pain or misfortune. That fits well with Paul’s statement that those men were ‘supposing to add affliction to my chains.’ For some reason the men were pleased that Paul was in prison chains in Rome. That meant they could go around preaching Christ hoping to add some type of ‘affliction’ to Paul. Why would they do that?

I think it had to do with their personal pride as preachers. They were glad to see Paul in prison because that allowed them to boast of themselves. Is that so different than what we see in churches and denominations today? Jealousy, envy, spite, and ill-will are still with us in pulpits across the world. These types of preachers do preach the Gospel, but they do it for the wrong reasons. God will always ‘bless His Word’ when it goes forth, but that doesn’t mean He will bless the ministry of preachers who preach for the wrong reasons. That’s what Paul was addressing. He knew they preached ‘from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction’ to Paul’s chains (imprisonment). Though they went

about preaching with the wrong heart motive, Paul rejoiced that Christ was preached.

Paul also used another interesting phrase when describing men who were out ‘preaching the Gospel’ – ‘whether in pretense or in truth.’ The Greek word translated ‘pretense’ is *prophasis* and means ‘pretext, outward showing, for appearance sake, to cause to shine before.’ Remember that Paul said some of the men were preaching ‘from selfish ambition.’ Part of that selfish ambition was that other people would see them preaching and think more highly about them. Selfish ambition leads to ‘pretense.’

Paul compared those men who were preaching ‘in pretense’ and those who were preaching in ‘truth.’ That doesn’t mean the ‘pretensers’ were not preaching the truth of the Gospel because Paul would have called them out as ‘false preachers’ if they were. What Paul meant was that they were not preaching with ‘true’ or ‘pure’ intent. That’s still alive in our churches today – men who preach for wrong reasons. However, even though Paul knew their intent was not right he still wrote – ‘Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in

truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.'

Paul preferred the men who went out preaching for the right reasons – true and pure reasons. They knew that Paul was in prison in Rome and knew he could not continue traveling from town to town preaching the Gospel of Christ. Even though Paul lived in a rented house and was allowed to have visitors, he was still under constant guard (Acts 28). So, those men took on Paul's ministry for a time from hearts of love and goodwill and preached Christ. They knew that Paul was imprisoned for the 'defense' of the Gospel of Christ and that gave them a special boldness to step out and preach as well – even if it meant they too might be arrested.

A Personal Message to Preachers

If you are a preacher of the Gospel, I'd like to speak directly to you for a moment. I hope you will seriously consider Paul's words to the Philippians. Why do you preach the Gospel? Is it out of a heart of love and goodwill? Or do you preach for selfish ambition, jealousy, spite, and ill-will? Are you jealous because the numbers of people you preach to are fewer than some other preachers in town? Do you wish your church had more people in attendance so you could make more money and have prestige in the community? Do you wish you could have a radio or television ministry and become known across the country? Why do you preach? It's a fair question – in fact I think it's an important question. Paul rejoiced that Christ was preached, but you could tell from his language that he had a higher regard for those men who preached from hearts of love and goodwill. I pray you will be like them.

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Living for the Gospel

Paul continued his letter to the Christians in Philippi by writing:

“For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Philippians 1:19-21

Paul ‘knew’ (*eidó* – to see, beware, perceived, was sure) that what he had been writing about (context) would ‘turn out’ (*apobainó* – future tense – ‘become, result in, step off, disembark’) in his ‘deliverance’ (*sótéria* – health, safety, rescue.) What kind of ‘deliverance?’ Let’s read on.

‘Through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.’ What were the Philippians praying for Paul? That he would be ‘rescued’ from his imprisonment in Rome. What was the ‘supply’ of the Spirit of Jesus Christ? The word ‘supply’ is *epichorégia* and means ‘provision, contribution, lavish resources, ample supply.’ Paul knew how Christian prayer works with the abundant supply of the Holy Spirit. He knew something very good was on its way, but what supply was he expecting?

