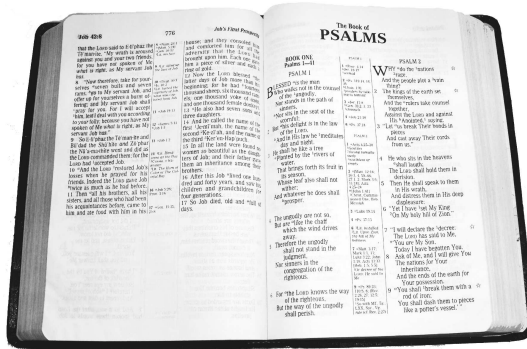


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



September 2017

Psalm 112
Philippians

Blessed is the man who fears the LORD

This psalm is a companion to the previous psalm which declares the glorious character and acts of God. Psalm 112 describes the character and behaviour of the godly person (compare verses 3 and 4 in each psalm). *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom* (111:10) and those who fear God are blessed indeed! *Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in his commandments* (1). When we truly love the Lord, obedience to his Word is not a burden but a delight. The descendants of the godly make an impact for great good in society when they follow in the righteous ways of their parents (2). Material blessings are often emphasised in the Old Testament (3) but we have no right to expect or to demand wealth from God. We are warned against seeking to be rich (1 Timothy 6:6–10). The New Testament emphasises the spiritual riches of the believer (eg. Ephesians 2:7). Spurgeon describes these as: ‘contentment, peace, security, power in prayer, promises, providence, yea, God himself’ (TREASURY OF DAVID).

The godly man is *gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous* (4). He is generous and stable in character, and discreet in guiding his personal affairs (5–6,9). The believer is not spared dark periods in his life but he trusts in the Lord knowing that his trials are not forever. Light will arise in the darkness and he is not afraid of the future (4,7–8). The psalm closes by showing the difference with the ungodly (10). Life without God is very dark and the outlook is bleak! **Do you fear the LORD and delight greatly in his commandments?**

*How blest is life if lived for thee
My loving Saviour and my Lord;
No pleasures that the world can give
Such perfect gladness can afford.*

*All day to walk beneath thy smile,
Watching thine eye to guide me still,
To rest at night beneath thy care,
Guarded by thee from every ill.*

(Prust’s supplementary Hymn Book, 1869)

PHILIPPIANS

Philippi was a Roman colony in the province of Macedonia (Acts 16:12); as a colony, its government and customs were modelled on those of Rome. The Philippian church was the first church that Paul established in Europe (Acts 16:9–40).

Paul wrote this letter from prison in Rome between AD 61 and AD 63. He wrote to thank the Philippians for their generous financial support brought to him by one of their leaders, Epaphroditus (4:18). He wanted to reassure them that his imprisonment had *turned out for the furtherance of the gospel* (1:12–26). He also dealt with a threat to the unity of the church on account of friction between two of its women (1:27 to 2:4; 4:2). There is a great emphasis on Christian joy in the letter (in which the words 'joy' and 'rejoice' are found sixteen times).

Outline of Philippians

- | | | |
|---|---|-------------|
| 1. Opening greetings | – | 1:1–2 |
| 2. Paul's thanksgiving and prayer | – | 1:3–11 |
| 3. Paul's situation at Rome | – | 1:12–26 |
| 4. The necessity of Christian unity | – | 1:27 to 2:4 |
| 5. The humiliation and exaltation of Christ | – | 2:5–11 |
| 6. Working out our salvation | – | 2:12–18 |
| 7. Commendation of Timothy and Epaphroditus | | 2:19–30 |
| 8. Warning against false teaching | – | 3:1–21 |
| 9. Final exhortations | – | 4:1–9 |
| 10. Paul's gratitude for their gifts | – | 4:10–20 |
| 11. Closing greetings | – | 4:21–23 |

I have found the commentary on Philippians by Willkiam Henriksen (published by Banner of Truth) very helpful.

