

Hednesford Pentecostal Church

Philippians

Bible Version

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1. INTRODUCTION

Paul's letter to the church at Philippi was written to thank them for their concern which is demonstrated by practical support. It is a beautiful letter in which Paul teaches us some great spiritual truths, demands some very practical action and gives us some great Biblical promises. The background to these things is Paul's suffering of hardship, persecution, injustice and great practical need.

This letter undermines any notion that serving Christ is meant to be easy or problem free or that God's primary desire is to bless us, keep us or protect us. Paul views his hardships as part and parcel of the spiritual struggle we are in. He does not complain or grumble but rejoices in all things.

Rejoicing is a recurring theme of this letter. Paul describes how he is rejoicing, for the good and despite of the bad. He also commands the Philippians to rejoice. It is befitting that we rejoice in the Lord, either as a statement of thanksgiving or as a statement of faith. Rejoicing is good for our own heart and soul. It is an antidepressant and a soothing balm.

2. BACKGROUND

The church at Philippi had been planted by Paul the apostle and his team after a time of great frustration when nothing seemed to go right.

Acts 16:6-10. Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. {7} After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. {8} So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. {9} And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." {10} 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.

They had been seeking opportunity to expand the kingdom of God, but a door would not open. The scriptures explain these hindrances as being the work of the Holy Spirit. In life when God says no, or when He closes a door, then these are as much a blessing and provision as when He says yes, or opens a door.

Finally the Holy Spirit gave positive direction to Paul through a dream. Paul would not have known the future consequence and importance of that change in direction planned by God, because in turning West to Macedonia in Europe, rather than continuing East to Asia, the winning of the Western world for the Christian message had begun, the consequence of which is still with us today.

In obeying the call to Macedonia, Paul chooses the principal regional city - Philippi. The city was then a very strategic place, but now it is a ruin in North Eastern Greece. It had productive soil, and the gold and silver mines, which though exhausted by the Christian era, had made the city a great commercial centre. Most importantly Philippi was on the Egnatian Way, in a break in the hills that separated Europe and Asia. This was the main transportation route in Macedonia, and an extension of the Appian Way, joining the Eastern Roman Empire with Italy.

The initial break through in founding the church came by demonstrations of the power of God. Three principal events are recorded in the book of Acts, and in these events three different people are touched by the power of God. Each of these people were from different nationalities and different social groupings.

As usual Paul initially starts by approaching the Jewish community in the city.

Acts 16:13-15. And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. {14} Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. {15} And when she and her household were baptised, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

They were probably meeting at the riverside to pray on the Sabbath, because there was not the necessary ten men required to start a synagogue.

The first person to be saved was Lydia, a wealthy business woman from Thyatira. The Lord opened her heart to the truth, and then she opened her home to Paul and his team, begging that she might serve in the practical way of hospitality.

Acts 16:16-19. Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. {17} This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." {18} And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. {19} But 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 second person to be touched by the gospel was a demon possessed slave girl, who was set free from the powers of darkness.

Fortune telling was an accepted part of the Greek culture, and not recognised as sinful, evil and demonically inspired. The demonic predictions must have proven accurate, since the girl's reputation had made this a profitable trade.

What the girl says sounds like good advertisement; but Paul recognised that the source was demonic. Why the unclean spirit should cry out in this way is unclear. Perhaps it was trying to get acceptance from the Christians, so as to later work of havoc? We are called to try or test the spirits¹. The source of a prophetic message is equally important as the content. In the above account the demon was telling the truth - but for what purpose? We are called to destroy the works of the devil, not adapt them or work with them.

The third person to be touched by the power of God was a Roman jailer.

The devil, having failed with one plan, tries something else. Paul and Silas had done nothing unlawful, but the masters of the girl told a total pack of lies, and used prejudice to hurt the men of God². Yet through all this injustice and hardship, the kingdom of God would again be furthered.

¹ 1 John 4:1. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

² Acts 16:20-22. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; {21} "and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." {22} Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods.

Acts 16:23-30. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. {24} Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. {25} But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. {26} Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. {27} And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. {28} But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." {29} Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. {30} And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

After injustice and hardship, Paul and Silas pray and praise God. Throughout the book of Acts we read that the early church thought it a great privilege to suffer for the kingdom of God

Paul and Silas' attitude paved the way for another great miracle, a localised earth quake which broke doors and chains, but did not harm anyone. It appears that the Roman jailer already knew that he had need of salvation and whom he needed to ask for help. Presumably he had heard Paul preaching in the city. But this event at the prison persuaded him to act upon that knowledge.

All the experiences of Paul and his co-workers in Philippi underline the fact that in all things God works for good³ and that apparent set backs eventually further the cause of the kingdom.

3. CHAPTER ONE

3.1. CONFIDENCE

Phil 1:1-7. Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: {2} Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. {3} I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, {4} always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, {5} for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, {6} 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; {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 defence and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.