Paul’s ‘earnest expectation’ (*apokaradokia* – ‘intense anticipation, eager expectation’) and ‘hope’ (*elpis* – confident expectation, faith, hope, expectation of what is certain’) that in nothing he would be ‘ashamed’ (*aischunó* – ‘feel shame for oneself, be disgraced, be ashamed, be dishonored, shrink from’). Paul was confident that he would not shrink from his duties as an imprisoned apostle, which would bring dishonor and shame upon him, but that he would be ‘bold’ (*parrésia* – publicly open, be outspoken, be blunt, speak with assurance and confidence’) in his faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul then wrote – ‘as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.’ Paul was not afraid of death. Whether he lived or died he was determined to bring glory to God. Paul then wrote what has become one of the best-known and most quoted verses in the New Testament – ‘For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.’ You might call that Paul’s motto, one that should be ours as well. Living for the Gospel means that to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Think about it. Isn’t that the truth that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ gives every true Christian? If we are alive, our life is all about loving and serving Christ. If we die, we receive great gain because we go to live with Christ forever. Whether we live or die, we belong to Christ and He will deliver us from any event in our lives. Jesus is our Savior. He is our Lord.

Then Paul shared something that has resonated with me for many years –

“But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.”

Paul told the Philippians that he was ‘hard-pressed’ (*sunechó* – constrain, hold, afflict, to compress’) between living and dying. He personally had a ‘desire’ (*epithumia* – ‘strong longing, passion built on strong feelings’) to ‘depart’ (*analuó* – ‘return, to unloose for departure’) and be with Christ which is ‘far better’ (*mallon kreisson* – ‘more in a greater degree, more than, greater advantage, better.’) For Paul, who had suffered so greatly for preaching the Gospel and establishing Christian churches across the Roman Empire, his strong desire was to ‘return’ to be with Jesus Christ. That would have happened if Paul had died in prison. I understand Paul’s strong desire. I

have a similar desire at times. The joys of being with Christ outshine anything we can experience on earth.

However ... God has called each of us to complete the work He has given us to do. Paul understood that, which is why he wrote: 'Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.' Paul was telling the Philippians how much he loved and cared for them. Though it would have been 'far better' for him to 'depart and be with Christ,' the apostle knew it would be better for the Philippians and other Christians for him to remain alive on earth. That's the meaning of 'remaining in the flesh.' Paul wrote that remaining in the flesh was 'more needful' (*anagkaios* – more necessary, more pressing) for them. How did Paul know that? Remember, Paul was an apostle. He had a special relationship with God and was inspired by God to know the right things to think and say. Paul had his own personal desire to depart and be with Christ, but he also knew from the Lord that God wanted him to remain in the flesh for a while longer because the Philippians and other Christians needed him.

Why did the Philippians need Paul?

“And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.” Philippians 1:25-26

Paul knew that as the apostle to the Gentiles God would use him to help the Philippians and other believers for their spiritual progress (*prokopé* – profit, furtherance) and joy of faith – ‘that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.’ Instead of the Philippians mourning over the continued imprisonment of their beloved apostle or even his death at the hands of the Romans, they would rejoice abundantly when he came to them again in person. And he most likely did. Paul traveled to many places after his release from his first Roman imprisonment. Philippi would certainly have been one of those places, especially after what he wrote to them. Paul’s personal struggles and suffering set aside for the good of the people God loved and that Paul loved.

Paul's example of personal sacrifice over personal desire speaks powerfully to me. I hope it speaks to you as well.

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Conduct Worthy of the Gospel

Paul continued his letter to the Christians in Philippi by writing:

“Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.” Philippians 1:27-28

The Greek word for ‘your conduct’ is *politeuomai* and means ‘live as a citizen, behave as a citizen.’ That’s interesting in light of Paul’s words later in Philippians:

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Philippians 3:20

The Philippians were citizens of Philippi, Macedonia, but as Christians they had a higher and longer-lasting citizenship. It is 'in heaven.' Yes, they physically lived in Philippi but they were eagerly waiting for their Savior the Lord Jesus Christ who is in Heaven. Paul wanted the Philippian Christians to behave as good citizens of both earth and Heaven. That's our calling from God as well. Yes, we are citizens of our city and country, but we have an even higher calling as 'citizens of Heaven.'