N.B. The letter of Paul to the Philippians is so rich and wonderful in teaching that we shall repeat some readings for two or more days to give more space for explanation. **Do meditate on these repeated readings of Scripture each day so that they will be impressed on your mind and heart.**

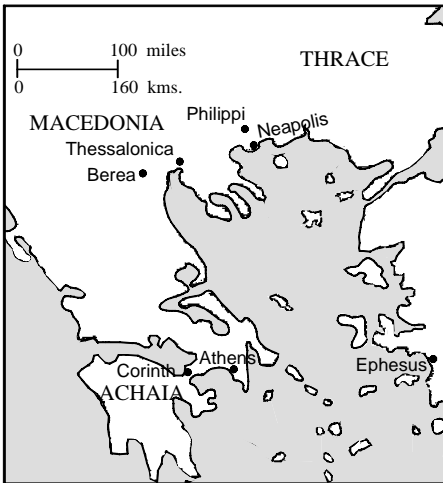
Servants ... saints ... bishops and deacons

Paul describes Timothy and himself as *servants of Jesus Christ* (1). Peter and Jude also introduce themselves in the same manner in their letters (2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1). The Greek word for *servants* means ‘slaves’. All Christians have been bought at a price (with the blood of Christ). We should always remember that we are Christ’s servants who must obey him (1 Corinthians 3:23; 6:19–20; 7:22).

The church at Philippi was made up of *saints in Christ Jesus ... with the bishops and deacons* (1).

- *Saints* are those whom the Lord Jesus has set apart to glorify him. All Christians are *called to be saints* (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2). We must live for God in this evil world as *saints in Christ Jesus*.
- *Bishops* are the overseers (that is what the Greek word means). They function within a local church as preaching and ruling elders, shepherding the flock of God to feed them and to build them up in the faith (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1–4). Notice that there was a plurality of *bishops* within the Philippian church. The elders of the church at Ephesus are also described as *overseers* (same Greek word translated *bishops*; Acts 20:17,28). The qualities required for those who would be elders are found in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9.
- *Deacons*; the Greek word means ‘servant’; it is also translated *minister* (eg. Ephesians 3:7; 6:21; Colossians 1:7,23,25). In the New Testament, this ministry is associated with service and the supply of material need (eg. Romans 15:25; 2 Corinthians 8:4). Deacons today are often viewed as administrators in the church, but the office must always be seen as one of spiritual service requiring godly men (Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:8–13).

God bestows his *grace* and *peace* upon every Christian (2). **We are not all called to be overseers or deacons, but we are called to live as saints and to serve Christ. How are you doing?**

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you

The church at Philippi had its problems (there is no such thing as a perfect church on earth), but the apostle was able to pray for them with thankfulness and joy. He wrote, *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy* (3–4). Why was Paul so thankful to God and joyful in his prayers for the Philippian church? It was for their *fellowship in the gospel* which

had continued from the time that they had come to Christ (5).

The Greek word translated *fellowship* means ‘a sharing of the same things’; it is also translated *communion* (1 Corinthians 10:16; 2 Corinthians 6:14; 13:14). The Philippians were partakers with Paul (sharers) of the grace of God (7). Christian fellowship is more than meeting together for worship, praise and prayer (though these are most important). It is having our fellow-believers in our heart (7) and this results in having a practical concern for their well-being! When Paul was out of sight, he was not out of mind as far as the Philippians were concerned. They had supported him with their prayers and gifts in the past and continued to do so now that he was in prison (4:14–18).

Fellowship involves giving as well as taking – that is what sharing is about. **How practical are you in Christian fellowship? Is your life a blessing to others so that whenever they think of you, they are thankful to God for every remembrance of you and they are able to pray for you with joy?**

He who has begun a good work in you will complete it

We are again repeating our reading; please do not skip it – repetition is useful.

Some of us begin jobs but leave them half-finished or we abandon them altogether. We must be very thankful that God is not like that. Paul was able to assert that he was *confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ* (6). Think about God’s work of salvation in our lives: He chose us in Christ before he made the world (Ephesians 1:4). He has called us and justified us and he will one day take us to heaven to glorify us. (Romans 8:30). There are no drop-outs among those who are truly saved!