In this *thank you* letter, Paul does not describe himself as an apostle, something he does in other letters. Here he is not seeking to correct some doctrinal error or deal with some immorality, but writes to encourage the saints of God, and to thank them for their financial support. He refers to himself as a slave, and to them as saints.

Paul knew without doubt that it had been the supernatural leading and power of God that had started the church at Philippi, and he had confidence that God would complete what he had begun. There may be frustrations, attacks and set-backs, but the church was founded upon the work of God. Jesus said:

Mat 16:18. ...I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

³ Rom 8:28

This is the confidence that all Christians can have for their own lives, and for the lives of other believers. He who began a good work in us, is willing to finish or complete that work of salvation. Such confidence is part of the Christian hope, the assurance of the working of God in our lives in the future.

John 10:28-29. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. {29} My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.

Jesus promised His disciples eternal life, a life that is everlasting and unfailing. You cannot have eternal life one day and then not have it the day after, else the gift would not be eternal life. We may lose our job, our money, our liberty or even our lives, but external circumstance cannot make us lose eternal life. The security behind this gift of life is the power of God; our lives are in His hand and no one and nothing is strong enough to snatch out of the hand of God.

Rom 8:35-39. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? {36} As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." {37} Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. {38} For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, {39} nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The world and all the power of hell are not sufficient to snatch us out of the hand of God, or make our salvation of non-effect. Only if we neglect our salvation and turn our backs upon God, do we run the risk of being lost eternally.

Peter describes Christians as those:

1 Pet 1:5. who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

3.2. AFFECTION

Phil 1:7-8. 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 defence and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. {8} For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

Throughout his life Paul suffered a great deal of injustice, suffering and hardship⁴, but he considered that was part and parcel of the Christian life. He had declared war on evil and had not then expected peace.

Acts 20:24. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

⁴ 2 Cor 11:24-27. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. {25} Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; {26} in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; {27} in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, fasting often, in cold and nakedness;

Many things had hurt Paul, but he allowed none of them hinder him in his life's purpose and calling. He had a heavenly vision that he sought to obey⁵. His attitude to suffering meant that others had not kept up with him and turned back from missionary journeys⁶.

Paul was also not afraid to confront people, even people he loved, with the truth and he would correct doctrinal error and moral failings with all authority and severity. With Paul there was no compromising.

But if Paul was tough and thick skinned he was not hard hearted. He knew how to be tender and the motivation behind all his life work was love.

2 Cor 5:14. For the love of Christ constraineth us...

In Philippians 1:7-8 Paul expresses his deep love for the people of Philippi; they were in his heart. He had already spoken of their partnership in the gospel (verse 5), and now he speaks of sharing in God's grace with them (verse 7). There is a close bond between those who work together for Jesus Christ, and there is even a closer tie when one person is responsible for the conversion of the other.

Paul was a man of love and compassion, and this he extended even to his Phillipian jailer, gladly leading him to Christ without any talk of revenge.

The word for affection in verse 8 is frequently used of Jesus. The motivating force behind Paul's ministry was the love and compassion of Jesus. It does not matter how doctrinally correct or gifted we are, without love we are nothing⁷. To try and minister from any other motivation but love will prove to be disastrous. When love abounds amongst us then, like Paul, we are able to forgive offences against one another. But when love is lacking misunderstanding, division and dissension easily take root.

We need to pray for the love and compassion of Jesus to fill our own hearts. Paul says in another letter;

Col 3:12. Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;

Jesus demonstrated a sacrificial love that was able to embrace anyone and forgive His persecutors and His enemies (even when they did not seek forgiveness or say sorry). Such a love is not natural to our sinful and selfish hearts. We need to pray for God to soften and enlarge our hearts. As Paul says we need to choose to **put on** love, to cloth our attitude with the heart of Jesus.

3.3. MATURITY

Eleven or twelve years had passed since Paul's original visit to Philippi, and in that time the church had flourished and grown, both numerically and in maturity. In church life the two are linked. It is not enough to simply increase numerically, nor is it sufficient for a small group to only grow in maturity. A healthy church will grow in maturity and expand in numbers. In creation healthy animals and plants all grow in stature and reproduce.

⁵ Acts 26:15-19

⁶ Acts 15:38

⁷ 1 Corinthians 13

Phil 1:9-11. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, {10} that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, {11} being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Paul is praying that the church might grow, mature and be fruitful. He prays that their love would abound more and more. The Greek word translated here as abound means to "overflow". Presumably he is thinking of their love for each other and their love for God. The two are unalterably linked in the New Testament⁸. A church's love for God will be evident in the genuine love that is expressed between church members.

Paul also prays that their love might be more than just an emotional experience, but that it might be rooted in knowledge. Presumably he is talking of knowledge of God, knowledge of each other, knowledge of ourselves and knowledge of what is good. Love is not a gooey feeling but the motivation behind deliberate action. We need to increase in knowledge and discernment, but such an increase is only valuable when we are correspondingly increasing in love. Love is the foundation upon which knowledge, discernment and fruitfulness can be built.