The Greek word for 'worthy' is *axíós* and means 'worthily, worth that matches actual value, appropriately, after a godly sort.' Paul said the Philippians should behave themselves in a manner that matched the value of being followers of Jesus Christ. What did that mean? Paul had already addressed some of those values previously in this letter:

- fellowship in the gospel
- that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment
- that you may approve the things that are excellent
- that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ
- being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God

Being a follower of Jesus Christ in pagan societies was not easy. That's clear to see from Paul's travels in Acts and his letters to churches and individuals. Paul suffered greatly when he first arrived in Philippi a decade earlier. His preaching of the Gospel there led to his being dragged into the marketplace 'to the authorities.' There he and Silas were beaten with rods by the command of the city's magistrates, arrested by Roman soldiers, and thrown into prison.

“And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.” Acts 16:23-24

To conduct their lives ‘worthy of the gospel of Christ’ in Philippi was not easy for Christians. Paul may have visited the Christians in Philippi during his third missionary journey a few years before his imprisonment in Rome. Acts 20:1-6 records Paul’s visit to Macedonia to encourage Christians there. He stayed in Greece about three months. Paul decided to return through Macedonia when he learned that Jews were plotting against him as he was about to sail to Syria. Acts 20:6 records that Paul ‘sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread,’ so he may have visited Philippi twice during the third missionary journey. Paul’s imprisonment in Rome is recorded in Acts 28.

Continuing in his letter to the Philippians, Paul told them that whether he came to see them again or was absent, he wanted them to:

“stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.”

This is an important part of what it means to ‘conduct’ oneself in a way that is ‘worthy of the Gospel of Christ.’ The Greek word translated ‘stand fast’ is *stékó* and means ‘to be stationary, stand firm, to persevere, persist.’ Paul wanted the Philippians to ‘stand fast in one spirit’ and with ‘one mind.’ The word ‘spirit’ is *pneuma* and speaks to a person’s ‘mental disposition’ in this context. The word ‘mind’ is *psuché* and speaks to a person’s ‘unique personality and heart’s desire’ in this context. Paul asked the Philippians to stand firm in the Gospel of Christ with all their heart and mind ‘striving together for the faith of the gospel.’ The Greek word for ‘striving together’ is *sunathleó* and means ‘to wrestle in company with others, a shared struggle.’ The Philippians

were stronger when they faced life's challenges together. That's an important lesson for Christians today as well.

Paul knew all about opposition to the Gospel of Christ and what the Philippians faced from unbelievers in Macedonia. He told them not to be 'terrified' by their 'adversaries.' The Greek word for 'terrified' is *pturó* and means 'frightened, alarmed.' The Greek words for 'adversaries' are *tōn antikeimenōn* and mean 'those opposing you, those contrary to you, those who are thoroughly unreconcilable to you'). Christians across the world today are facing severe opposition, even to the point of imprisonment and death. Those who are opposed to the Gospel of Christ are growing in number and power. Christians must face this opposition together rather than be divided by disagreements with little merit or importance (that does not include false teachers and preachers, who must be avoided).

Paul wanted Christians in Philippi to see their situation correctly. Opposition to them was ‘proof of perdition’ for the oppressor based on the Christian’s commitment to conducting their lives ‘worthy of the Gospel.’ The Greek words are *endeixis apōleias* and mean ‘a demonstration of destruction, proof of ruin or loss.’ Though it may appear at times that those who oppose the Gospel are winning in this world, they are simply demonstrating their own future destruction (ruin, loss) by the holy response of believers in the face of opposition. However, for God’s people the opposition to the Gospel is a sign of God’s salvation.

That may sound like a contradiction given the way people see opposition and respond to it in our world today, but it is different in how God views life. The Jews thought they were rid of Jesus when they forced the Romans to kill Him, but they did just the opposite because Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to His Throne in Heaven. The Jewish religious leaders actually brought on their own ruin and loss which eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem and their Temple. Their continual opposition to the Lord’s apostles led to the massive expansion of God’s eternal plan of

salvation throughout the world. The Philippians could place their full trust in God as they faced opposition. So can we.