We are painfully aware of our remaining sin and weaknesses. If we are troubled with lack of assurance of our salvation let us think about the things that God has done in us to make us a new creation in Christ. He will complete the good work that he has begun in us. The great completion day will be at the return of the Lord Jesus (*‘the day of Jesus Christ’*) when we will have new bodies (*‘the redemption of our body’* – Romans 8:23). God is able to keep us from stumbling and we will be presented faultless before him with exceeding joy (Jude 24).

We are secure in Christ, but that does not mean that we do not have to do anything to progress in the Christian life (2:12–13). Progress is often painful and we must expect trials and chastening which are part of God’s work in us (Hebrews 12:5–11; 1 Peter 4:12–14). **God who created all the universe, loves us and is working in our lives. What a privileged people we are, and how it should humble us and excite us to adoring worship and grateful praise!**

*The work which his goodness began,
The arm of his strength will complete;
His promise is Yea and Amen,
And never was forfeited yet.*

(Augustus M. Toplady)

That your love may abound still more and more in knowledge

Paul was confident that God would complete the good work that he had begun in the Philippians (6). This did not mean, however, that he had no need to pray for them. The Lord uses our prayers and he encourages us to pray (eg. Luke 18:1). The apostle's love for the Philippians gave him a great concern for their well-being which drove him to pray for them (8–9). Love for our fellow-believers, for unsaved relatives and friends should drive us to our knees.

Paul's prayer for the Philippian Christians gives us some idea of how we should pray for each other (9–11). We are often vague in our prayers (eg. 'Lord, bless so-and-so'). We must be more specific and tell God how we want him to bless those for whom we pray.

How then should we pray for each other? We should pray that our love for God *may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment* (9). We all need to increase in our knowledge of God and his Word however long we have been saved. We also need to know how to apply God's word so that we are able to discern and recognise false teaching, especially that there are so many false teachers waiting to deceive us.

'Love ... knowledge and all discernment' (9). These are essential for us that we *may approve the things that are excellent*, that we *may be sincere and without offence* until Christ returns (10). The Greek word translated '*sincere*' is better rendered '*pure*' as in 2 Peter 3:1 and in the English Standard Version. The healthy Christian has a godly character. We all need to be more godly, *being filled with the fruits of righteousness*, which come through Jesus Christ (11; cp. John 15:2,5). All this brings glory and praise to God who has made us to glorify him and to enjoy him forever (cp. Matthew 5:16; John 15:8). **Let us meditate on Paul's prayer and take it up as we pray for ourselves and for others.**

For the furtherance of the gospel

We do not find any trace of self-pity in Paul as he refers to his imprisonment. He was more concerned for the progress of the gospel than what had happened to himself. He could have felt frustrated and bitter because he was no longer in a position to plant churches, but no, he saw the sovereign hand of God in all his circumstances. His imprisonment had not hindered the spread of the gospel, rather it had *actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel* (12). His chains were *in Christ* and all the soldiers of the palace heard the gospel as they took their turn to guard Paul (13). Not only that, Paul's example had encouraged the Christian men in the church at Rome to be more bold in proclaiming the Word of God (14). William Hendriksen observes, 'When the apostle went to Rome as a prisoner, it was in reality the gospel that went to Rome.' (COMMENTARY ON PHILIPPIANS, page 68). Paul not only wrote to the Ephesians, but also to the Philippians, Colossians and Philemon during this imprisonment. What a great blessing these letters have been to Christians throughout the ages!

Some preachers proclaim the gospel from wrong motives but Paul rejoiced that God sovereignly worked for good even through the preaching of insincere men (15–18). Many people are still saved through preachers whose lives are not consistent with their profession. This does not excuse such men (cp. Matthew 7:22–23), but it does show that God is gracious.

How do you react to adverse and perplexing circumstances or disappointments in your life? Do they overwhelm you, or do you see that *in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us* (Romans 8:37)? **Our attitude to our circumstances makes all the difference!** We must trust God even when we cannot trace his ways. Remember Joseph's words to his brothers, '*You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good*' (Genesis 50:20). God works all things together for good to those who love him (Romans 8:28). Let us take heart, trust in God and rejoice in him!