Paul also prays for growth in holiness of life. He wanted them to be "sincere and without offence". The Greek word translated as sincere literally means 'unmixed'. It describes an inner purity in which even our motives and emotions are unmixed. The term "without offence" refers to the outward manifestation of our life. Paul was praying that they might be holy both inwardly and outwardly.

A fruitful life is God's purpose and plan for our lives, and brings glory and praise to his name. A farmer plants desiring a harvest, and God is seeking a harvest in our lives.

3.4. WORKING FOR GOOD

Phil 1:12-14. But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, {13} so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; {14} and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

He refers to "what happened to me". This phrase refers to an awful lot Paul had been through⁹. He faced false accusation and mob violence. He was stripped and stretched out to be tortured. He was then put in the dock where he was illegally assaulted. He faced an assassination plot and ended up in the hands of a tyrant. He was shipwrecked on his way to Rome and was now confined in prison, uncertain about whether or when he would be executed. In writing to the Philippians, twice he alludes to all this suffering as simply "what has happened to me".

Not only does he understate his suffering, he actually rejoices in it because he sees that through it the gospel is being advanced.

Word had spread concerning the reason why Paul was in prison. He was chained to a member of the crack imperial troops for eight hours at a time. No doubt he made the most of the opportunity to tell them the good news about Jesus Christ. He didn't say, "I can't do anything at this moment. I'll wait until I'm released". He made the most of every opportunity. He spoke directly to those at hand and

⁸ 1 John 4:7-12

⁹ Acts 21-28

he wrote letters to others. These letters, unknown to him, became part of the New Testament and changed the course of history.

Many Christians long to be released in order that they can tell others the good news. They feel trapped in their jobs or maybe even "chained to the sink" at home. They look forward to a time when they are retired or when the children have left home, thinking that then they can really serve Christ. But now is the time: the possibilities are where we are. If we have a job in the secular world, that is an opportunity for the gospel. If we are bringing up children, it is an opportunity to bring up "soldiers for Christ".

Paul got on with the job where he was, and the impact of this was vast. Not only did many hear about Jesus Christ directly from Paul, but also other Christians were encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously.

Phil 1:15-18. Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: {16} The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; {17} but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defence of the gospel. {18} What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

It appears that there were some Christian ministers who were opposed to Paul. It shouldn't surprise us that believers in the early church were just as susceptible to fleshy attitudes and actions as we are today. Were these ministers envious of Paul's exploits? Or were they angered by this radical who stirred up opposition? Whatever the reason, Paul decided that his response should be to rejoice that Christ was being preached.

Our motivation for doing good works does matter¹⁰. Deeds done through selfish ambition may not receive the expected reward from the Lord. But Paul is not writing to the people with a bad attitude. So he reveals to the Philippians how he is keeping his attitude right.

With everything that Paul has suffered we might think that the attitude of these Christian workers who wished him ill would cause Paul to be angry and feel greatly hurt. But he processed the problem by viewing it in light of Kingdom and turning his complaint to rejoicing.

3.5. READY TO DIE

Phil 1:19-20. For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, {20} 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.

Paul is confident in the effectiveness of the saints' prayers and also in the energising of the Holy Spirit. He is confident that whether he is executed or released he will not let the Kingdom of God down.

The Psalms repeatedly call us to magnify the Lord. Paul uses the phrase to refer to action rather than praise.

¹⁰ 1 Cor 13:1-3. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. {2} And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. {3} And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

Phil 1:21-26. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. {22} But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labour; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. {23} For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. {24} Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. {25} And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, {26} that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

For Paul long life was not the priority and death was not something which we need to seek to avoid. In fact our death brings gain - increase, prosperity and blessing. Paul knows that being with Christ is far better and being alive here. But while in the body it is serving Christ that gives our lives purpose and worth.

In saying that he does not know what he would choose, Paul is not automatically saying that the choice is his.

Somewhere deep inside Paul seems to know that his life of service is not yet over. He still has a sense of responsibility for the young churches.

3.6. CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

Phil 1:27-30. 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, {28} 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. {29} For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, {30} having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.

As the apostle who planted the church, Paul includes words of direction in this letter of thanks. Not all behaviour is befitting Christians, but only that which is worthy to be associated with the gospel of Christ. We are to stand fast and stand together as we suffer the strife that is thrown at the church from adversaries that are stirred up by spiritual darkness.

Salvation faith is a gift of grace, but suffering for the cause of Christ is also seen as a privilege and gift.

Acts 5:41. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

Paul was once a persecutor of the church, and he knew first hand the power of standing fast in faith against abuse. Stephen's demeanour deeply impacted Paul¹¹.

¹¹ Acts 6:15

4. CHAPTER 2

4.1. UNITY

Phil 2:1-4. Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, {2} fulfil my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. {3} Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. {4} Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Good things can be done from wrong motives, such as ambition, self-promotion and conceit. But spiritual maturity is characterised by a humility that recognises the worth and value of others. A Christian community, such as a church, should be characterised by every member seeking the well being and interests of the other members before the needs of self. None of us is to be full of our own importance.