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Suffering for the Gospel

Paul continued his letter to the Christians in Philippi by writing:

“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.” Philippians 1:29-30

Faith in Christ is one thing that unites true Christians. Another is suffering for His sake. Christians, real Christians, have the same conflict that the Philippians had seen in Paul’s life. To think differently is to miss a primary point of what it means to be a Christian.

Look through the history of God’s people and what do you see? Suffering .. struggle .. opposition .. persecution. God told Adam and Eve that they would suffer, then die, and they did. God said that He would send the ‘Seed of the woman’ who would also struggle, then die, and He did. However,

Jesus rose from the dead and promised His followers that they too would rise from the dead.

Jesus, who is the Seed of the Woman, was sent into the world to ‘destroy the works of the devil.’ He told Ananias that Saul of Tarsus (Paul) would suffer greatly .. and he did (Acts 9). Paul told the Philippian Christians that they would suffer .. and they did. So will you. So will I. That is what it means to be a child of God in this broken world. We suffer ‘on behalf of’ Christ and ‘for His ‘sake.’

I found Paul’s way of explaining ‘suffering’ to the Philippians to be unique in a world that avoids suffering at all costs. He wrote: ‘For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.’ The Greek word translated ‘on behalf of’ is *huper*. It is a preposition that means ‘over, beyond, above, conferring benefit, for the sake of, more than.’ The words ‘it has been granted’ in the Greek is *charizomai* and means ‘to grant as a favor, extend favor, to extend grace.’ The root word for *charizoma* is *charis* (grace, unmerited favor).

Does that strike you as unusual or even a strange way to describe ‘suffering?’ We believe and suffer ‘on behalf of’ Christ and for His ‘sake.’ Believing in Christ makes perfect sense, but why would Paul place ‘suffering’ within the framework of God being ‘gracious’ to His people?

I believe that Paul joined two important spiritual ideas together: belief in Christ and suffering for His sake. Faith and suffering go together. There is not one without the other. What Paul was telling the Philippians, and is telling us, is that believing (having saving faith) in Christ includes suffering for Christ.

Paul knew, as did the Philippians, that life in Heaven would be a beautiful experience. Paul had already written his letters to the Galatians, Thessalonians, Corinthians, and Romans by the time he wrote Philippians. The Christians in Philippi may have read copies of those letters, but Paul would have certainly taught them about what awaited for them in Heaven. However, Paul also made it clear that part of believing in Christ included suffering for ‘Christ’s sake’ while in our mortal bodies.

We can deny it, wish it weren't so, even try to pray it away, but that doesn't change the fact that – 'it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.' And, just in case anyone in the Philippian church needed an example of what Paul meant by 'suffering,' he added these words: 'having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.' The Greek word for 'conflict' is *agón* and means 'fight, struggle, contention.' We get our English word 'agony' from the Greek *agón*. The Philippians knew how Paul had suffered through the years for the 'sake of Christ.' He was their example of 'suffering' and how God wanted them to respond to it in their daily lives. God graciously 'granted' them 'on behalf of Christ' to suffer for His sake.

God has done the same for us. He has granted us to both 'believe' in Christ and 'suffer' for Christ. Thank you, Lord. May you be glorified.

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The Joy of the Gospel

Paul continued his letter to the Christians in Philippi by writing:

“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” Philippians 2:1-2

It's important to remember that chapters and verses were added to Paul's letters many centuries after he wrote them. The Philippians received one lengthy letter; just like letters they received from family and friends. Even though you and I have moved to 'Chapter Two' of Philippians in our Bibles, the original letter and copies of the letter did not have chapter divisions for the first thousand years of Christianity. I mention that to remind us of the importance of the 'context.' What we read in Philippians chapter one is the context for Paul's next statement.

I had a friend and theology professor who used to say that when I saw ‘therefore’ in the Bible, I should ask what the ‘therefore was there for.’ It is the Greek conjunction *oun*. It means ‘consequently, then, so, likewise now.’ One Bible study help states – “By extension, here’s how the dots connect.” ([Bible Hub](#)) Paul was pointing back to everything he had just written for proper ‘context.’

