

**A PERSONAL  
VERSE BY VERSE COMMENTARY**

**PHILIPPIANS**

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**Phil. 1:1 Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:**

This letter is identified as being from Paul and Timothy to the body of believers at Philippi. The letter is addressed to all the believers (in Christ) with note taken of the church leaders and teachers. Easton's Dictionary makes note that it was at Philippi that Paul and Silas established the first church in Europe. Paul and Timothy identify themselves as voluntary slaves of Jesus Christ; their purpose in life is to go where He leads them and do as He directs them with complete submission and obedience.

**Phil. 1:2 Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ.**

As noted in other journals, this greeting is standard in letters of the Apostle Paul. He asks that the body of believers experience grace and peace from God the Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Peace is a by-product of the grace of God at work in one's life; the works of Father and Son in the life of the believer are unified and of single purpose.

Paul always places himself in unity and on the same level with the body of believers; in this verse he refers to God as "our" Father. He also takes every opportunity to declare the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord, THE supreme authority in the universe.

**Phil. 1:3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,**

**Phil. 1:4 Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,**

**Phil. 1:5 For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;**

Also as noted in other journals, Paul is a prayer warrior for those to whom he has ministered. I like the way he puts it, "upon every remembrance of you." That is a guideline for my prayer life. I don't like to pray with lists. I like to pray as the Lord places people on my heart. I think those are the times that our prayers are most effective. Obviously, those that are closest to you and/or for whom you are most burdened will be brought to your remembrance more often than others.

Every time Paul prays for the Philippian believers his heart is filled with joy at the memory of their participation in sharing the good news of the gospel from the very beginning of their spiritual rebirth up until the time of this letter. It reminds me of the verse in 3John.

3John 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. Joy and rejoicing permeate this epistle; I have often heard it referred to as the epistle of joy.

**Phil. 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ:**

This is one of my favorite verses. Actually, it is a continuation of the sentence that started in verse 3. It states the basis of the joy Paul has in this body of believers. He knows that God will finish what He starts. It is God who brings about our spiritual rebirth. It is God who gives us the seal of the Holy Spirit at the time of that rebirth. Salvation is the good work that God started and will

bring to completion in us. That completion will come when we receive our immortal bodies when Jesus comes to receive us unto Himself as promised in John 14 and described in 1Corinthians 15.

John 14:1-3 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also.

1Cor. 15:51-54 Behold, I shew 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 trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall 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 shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

This is also one of the best verses regarding the security of the believer. Our salvation is a work of God. He never fails at anything. All we do is acknowledge our sin and receive Jesus as Lord (and even there we are responding to the wooing of the Spirit); He does the rest. He makes us a new creature and imputes to us the righteousness of Jesus. He doesn't force His way in and He doesn't force us to grow. I personally believe, however, that where there is true faith—there will be evidence. The book of James is all about how faith and works are intertwined.

**Phil. 1:7 Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.**

I think this is a statement of the confidence Paul has that the Philippian church is a body of true believers; he believes that every one of them are partakers of "my grace." The source of Paul's grace is God, and the source of grace for the Philippian believers is God. Paul makes this statement because of the evidence he sees of God's grace at work in their lives. Later in this epistle he references their obedience to God's word (2:12) and their provision for Him while he was in Thessalonica (4:16). Their concern and provision for him, in particular, has endeared this body of believers to him; they have a special place in his heart. Their support for him did not waiver when he was sent to prison.

**Phil. 1:8 For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.**

In this verse Paul claims God as his witness, and the only One who can truly witness, to the love he has for this body of believers because only God can see our hearts.

1Sam. 16:7 ...for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

He compares his affection for the Philippians to the feelings Christ has for the believer. I think he is also connecting his ability to love to the love of Christ working in and through him.

**Phil. 1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in* all judgment;**

**Phil. 1:10 That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;**

**Phil. 1:11 Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.**

This group of verses form one connected thought. Paul is telling the Philippians how he prays for them.

- **That their love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment** – We’ve all heard the old saying, “Love is blind”; but true love is not blind. Real love is a choice, a choice made because of and sometimes in spite of what we know. Paul is praying that these believers will love one another with discernment and perception. To love “more and more” with discernment and perception references the ability to determine needs in the body of believers and act accordingly--to know when encouragement is needed, to know when correction is needed, to know when material or physical help is needed, in short, to act so as to promote unity and strength in the body of believers and in sharing the gospel with the lost.
- **That they approve things that are excellent** – *Excellent* is a reference to things that are “the best,” that are superior and of great value. To be able to approve or discern what is best, one must have a basis for judgment. That undisputable basis for the Christian is the word of God. Paul declared this truth in his letter to Timothy.  
2Tim. 3:16 All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:  
2Tim. 3:17 That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

This is also the basis for the discerning love mentioned above. Unless we accept the word of God as our foundation for truth and morality, we are left to the subjective opinions of man. So it would seem that the underlying prayer that Paul is making is that these believers grow in knowledge, wisdom and application of the truth of scripture to their lives.