So long as everyone obeys this commandment of Scripture, unity and blessing follow. If there is anyone who only seeks what they can take from the group, and to put on the goodwill of others, then dissention and division will result. Immaturity is being wrapped up in ourselves.

Attitude is the fruit of character. Jesus' attitude that was manifest in putting His Father's will before His own comfort. The life that God prepares for us will expose us to circumstances which will challenge what is on the inside of our hearts, and seek to deliver us from self and develop Christ-like humility.

4.2. HUMILITY

Phil 2:5-11. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, {6} who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, {7} but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. {8} 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. {9} Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, {10} that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, {11} and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul tells us three times that we are to "let". Let nothing be done through selfish ambition; Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others; Let this mind be in you. Whether we respond to these three let's, is a decision that we have to make daily.

Jesus knew who He was. He had a high sense of self worth and destiny. He was comfortable in who He was and this released Him to become a servant of others. Insecure people cannot serve in the right attitude or mind-set, because they have a need to prove themselves or maintain the appearance of importance. Insecure people seek recognition and acknowledgement of external things; while secure people are secure deep inside. We are all naturally insecure to a greater or lesser degree, in various aspects of our lives. Good attitude comes from walking close with God, and having a sense of worth and security.

Jesus was meek and lowly. He walked humbly with His Father, and among men. He didn't seek His own, He didn't seek to be served¹², but He came to do the will of His Father and to serve men.

Christ humbled Himself by becoming a man and coming as a child. It is childlike humility that He commands His servants adopt¹³. In becoming a child Jesus gave up His independence and made Himself dependant upon others. Pride often manifests by making people totally independent, unwilling to submit to the help of others. When Jesus was thirsty He asked a Samaritan woman for water. Pride would have stopped a Jew doing such a thing. Pride cannot receive help from others.

Jesus humbled Himself by becoming a servant or slave, and finally He humbled Himself and became a sacrifice. There is a progression here in the growth of humility, and conversely the decrease of self, which we are called to follow. Without developing a childlike trust and confidence in God, we will not be effective servants. Without a true servant's heart, we will not live as a true living sacrifice.

The humility of Christ was absolute. He didn't seek deliverance, recognition or understanding. He didn't insist on His rights or any privileges. He didn't complain or protest. He recognised that His life was to be a sacrifice, and walked that way - Lamb-like.

At the cross Jesus became the servant and sacrifice of every human being. There God has exalted Him to be over all. Ultimate humility brought ultimate exaltation.

Prov 15:33. The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom, and before honour is humility.

Prov 18:12. Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honour is humility.

4.3. WORK OUT

Phil 2:12-16. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; {13} for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. {14} Do all things without complaining and disputing, {15} that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, {16} holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or laboured in vain.

One of the things that we need to work out correctly is resolving issues, either from the past or as they arise. When the spiritual equation for our lives does not balance; when there are unresolved issues, then we are storing up difficulties and troubles. Many people (Christians or not) are suffering today from the effect of not resolving past issues, which fester and grow. People suffer break downs because they have not correctly resolved issues.

Major issues are: Unforgiveness, Disappointments, Guilt, Anger, Failure, Habitual Sins, and Rejection.

In the first chapter Paul told us that God would complete the work he had started in the believer's lives. Now he tells us that God is at work within us, to change our will and to cause us to do certain things. In co-operating with our heavenly Father we need to be careful of our attitude.

Firstly we need have a healthy sense of respect and awe for God; we are to fear him. Secondly we are also to ensure that we do not complain. We live in a generation where people continually voice

¹² Mark 10:45

¹³ Matt 18:1

their complaints, but this is not to be our attitude. Paul has already described how he dealt with being wronged by other ministers. Thirdly we are not to get into arguments which divide the body of Christ and which get our eyes off the primary thing.

Working in this blameless and harmless lifestyle enables the light of Christ in us to shine before the world. No wonder Satan wishes to dim our light by generating complaining and arguing. But the church isn't just to demonstrate a godly way of living and living together; we are also to hold out the word of life. We must proclaim the gospel message to those around us.

Rom 10:14. 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?

Phil 2:17-18. Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. {18} For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

A drink offering is something that is poured out to accompany a sacrifice that is made on the altar. To human logic a drink offering is a pointless exercise: it doesn't benefit God and could have been given to somebody in need. But spiritual offerings have great value and great power. Christ's offering of himself bought about the salvation of the world. When we make sacrifices God sees and is pleased.

Mat 6:3-4. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, {4} that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

Paul was happy to suffer death under the Roman authorities, consider his sacrifice as a fitting companion to the sacrifice and service of the Philippian believers.

4.4. SACRIFICE AND SERVICE

Phil 2:19-24. But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. {20} For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. {21} For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. {22} But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel. {23} Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. {24} But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.