For to me, to live is Christ

True Christian fellowship involves praying for one another. Paul prayed for the Philippians and they prayed for him (4–5,19). He was confident that their prayers and the supply of the Holy Spirit would turn out for his deliverance. He expected to be released from prison but this was not certain (26–27; 2:24). Whatever the outcome, Paul wanted Christ to be magnified in his body *whether by life or by death* (20). He could write, *For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain* (21).

It is far easier to say, ‘*For to me, to live is Christ*’, than to actually live for him. What does it mean to live for Christ?

- It is to love the Lord Jesus more than anyone or anything in all the world. It is to esteem him as far more precious than any earthly honour or status (3:7–8). Do you have, or do you desire to have, a deeper love and devotion to Christ?
- It means that Christ is magnified in our lives (20). He is magnified in our bodies when we refuse to allow sin to reign in us (Romans 6:12–13). He is magnified in us when we obey him.
- It is to have a Christlike spirit, being humble and shunning all selfish ambition, having a practical concern for others (2:3–5). *For to me, to live is Christ* means that the old way of life (‘for to me, to live is self’) must go. Do you really want to be more Christlike?
- It is to be prepared to suffer for the Lord Jesus (1:29; 3:10).
- It is to have a praising and prayerful heart (4:4–7).
- It is to fill our minds with pure and wholesome thoughts (4:8).
- It is to learn contentment in all kinds of circumstances (4:11–12).

We must live for Christ. This alone is the pathway of blessing, joy and usefulness in our lives.

*How blest is life if lived for thee
My loving Saviour and my Lord;
No pleasures that the world can give
Such perfect gladness can afford.*

(Prust’s Supplementary Hymn Book, 1869)

For to me, to live is Christ, to die is gain

Paul was expecting to be released from prison (25–26) but he knew that if God chose to lead him the way of martyrdom (which eventually did happen following a later imprisonment) Christ would be magnified (20). He knew that if God spared him, he could continue to strengthen the Philippian church and others, but for himself, heaven was a far better option (23–24). It was for this reason that he was able to write, *For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain* (21). Death snatches us from those we love and brings the destruction of our body. How can it be gain to die when death parts us from those we love?

- Paul had no fear of dying, knowing that being absent from the body, he would be present with Christ *which is far better* (22–24). We may fear the process of dying and the parting from our loved-ones, but death should hold no terror for the Christian. Notice Paul's certainty concerning the glorious future of the Christian when he writes to the Corinthian church: *'We are confident, yes well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord'* (2 Corinthians 5:8). If we die before Jesus comes again, we do not immediately have 'resurrection bodies'. They will be given to us at the return of the Lord (3:20–21).

- In heaven, we will see our blessed Saviour (Revelation 22:4) and we will be reunited with all our Christian friends who died before us. We will worship God with all the believers from the past. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord* (Revelation 14:13).

- In heaven, we will be made perfect. We will no longer be troubled by temptation or sin. We will no longer be attacked by the devil or his angels. The fiery trials will be a thing of the past. Sickness, pain and death will be no more (cp. Revelation 21:4). We will know everlasting joy and peace in our glorious eternal home. *For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain ... to depart and be with Christ is far better.*

Let us think about how the Christian gains when he dies and be encouraged to serve the Lord wholeheartedly while we live.

To you it has been granted ... also to suffer for his sake

The Philippians were residents of a Roman colony (Acts 16:12) and they would have understood the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship. Paul urged them to show by their conduct that they were citizens of heaven (27). The Greek word for *conduct* (translated *conversation* AV) means ‘life as a citizen’. Just as a Roman colony represented the city of Rome, so the Philippian Christians were to show by their behaviour that they were citizens of heaven. The same principle applies to every Christian. How do you represent Christ in your home, in the church or at your place of work?