The words ‘if there is’ is *ei*, another conjunction (or conditional particle). It means ‘forasmuch as, a condition that is real.’ One Greek professor I studied with said that the word used in the way it was written could be understood as ‘since’ rather than a question about whether it might or might not be factual. With that in mind we could read verse one like this:

- since there is consolation (*paraklésis*) in Christ
- since there is comfort (*paramuthion*) of love (*agapé*)
- since there is fellowship (*koinónia*) of the Spirit (*Pneumatos*)
- since there is affection (*splagchnon*) and mercy (*oiktirmos*)

Paul used the words as ‘declarative’ statements rather than a questioning about the truthfulness of the statements. He presented each one as a ‘fact’ about what we have ‘in Christ.’

What Paul wanted the Philippians to do was do ‘fulfill’ his joy. It was and still is the ‘joy’ of the Gospel. The word ‘fulfill’ is *pléroó* and means ‘make full, complete, accomplish.’ The word ‘joy’ is *chara* and means ‘gladness, delight.’ How could the Philippians ‘complete’ Paul’s sense of ‘gladness and delight?’

- by being like-minded
- having the same love
- being of one accord
- of one mind

That combined attitude of an ‘assembly’ (*ecclesia*) of God’s people would be a delight to the heart of any pastor. If you want to ‘fulfill’ the joy of your church leadership, work toward those goals of being ‘like-minded,’ ‘having the same love,’ ‘being of one accord,’ and ‘of one mind.’ That’s what we will experience in Heaven. Why not have that now?

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The Humility of the Gospel

Paul continued his letter to the Christians in Philippi by writing:

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

Philippians 2:3-4

Paul continued his thoughts about the importance of ‘fulfilling’ his joy in the Gospel of Christ. He explained clearly how the Philippians could do that. This is really a very simple formula for Christian behavior with other Christians:

- Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit
- in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself
- Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others

The Greek word for 'selfish ambition' is *eritheia* and means 'strife, rivalry, selfishness, carnal ambition, acting for one's own gain regardless of the strife it causes.' The word for 'conceit' is *kenodoxia* and means 'empty glorying, vainglory, self-conceit, empty pride, vain pride.' Paul wrote that Christians should 'let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit. Can you see why that is so important to fulfilling the apostle's 'joy?' Can you see why it would be important to fulfilling the joy of your pastor? More importantly, can you see why it would please our Lord and Savior?

Instead of 'selfish ambition and conceit,' Paul told the Philippian Christians to 'esteem others better than themselves' in 'lowliness of mind.' The Greek word for 'lowliness of mind' is *tapeinophrosune* and means 'humility, humbleness of mind, having a humble opinion of yourself.' Paul wanted Christians to exalt others rather than exalt themselves.

He went so far as to say that Christians should look not only for their own interests, 'but also for the interests of others.' The Greek word for 'look out for' is *skopeó* and means 'consider, keep your eye on, watch, observe, regard.' Paul was not telling Christians to have no regard or consideration for what they did, but he wanted them to also regard and consider what other Christians were doing. He had already told them to exalt others rather than exalt themselves. He next put it into the context of regarding others 'better than themselves.' The Greek word for 'better' is *huperechó* and means 'surpass, more important, surpassing value.'

Can you imagine being part of a church where every member regarded the interests and work of other 'better' than their own? What would it mean for the Gospel of Christ if a community of unbelievers saw Christians expressing that kind of love and concern for each other? It might mean that more people would be open to the message of God's love and grace when they saw His Christians humbling themselves and treating other believers with respect and concern that overflowed to each believer viewing others as having 'surpassing value.' What a concept. What an

opportunity for Christians to demonstrate what it means to 'believe' the Gospel.