Timothy had served as a companion, assistant and apprentice with Paul. Their relationship had developed and strengthened and Paul regarded Timothy as his son. He was entrusting Timothy to go to Philippi and minister there and bring back a report to him. Paul gladly boasted about the character of this spiritual son. He was sincere, caring and serving.

Verse 21 is a damning charge Paul makes against the majority of believers, who are failing to serve the cause of Christ in a sacrificial way, but who "seek their own". Self care and protection can be equally harmful as selfish ambition.

Phil 2:25-30. Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; {26} since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. {27} For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. {28} Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. {29} Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; {30} because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

Epaphroditus is the person sent from Philippi with the support they had sent Paul. He also is highly regarded by Paul who instructs the church to hold “such in esteem”. Paul counts him as a true brother because he is a fellow worker and fellow soldier. Whether it was the journey to Rome or some other hardship, Epaphroditus had become ill and nearly died. Paul does not voice the thought that Epaphroditus has been foolish to make himself sick, instead he only praises him for his dedication.

Paul describes Epaphroditus’ healing in terms that do not fit some people’s idea of New Testament healing. He states that God had mercy, sparing the labourer’s life and sparing Paul from additional sorrow. He hasn’t described what his existing sorrows are.

5. CHAPTER 3

5.1. BEWARE

Phil 3:1-6. Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. {2} Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! {3} For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, {4} though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: {5} circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; {6} concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

We might think that the word finally means that this letter is about to end. Actually the Greek word doesn’t mean finally but rather it means *rest, other, remainder*. What Paul is saying is “As for the rest...”

Three times Paul tells the church to beware. He is calling them to be on guard and to be diligent. He warns the church to beware of a group of people he calls dogs, evil workers and the mutilation. That final phrase gives us an insight into who he is talking about, but verse 3 makes it plain. He is referring to the Jewish Christians who were insisting that Gentile believers had to come under the whole Mosaic Law and be circumcised. The phrases Paul uses could in no way be considered reconciliatory, but rather they are derogatory.

Dogs weren’t the house pets we are used to. Instead they were homeless, scavengers living off the rubbish in towns. The Jews used dogs as a derisive term to describe Gentiles who they considered unclean. Here Paul turns the table and uses it to describe Jews who say that salvation came through faith in Christ AND ceremonial and legalistic observance.

In calling physical circumcision “mutilation” Paul is stating that for Gentile believers the act achieves nothing positive. True circumcision, he explains, is nothing physical but is spiritual. It is the cutting away of the carnal flesh from our hearts and the fruit of the act is seen in worshipping God in spirit, faith in Christ Jesus and having no confidence in our own achievements.

Combating the teaching of false teachers is a constant theme in all the apostles’ letters in the New Testament.

Gal 1:8-9. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. {9} As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

First the attack was from Jewish believers who wanted the Gentiles to become Jewish as well as have faith in Christ. Later the church was attacked by false doctrine from the Gnostics. Church historians tell us that Satan’s attack against the church with false doctrines was more effective than the persecution from the Roman authorities. A similar tale has recently come from China. Years of persecution from the Communistic State did not prevent church growth. But when Western Prosperity Teaching became available the church became divided and distracted from the Mission of Christ’s Kingdom.

Gal 2:4. And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage),

We need to be continually aware of false or deceived ministers or brethren who spread false doctrine. Such people who have another agenda and goal. Often the motive behind their teaching was control. Such people are usually full of religious pride. They believe that their group is the best, the most mature and the one that God is really pleased with. They are not content with people coming to Christ. They want people to be moulded into their image, to wear their uniform and to promote them.

Gal 4: 19 (NIV). Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them.

In countering this particular danger from the Jewish quarter, Paul reminds the Philippians that he is more qualified than most in these matters; a real Hebrew among Hebrews. Paul had the right ancestry, the right orthodoxy and the right morality. He was a triple “A” rated religious zealot. What good did this do Paul? Nothing at all, instead he persecuted the church. Although he was recognised as being blameless concerning a legalistic code, none of his activities improved his standing before the God of Heaven. When compared to Christ’s righteousness he could only say “O wretched man that I am”.¹⁴

Any confidence we have in our self; our abilities and our strengths, is a serious hindrance to the power of God. Self confidence always causes boasting and divides the body of Christ.

Throughout church history there have been problems caused by evangelists promoting their own culture as well as the gospel of Christ. English missionaries who were not devoid of the colonial mindset sought to turn Africans into Westernised believers, right down to wearing a suit and tie at church.

¹⁴ Rom 7:24

5.2. GAINING CHRIST

Phil 3:7-9. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. {8} Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ {9} and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

The things that previously had made Paul appear like a righteous servant of God, all had to be renounced when he came to Christ. He had to realise that the right ancestry, the right moral code and a religious fervency were all insufficient to make him righteous before the throne of the eternal God. The ineffectiveness of these had to be acknowledged and they were considered as valuable as dung¹⁵.

Paul uses the language of an accountant in this section; talking about profit and loss accounts. All his achievements which he previously considered as profit were totally insufficient to pay the spiritual and moral debt he owed. But the knowledge of Jesus as Lord was a tremendous profit that far outweighed all losses on his moral account. However his achievements and status could not be added to this profit but they had to be discarded.