We are not to be terrified by the enemies of the gospel. When they persecute us it is a proof of their ultimate destruction, but of our salvation (28). We must expect suffering in the Christian life! Never listen to those who teach that the Christian life is easy (see John 15:18–21)! Let us ponder verse 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*. God has granted suffering for Christ as a blessing! How is suffering a blessing from God? The Lord Jesus promised blessing and glory to those who are persecuted (Matthew 5:10–12). When we are reproached for the name of Christ we are blessed, *the Spirit of glory and of God* rests upon us (1 Peter 4:12–14).

The Philippians had seen Paul suffering when he was cruelly beaten and imprisoned in their city (Acts 16:19–24) and they were also *having the same conflict* (30). **Are you prepared to accept suffering as a blessing bestowed by God? If you are, it will make all the difference in your life when trouble comes to you.**

*Believe not those who say
The upward path is smooth,
Lest thou shouldst stumble in the way
And faint before the truth.* (Ann Brontë)

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit

The word ‘If’ appears four times in verse 1. *If there is any consolation (encouragement) in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,* we must be united in mind and purpose. We must love one another. Paul writes of his joy being completed, not by his release from prison, but by his beloved Philippians being united (1–2). Two women, Euodia and Syntyche were quarrelling (4:2) and their dispute was threatening the unity of the church. Our conduct is only *worthy of the gospel of Christ* as we live in unity with our fellow-believers in our own local church. We must with one mind strive *together for the faith of the gospel* if we are to see the blessing of God on our work (1:27; cp. Ephesians 4:1–6).

Wrong motives in any work for Christ are a threat to Christian unity. It is possible to work for Christ for the wrong reasons (1:15–16). *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself* (3). Selfish ambition and pride in Christians have torn apart many a church and destroyed many a good Christian work. We may ‘pride’ ourselves on not being selfish but do we esteem others better than ourselves and seek their interests before our own? If our Christianity is genuine (1), we will have the attitude described in verses 3 and 4. **To have such an attitude is one of the hardest things in all the world, but Christ calls us to deny ourselves. We are able, with his help, to follow his example.**

*How sweet, how heavenly is the sight,
When those who love the Lord
In one another’s peace delight,
And so fulfil his word!*

*When free from envy, scorn and pride,
Our wishes all above,
Each can his brother’s failings hide
And show a brother’s love.*

(Joseph Swain).

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus

Paul drives home his appeal for unity and humility with one of the most wonderful and moving passages in the whole of the Bible (5–11). How are we to deal with the sins of selfishness and pride in our lives? We must take to heart the example of the Lord Jesus: *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus* (5).

The Son of God is equal with the Father but he took *the form of a servant* (Greek ‘doulos’ = ‘slave’), and was obedient to the Father’s will, even to the point of submitting to torture and death on the cross (6–8; cp. Matthew 26:36–44). The Lord Jesus washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper, but they went on to argue about which one of them was *the greatest* (Luke 22:24–27; John 13:1–5). What kind of mind or attitude should we have? We should take a delight in serving one another for the sake of our precious Saviour. The Lord Jesus said, ‘*Whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave*’ (Matthew 20:26–27).

Let us ponder this! The Lord Jesus completely denied himself to pay the highest possible price to save us from our sin, from Satan and from eternal hell. He is now *highly exalted* in heavenly splendour and one day we will gaze on him, admire him, adore him and worship him in heaven. Do you love the Lord? Do you rejoice in awe and wonder at the greatness of his love for you? **Do you desire with all your heart to please him? Then you must have his mind and attitude and be Christlike in your life.** You must get along with your fellow Christians and love them, however difficult some of them may be (and they will answer to God for that).

*May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Live in me from day to day,
By his love and power controlling
All I do and say.*

(Katie B. Wilkinson)

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling

The Philippians highly regarded Paul and had always obeyed his instructions for living the Christian life. He urged them to continue to show this obedience in his absence and this meant taking to heart his appeal for unity and humility and selfless giving to each other. When he was with them, they were encouraged by his presence, but he was concerned that they continued to work out the demands of the Christian life in his absence. Perhaps Euodia and Syntyche (4:2) would have maintained their unity in the Lord, had he remained at Philippi?