- **That they are sincere and without offence** – To be sincere (pure, genuine) and without offence (faultless, inoffensive) is the outcome of choosing what is excellent. Burton Coffman had an interesting commentary on the word *sincere*.  
“It has often been pointed out that this word is derived from two Latin words, sin (without) and cere (wax). Italian marble vendors and certain merchants of porcelain fell into the habit of hiding flaws in their merchandise by filling cracks and blemishes with a certain kind of wax; but the more reputable dealers advertised their

wares as sin cere (without wax); and from this derived the meaning of the English word "sincere." The true meaning of it is "without deception" or "without hypocrisy."

Paul's prayer is that the Philippians exhibit this type of character "till the day of Christ." (cf comments on verse 6 above)

- **That they be filled with the fruits of righteousness** – The natural progression of discerning love, excellent choices, and living a pure life will produce fruit. This would be a reference to the fruit of the Spirit as defined in Galatians.

Gal. 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

Gal. 5:23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

How is that fruit produced in our lives? By abiding in the Savior.

John 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

John 15:5 I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

When we are yielded to the Savior to the point of producing fruit, we are bringing glory to the Father through the provision of the Son and the empowerment of the Spirit that we possess because of that provision.

**Phil. 1:12 But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things *which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;***

**Phil. 1:13 So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places;**

**Phil. 1:14 And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.**

Based on that introduction, Paul realizes that some of the believers could be confused as to why God has allowed Paul to be put in prison. Paul boldly declares that his circumstances are a God-given opportunity to spread the gospel message. Because of his imprisonment, he has been given the opportunity to share with those who live and work in and around the palace, as well as others in the city of Rome. Paul's example before the believers in Rome, in particular, is inspiring them to share the gospel more boldly and without fear. Boldness is a result of faith and confidence; timidity is a result of fear and lack of faith.

2Tim. 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

As the old saying goes, "An example is worth a thousand words." Our victorious example in difficult circumstances is a testimony to the power, provision and sufficiency of God for His children and will encourage and strengthen others.

**Phil. 1:15 Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will:**

**Phil. 1:16 The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds:**

**Phil. 1:17 But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.**

The first half of verse 15 references verse 16, and the last half references verse 17. I can't help but be reminded of an illustration Ravi Zacharias used in one of his teachings. I don't remember the details, but the reference was to men who were studying to be pastors and openly admitted that they weren't believers. When asked why they were going into the ministry, they replied that it was because there are big bucks to be made in the God racket. I also can't help but make application to some of so-called biblical experts today from the Jesus Seminar who don't even accept the Bible as God's word. Some men actually preach the true gospel message, but join it to false teaching in other areas for their own selfish purposes. I believe many are in the ministry today, not because they are called by God, but because they *envy* the wealth that is so gaudily and publicly displayed by many who claim to represent the Lord. I believe that many join the ranks of the clergy just to undermine the true gospel and/or to promote a personal agenda, such as recognizing homosexuality as a normal lifestyle, etc.

Paul evidently had formed enemies who took pleasure in adding to his persecution. Jealousy and self-ambition are strong, evil motivating forces. JFB made an insightful comment: "...they thought that I, like themselves, sought my own glory, and so would be mortified at their success over mine. But they are utterly mistaken; 'I rejoice' at it (Philippians 1:18), so far am I from being *troubled* at it."

Thankfully, there are many men in the ministry that are called by God and determined to preach the truth of His word boldly and without apology. They are not in it for what they can gain from it. They are in it to glorify God and His Son Jesus Christ, to spread the gospel message, and to equip the body of believers. They are, like Paul, committed to serving the Savior. These are the men that we need to support with our prayer and resources.

**Phil. 1:18 What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.**

Paul was able to look past these selfishly motivated and/or false teachers and rejoice in the fact that "Christ is preached." That is something I try to focus on more as I see some of these teachers with mixed messages today. It's always so confusing to hear the truth mixed with deceit. The important thing is that the Holy Spirit can minister the truth heard by men and women whose hearts are tender and seeking in spite of the deceit with which it is surrounded. I have to keep reminding myself of that; it doesn't, however, keep me from praying for false teachers to be exposed for what they are.

**Phil. 1:19 For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,**

**Phil. 1:20 According to my earnest expectation and *my* hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but *that* with all boldness, as always, *so* now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether *it be* by life, or by death.**

*Salvation* is a reference to deliverance or rescue. Paul knew that his salvation from prison would be expedited by the prayers of the believers at Philippi

through the provision of the Holy Spirit. He believed in the power of prayer. I know I have been guilty at times of thinking, "I wish I could do more; all I can do is pray." I am still working on eliminating that mindset. Actually, the best thing we can do for anyone is to pray for them—not the only thing, the *best* thing. We are not to pray instead of serving, we are to pray along with serving. Sometimes, however, we are limited in ability to serve; but we are never limited in our ability to pray.

I like the wording of the NLT for verse 20:

For I live in eager expectation and hope that I will never do anything that causes me shame, but that I will always be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past, and that my life will always honor Christ, whether I live or I die.

This verse tells us that Paul knew that his salvation could come through means of release from prison *or* through death. That is a truth that I have been able to embrace more readily as I have grown in my relationship with the Lord. The time that truth is hard to embrace is when you know that the one you are praying for is not a believer.