There are things which are advantageous within the world; securities, intellect, abilities, contacts, wealth. But things that are an advantage for people in the world can be a disadvantage or hindrance to people in the kingdom of God. God wants us to be dependent upon Him and to trust Him fully and Him only. He is to be our security. These other things may have to be forsaken before we are going to see the power of God manifested.

Paul had counted all things loss, and then suffered the loss of all things. They had first lost their pre-eminence in his heart, as he made a conscious decision and sacrifice. Then God had taken Paul at his word and stripped him of everything. Although their loss caused outward hardship, Paul had gained a far more excellent thing: a real knowledge of Christ.

Phil 3:10-12. that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, {11} if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. {12} Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

Paul's goal was to know Christ but he realised that a real intimate knowledge of Christ comes at a great price. Fellowship with Jesus is found in labouring for the kingdom. It is found when suffering for the kingdom. It is found through dying to self and allowing the full power of the cross of Christ to transform us. Christ cannot fellowship with carnality, double-mindedness and self-seeking. Jesus only fellowships with those of the same lamb-like nature.

Paul also wanted to know the power of Christ's resurrection.¹⁶ Power is a major theme of Paul's ministry. He states:

¹⁵ Greek: *skybalon*

¹⁶ Eph 1:19-20. and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power {20} which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,

1 Cor 4:19-20. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. {20} For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.

The message of the gospel is far more than words, yet some people's religion is little more than words. They have words of doctrine, they have words of prayer, and they have words of sympathy for those who are suffering. Some people are just absorbers of words, hearers of sermons, but not doers of God's word.

To other people, religion is nothing more than sentiment and emotion. They want to experience feelings, thrills in their spine, emotional highs. They need a continuing sense of being loved. They are emotional consumers.

But the Kingdom of God is about something much bigger, it is about power, the power of God that takes a sinful, shrunken, fearful son of Adam, and transforms him to be a son of God, to be a representative of Jesus Christ, sharing the same nature, the same Father, the same Holy Spirit and same message. This is the marvel of the gospel. Not that it saves sinners from hell, but that it transforms sinners into the likeness and nature of God.

Paul uses the word power 44 times in his letters. He speaks of the power to live a Christ-like life and the power to demonstrate Christ's authority through signs and wonders. It is a major theme of his doctrine and he wants it to be a major factor in his life.

Paul was not afraid of suffering for the kingdom. He saw value in hardships, difficulties and persecution. The phrase in verse 12 would be superfluous if Paul was referring literally to the resurrection from the dead. Of course he had not already attained to that future event. It therefore appears that Paul is using the phrases death and resurrection to refer to being totally dead to self and living a perfect Christ-centred life. This was something that he was still striving towards.

We do however recognise with Paul the knowledge that one day he too would lay down his life and be martyred for the cause of Christ. He does not shrink back from this future event but keeps striding towards it. He is content to follow his saviour along that road.

Paul's maturity and spirituality may seem light years ahead of most Christians' experience but he states that he hasn't arrived yet and neither is he satisfied with staying where he is at. He is still chasing the goal.

5.3. PRESSING ON

Phil 3:13-16. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, {14} I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. {15} Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. {16} Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

Paul now uses the language of athletic games. He is like a runner who is focused singularly on the finishing line and is lunging forward to be first across the mark. Like the athlete he does not look back at the last bend but his focus is solely in front.

Paul was not a prisoner of the past; its hurts or its glories. He was a man of "one thing", and he kept pressing on until he reached the finishing line. Starting is easy, many people start many things, but finishing what we start is not so easy. Some quit what they are doing when difficulties arise, and

start something new. Dreams are easy and cheap, and require no perseverance. We should not quit believing, praying, expecting, witnessing, forgiving and loving. If we quit we will miss our destiny, we will rob others and lose our reward.

We need to be men and women of the one thing, allowing nothing to deviate our focus from our destiny. We should also walk according to the revelation we have received and we should maintain the standard to holiness and personal discipline.

5.4. ENEMIES OF THE CROSS

Phil 3:17-19. Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. {18} For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: {19} whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame; who set their mind on earthly things.

Within the communion of saints the mature believers demonstrate a lifestyle which others can emulate. More than teaching and doctrine the example of an exemplary Christian life can assist others to achieve spiritual maturity. We should be illustrating through our choices what it means to live a holy Christ-centred life. Such demonstrations of Christ's power to save and change are also the best witness to unbelievers.

There are other examples we should avoid. Paul recognises that among the ranks of believers there are those that walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their focus is on earthly things and they serve themselves. The things that they now value will ultimately be their shame when they face Jesus. In serving themselves they seek to avoid the demands of the cross. They do not want to die to self and they do not want to suffer loss or pain for the cause of Christ.