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The Sacrificial Mind of the Gospel

Paul continued his letter to the Christians in Philippi by writing:

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” Philippians 2:5-8

Paul wanted the Philippian Christians to have a ‘mind’ that was similar to that of Jesus Christ. What did he mean by that? The Greek words for ‘Let this mind be’ are *touto phroneite* and mean ‘to exercise the mind, to think like, to be mentally disposed to.’ The grammar is important to know here because the verb is in the ‘imperative’ mood, ‘present’ tense, and ‘active’ voice. That means it’s a command that

indicates action that is to be ongoing. It is not a one-time event for a Christian. Paul wanted the Christians in Philippi to have a continual way of thinking that was similar to the way Jesus thinks – the way He ‘exercises’ His mind.

The example Paul gave was that Jesus, ‘being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.’ This is a favorite verse for Christian apologists because it demonstrates that Jesus Christ is equal with God. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. He is in the ‘form of God’ (*morphē Theou* – same shape, same nature, shared parts, an outward expression that contains the same inner substance). The idea is that Jesus Christ in His essence and nature is in complete harmony with the essence of God.

Paul wrote that Jesus did not think it was ‘robbery’ (*harpagmos* – thing to be grasped, thing to be seized, plunder, robbery) to be ‘equal’ (*isos* – equality, similar in amount and kind, having the same level or value, equal in substance or quality) with God.

These two statements are among the strongest declarations of the Eternal Deity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Jesus is in the 'form' of God and is 'equal' with God. Paul, who had seen many visions and revelations in Paradise (2 Corinthians 12) knew that Jesus Christ is God. This was not something someone else had told Paul. He knew the truth from his personal experience.

While this is important for the defense (*apologia*) of the doctrine (teaching) of Christ's Eternal Deity and equality with God the Father and God the Spirit, there is more to learn here. Paul used the truth of Christ's equality with God to demonstrate what I call the 'sacrificial mind.' Jesus Christ sits on the His Heavenly Throne worshipped by millions of angels and other Heavenly creatures. He owns the universe. that He created. He owns the great wealth of the universe. He is worthy of all worship in the universe. Yet, even with all the worship that He deserves, Jesus has a 'sacrificial mind.' Here's what Paul said the Son of God did for us:

- He made Himself of no reputation
- He took taking the form of a bondservant
- He left His glory in Heaven and came to Earth in the likeness of men
- And being found in appearance as a man, Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross

Wow! That's a 'sacrificial mind.' The Greek for 'made Himself on no reputation' is *heauton ekenōsen*. It means 'Himself emptied, made empty. to abase, make void, empty out, render void, without recognition.' The world should have recognized the Son of God for who He really is, but He emptied Himself and took on the 'form of a bondservant.' The Greek word is in Aorist Tense, Active Voice, Indicative Mood. The Son of God chose to empty Himself and come to Earth.

The word ‘bondservant’ is *doulos* and means in this context ‘a fully-devoted servant.’ The Creator became the Servant. That’s remarkable! Jesus, the Eternal Son of God, left Heaven’s glory and came to Earth in the ‘likeness’ (*homoióma* – ‘likeness, form, similitude, made to look like) of men, and in the ‘appearance of a man’ (*heuretheis hōs anthrōpos* – ‘outward appearance, external condition, of a man”). Think about that mindset. The Creator came to Earth and became like the creatures He had created. Jesus Christ became the ‘God-Man.’

What would Jesus do in this new ‘form?’ He ‘humiliated Himself’ (*tapeinoó* – ‘abase, bring low, to humble’) and ‘became obedient’ (*ginomai hupékoos* – ‘to cause to be, be brought to pass, submissive, giving ear, obedient’) ‘to the point of death’ (*mechri thanatos* – ‘until, up to, as far as, death’), ‘even the death of the cross’ (*thanatos de stauros* – ‘death, even, the cross’).

It's one thing for the Eternal Son of God who is 'equal' with God to humble Himself and come to the world He created in the 'likeness' of the creature who He had created in His likeness (Genesis 1). It's quite another thing for the Son of God to die on a Roman cross for His creatures. That's a mindset that is unlike any other. Yet, it's a mindset that the Apostle Paul wanted the Philippian Christians to have ('Let this mind be in you').

God wants us to be 'like' Jesus Christ and have a 'sacrificial mind.'

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In Christ's Love and Grace,

Mark McGee

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