This verse also shows us Paul's humility. He knows that as a man he is subject to failure and temptation. His desire is to be a living testimony to the sufficiency of the power of God. Oh how I identify with that desire and that recognition of my vulnerability if/when I let down my guard even a little bit. So many times it seems as if I take two steps backward for every step forward.

This verse also shows Paul's strong faith because his "earnest and confident expectation" is that he will be unashamed and bold no matter the circumstances. He wants his life to bring glory to Christ. His desire is that people look at him and see Jesus. That is soooooooooooooo my heart's desire.

**Phil. 1:21 For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.**

**Phil. 1:22 But if I live in the flesh, this *is* the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.**

**Phil. 1:23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:**

**Phil. 1:24 Nevertheless to abide in the flesh *is* more needful for you.**

Paul knew that his life was to be a testimony to Christ, to be a vessel of honor for the Lord to use however, whenever and wherever He so chose. Although Paul took great joy in serving Christ in the flesh, he knew that death would be the beginning of a life far better. Paul took pleasure in the fact that his life was producing fruit in the form of producing new believers and strengthening the body of believers through instruction and encouragement. He is basically saying that given the opportunity, he would have a hard time choosing whether to go on to be with Christ or to stay and minister to the church. He knows that going to be with Christ is the far better choice, but he also knows that the body of believers needs his ministry to grow and become stronger in the faith.

I think it is important to note that Paul believed he would be with Christ after death. He didn't expect to go into limbo or to a temporary holding place; he expected to be in the presence of his Lord.

**Phil. 1:25 And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith;**

**Phil. 1:26 That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.**

Paul seems to be affirming that he knows it is God's will for him to remain in the flesh to serve for a while longer. One of the reasons is to encourage the strengthening of the faith of the believers at Philippi. He knows that seeing their prayers answered by his release from prison and knowing that he might be able to visit them again would bring them great joy and strengthen their faith.

The NIV Commentary makes this note: "Evidence from the pastoral letters, confirmed by early historical testimony, indicates that Paul was released from this first Roman imprisonment and began to travel, including a trip through Macedonia (and presumably Philippi), before being reimprisoned and suffering a martyr's death."

**Phil. 1:27 Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;**

I like the wording of the NIV for this verse:

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel...

Paul knew that he was going to be around for a while longer, but he couldn't state as fact that he would get to come and see them. He is reminding the believers at Philippi that more important than his coming to see them was that they have a testimony of unity of spirit in growing in faith and spreading the gospel. Jesus taught that unity in the body of believers was key evidence of the truth of the gospel message; it was part of His prayer to the Father before His crucifixion.

John 17:20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

John 17:21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

John 13:35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Love for one another is the bond of unity in the body of Christ—and not our distorted vision of love, but true love as described in 1Corinthians 13.

**Phil. 1:28 And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.**

We all have heard the old saying, "There is strength in numbers." Unity of the body of Christ does produce strength in the individual parts of the body as well as the whole. When we are focused on serving Christ and sharing His truth, we are operating in the Spirit and have nothing to fear. I like this statement by David Guzik, "When our spiritual enemies fail to make us afraid, they have failed completely, because they really have no other weapon than fear and intimidation."

Others may choose to set themselves against us as enemies. That in itself is a sign that they are headed for eternal damnation; the enemies of God's children are the enemies of God and vice versa.

Luke 21:17 And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake.

John 15:18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you.

Our commitment to Christ, on the other hand, through unity of spirit and working to spread the gospel gives us assurance of our salvation.

"that of God" – I can read more than one meaning into that phrase:

- that our salvation is of God
- that our lack of fear in faith is of God
- that the perdition of our enemies comes at the hand of God.

I think scripture supports all three.

- Eph. 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:
- 2Tim. 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.
- John 5:26-29 For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

**Phil. 1:29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;**

**Phil. 1:30 Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear *to be in me.***

Again, I like the NLT translation of these verses:

For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. We are in this fight together. You have seen me suffer for him in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of this great struggle.

The Greek for "given" was quite surprising: "to grant as a favor, i.e. gratuitously, in kindness, pardon or rescue..." This supports the wording of the NLT. It is a privilege to be given the gift of salvation and to suffer for the sake of Christ, the One who provides that salvation. Suffering does not necessarily mean going to prison or even being persecuted; it is to respond with the heart of Christ toward sin and sinners. It reminds me of the verse referencing Lot in 2Peter.

2Pet. 2:7 And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked:

2Pet. 2:8 (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed *his* righteous soul from day to day with *their* unlawful deeds;)

I think this is the *conflict* that Paul is referencing in verse 30.

We know that God's thinking and our thinking are on different levels. God knows that suffering is good for us; it is one of the ways He refines us and perfects us.

Job 23:10 But he knoweth the way that I take: *when* he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

1Pet. 1:6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

1Pet. 1:7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

Just as with Job's friends, most people today, even Christians, associate "suffering" of any kind as a sign of God's judgment. The Lord declares just the opposite; it is a God-given opportunity for the child of God to grow in faith and bring glory to the Savior.