Referring to Paul's phrase that their God is their belly, F. B. Meyer writes:

“There is no chapel in their life. It is all kitchen.”¹⁷

The knowledge of this causes Paul, not anger, but weeping. He is distressed that the Saviour is not served better. The end of such a carnal lifestyle is destruction: the loss of all things. The end for false brethren who infiltrate the church is eternal damnation. The end for deceived or carnal believers Paul describes elsewhere:

1 Cor 3:14-15. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. {15} If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

5.5. HEAVENLY CITIZENS

Phil 3:20-21. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, {21} who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Philippi had the distinction of being a Roman colony. This gave them Roman protection and numerous privileges including being citizens of Rome. This was something the locals were very proud of and something which marked them out from the majority of the people in the Roman

¹⁷ Believer's Bible Commentary

Empire. Imagine the preparations that a city like Philippi would make if they knew that their Emperor was visiting. No expense would be spared in cleaning up the city and making his royal visit as grand and memorable as possible.

Paul seems to be drawing a parallel for the Christians. Indeed Moffat translates verse 20 as “We are a colony of heaven”. Our Lord is in heaven and as citizens of heaven we have many great privileges and we are protected by heaven’s authority and power.

Since we are eagerly awaiting the return of our Lord and King we too should be living in a state of readiness; not fearing a royal inspection.

When Jesus returns he will come as conqueror, subduing the nations for a thousand years. He will also transform the bodies of all the saints, whether dead or alive, delivering from these sinful and decaying bodies and making us like unto himself.

6. CHAPTER 4

6.1. UNITY

Phil 4:1-3. Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved. {2} I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. {3} And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

In view of the expected return of our Saviour the Philippians are to stand fast; holding on to their faith, their witness and their walk. Paul regards the Philippian church with a great deal of affection; they are beloved and longed-for. How Paul must have missed the freedom to visit all the cities where he had planted churches and raised up groups of believers who were grateful for the apostle’s ministry.

Verse 2 describes a sad issue of division between two female members of the church, who had apparently been prominent co-labourers with Paul in establishing the church at Philippi. Paul shows them both respect and implores each of them rather than commands them. Neither does Paul try and arbitrate with regard to the disagreement. They don’t need someone to act as judge in their quarrel. Instead they need to agree in the Lord, putting the cause of the kingdom before their differences and hurts.

Who is the “true companion” in verse 3? The letter has been written to the whole church not an individual. Some have suggested that the phrase should include a proper noun “loyal *Syzygus*”. Whoever it is Paul is urging them to intervene between these two women and arbitrate in their difference.

These women were among the initial disciples who worked along side Paul to establish the church. Their deeds have been recorded in heaven.

6.2. REJOICE

Phil 4:4. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

Rejoicing is a major theme of this letter from Paul the prisoner. Rejoicing in the Lord is an issue of the will; a decision we should make considering our salvation and the Lord’s grace and lovingkindness. We should not allow circumstances to make that decision make for us. Certainly

Paul demonstrates that he has chosen to rejoice in the Lord rather than complain about the injustice and hardship of his circumstances.

We need to keep rejoicing in the Lord; we need to maintain our heavenly perspective. Without joy, without thanksgiving we will spiritually dry up and life will become drudgery. Have we lost our joy? God wants to sanctify our emotions; to be Lord over our feelings. But we have to work out our salvation in this area, co-operating with the Spirit of sanctification, examining our feelings and choosing to put on the garment of praise.

The following are the other references to rejoicing in Philippians.

- Phil 1:18. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.
- Phil 2:16-18. holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or laboured in vain. {17} Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. {18} For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.
- Phil 2:28. Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful.
- Phil 3:1. Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.
- Phil 3:3. For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,
- Phil 4:10. But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.

These declarations are more startling when we consider that Paul was a prisoner awaiting trial and that he had been suffering severe want.

6.3. DEALING WITH ANXIETY

As he begins to draw this letter to a close Paul gives some general instruction using short, direct statements.

- Phil 4:5. Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

Gentleness should be a hall mark found in the lives of all believers. We should appear gentle and unthreatening to all people, not just to the church membership on Sundays. In our generation people seem to be willing to trample over others to get what they want. Road Rage is seen when they are driving and Trolley Rage is manifest in the super-markets. Aggression is opposite of the example that Jesus demonstrated, even when severely provoked.

What does Paul want to infer when he says that the Lord is at hand? Is it the imminent return of Jesus? Or is he stating that the Lord is present with the church at Philippi and the saints should trust in his presence but also live suitable lifestyles? Whichever Paul had intended all the warnings are worthy of our consideration.

- Phil 4:6-7. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; {7} and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Anxiety and fears attack the heart and the mind, undermining faith, trust and peace. Prayer in its various forms (supplication, thanksgiving and requests) is the antidote for anxiety. The consequence of prayer is a shield of peace being set about our hearts and minds. All our prayer should be “with thanksgiving”, which is a God honouring ingredient.

6.4. THINKING ARIGHT

Phil 4:8-9. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy; meditate on these things. {9} The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Character and conduct begin in the mind. We are to some degree that which we consistently think about. Paul’s admonition refers to what things we think about and also what we think about other people (just and good report). We are to avoid the critical analysis of others.

As disciples of Christ we are responsible for what we think about. Our thinking should be positive, pure, faith-filled and wholesome. We are to take every thought captive to obedience to Christ.

2 Cor 10:4-5. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, {5} casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

This is the battle ground of sanctification, testing every thought and rejecting everything that is not God honouring or of God; envy, lust, covetousness, bitterness, resentment, fear, doubt, pride, jealousy etc.

Satan wants to set up a stronghold in our thinking. This is thought process or attitude caused by the activity of an evil spirit and if unchecked could become a personal characteristic. Most people have some sort of stronghold in their thinking before they come to Christ: anger, bitterness, resentment, sexual lust, greed, pride, fear, doubt etc.

In the list of positive things we are to think about Paul says noble. Noble means lofty, elevated, impressive, admirable character or ideals.

The abiding shield of God’s peace Paul speaks of in verse 9, requires us to be living a life that is consistent with Biblical teaching and that our minds and hearts are manifesting inner purity. Paul points to his own life style as being totally consistent with Christian doctrine and as being an example that should be emulated.

6.5. GIVING AND RECEIVING

Phil 4:10-14. But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. {11} Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: {12} I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. {13} I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. {14} Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.

The practical help that the Philippians had sent Paul caused him great rejoicing and greatly eased his plight. He shares how he has learned in every circumstance the art of contentment in the Lord. The peace in his heart was not dependent upon whether he had all things he needed or whether he was suffering want. Whether the peace of God reigned within was determined by Paul's own attitude. This lesson was learned through many practical difficulties and trials. Paul's needs, which he describes as distressful, did not rob him of contentment, or peace with God. Such distresses caused no questioning or grumbling in heart or mind.

Paul boldly states that he can manage all circumstances and tasks through Christ. The will of God had taken Paul through some trying circumstances; into situations where he could not have coped in his own strength. When we are abased we need God's help and perspective. When we abound we need grace to keep us focused and dependent upon God.

He writes elsewhere:

1 Tim 6:6-8. Now godliness with contentment is great gain. {7} For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. {8} And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

We are passing through this world. So why should we concern ourselves with the hoarding and increasing our material possessions, which we shall soon leave behind. We can trust God to meet our necessities and needs, such as food and clothing. The world expects a lot more beside, but we should not.

Phil 4:15-20. Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. {16} For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. {17} Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. {18} Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. {19} And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. {20} Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Paul reminds the church of their past help. He describes their help not as giving only but rather as "giving and receiving", which we could describe as "sowing and reaping". Paul's sees the saints' participation in these things as good spiritual fruit, and proof of their maturing in the Lord.

Heaven is watching how we live our lives. We each have an account in heaven. Perhaps there are different columns in this ledger. One for prayer, one for fasting, one for Bible study, one for faith, one for tithe owed and one for gifts given and sacrifices made. Before we can make a withdrawal, there must be the spiritual funds in our account. For example Jesus told his disciples that one young boy could not be delivered from demonic powers, unless the person ministering had put in sufficient prayer and fasting.¹⁸

Paul recognised that the Philippians gift would cause an investment resulting in abounding fruitfulness. In talking about a sweet smelling aroma Paul is making a reference to the Free Will offerings in the Old Testament.

In verse 19 we have an unlimited and yet conditional promise. God wishes to supply all our needs. There is no limit to what God can do. His superabundance was demonstrated in the feeding of the

¹⁸ Mark 9:18-29

5000, in the supply of manna and quail; in the widow's grain and oil supply. His storehouses are inexhaustible. His supply routes can never all be blocked. It can appear on the ground every morning, be brought by ravens, and be supplied through other people. However all the promises of God are conditional. Are we seeking first His Kingdom; are we walking in faith; are we sowing so that our account is in credit?

God is glorified through these spiritual laws of supply (verse 19).

It has been said that the last part of a person to be saved is their wallet. Perhaps this is why there is so much teaching on this issue in Scripture. Jesus said:

Luke 16:10-13. "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. {11} Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? {12} And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? {13} No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

The way we fulfil our stewardship responsibilities in the natural is the same way we fulfil them in the spiritual. We are only stewards of the things that we possess, they are not our own, and we are accountable for the way we use these things. The way we handle these things determines what spiritual treasures we will be given.

People, who cannot break through and surrender their finances to God, suffer spiritual lack in many areas. They are devoid of true riches. Jesus does not say that it is bad idea to try and serve God and wealth, but he says emphatically it can't be done.

6.6. FAREWELL

Phil 4:21-23. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. {22} All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household. {23} The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Paul closes in typical style. Something worthy of note is the greeting from the Christians with "Caesar's household". The Caesar at the time was the infamous Nero. Right under this fearful dictators nose there were followers of Christ. This is a testimony to the power of the gospel that was infiltrating every aspect of Roman life.