We love godly Christian leaders, but it is possible to lean on them too much. The Philippians had to learn to work out their *own salvation* in the apostle's absence. We cannot save ourselves because salvation is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8–10) We must however, work out our salvation by showing the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives. *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling* (12). This salvation must be worked out *with fear and trembling* (that is with awe and reverence). This fear and trembling does not lead to despair or the loss of Christian joy. The fact that God is working in each Christian enables us to work out our salvation.

We have already seen that it is God who has begun the good work of salvation in us and who will complete it (1:6). Paul reminded the Philippians that God was working in them *both to will and to do for his good pleasure* (13). We do not struggle alone in trying to work out salvation in our lives. The almighty God works in every believer making us willing and able to please him. **The Christian life is not easy, but it is the best life, it is eternal life. If you are struggling, remember your privileges in Christ.** As you seek to please him, denying yourself, you will discover that he is working in you. You will find that you are making progress in the Christian life and you will enjoy the smile of God upon you. Are you working *out your own salvation with fear and trembling?*

Do all things without complaining and disputing

One of the ways in which we work out our *own salvation with fear and trembling* is to *do all things without complaining and disputing* (14). God has called us to shine as lights in the world (16; cp. Matthew 5:14–16; Ephesians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:5). We are the children of God and we must have a good testimony that the world cannot fault. If we moan and complain when asked to do something that we do not like doing, what kind of impression do we give to those who do not know Christ? They will not be attracted to him and who could blame them for rejecting an inconsistent witness?

If we are not cheerful about obeying God's will, we will not shine as lights in the world. Many people around us are discontented and unhappy. They are always complaining because their lives without God are empty. We must show them by our cheerful disposition that we are different. They will then be more prepared to listen to us as we hold fast (or hold up) *the word of life* (16). It is a privilege to shine as lights in this dark, sinful world, to glorify God by leading godly lives.

Paul looked forward to *the day of Christ* when he would be able to rejoice over the Philippian Christians that his labour among them had not been in vain. The prospect of martyrdom did not daunt him. If his life was poured out as a drink offering (cp. Numbers 28:7) to add to the sacrifice and service of the Philippians (cp. 1:29), he would be glad and rejoice with them and he encouraged them to rejoice with him (16–18). **What kind of person are you? Do you grumble and complain, or are you cheerful as you go about your daily work?**

*Teach me to live! no idler let me be
But in thy service hand and heart employ,
Prepared to do thy bidding cheerfully,
Be this my highest, this my holiest joy.*

(Ellen E. Burman)

But you know his proven character

In the last section of this chapter, Paul writes of three planned visits to the Philippians – by Timothy (19–23), by himself (24), and by Epaphroditus (25–30). They were all excellent examples of men who fulfilled verses 3 and 4. Today we turn our attention to Timothy.

Paul promised that as soon as he heard the verdict from his appeal to Caesar (and he was expecting to be released), he would send Timothy to them before coming himself (23–24). He wanted Timothy to care for them and to encourage him by reporting back to him with news of them (19–20).

Paul had a band of faithful workers such as Luke, Aristarchus and Titus who were probably away at that time serving on various missions. He was probably referring to false teachers when he wrote, *‘For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus’* (21). He may also have had in mind Christians who were motivated by self-interest. We were reminded in the notes on verse 3 that selfish ambition blights Christian service. Timothy was a different, however! Paul had first met him while on his second missionary journey at Lystra (Acts 16:1–3). Even as a young man, Timothy had been highly regarded by the Christians in his region. From then on he became one of Paul’s most highly valued friends and fellow workers. His relationship to the apostle was like that of a son to his father. Paul could write of him, *But you know his proven character* (22).

Proven character is a vital asset in the service of God. As a child, Timothy’s thinking had been moulded by Scripture. He owed much to the godly training of his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). Like Paul, he lived for Christ. The apostle could commend him because of his *proven character*. Godly character does not come without pain (see Romans 5:3–4). The Lord uses trial, suffering and hardship to build character. **The godly man or woman who can always be relied upon and who has *proven character* is a priceless asset to any church. What are you like?**

My brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier

Epaphroditus belonged to the Philippian church and they had sent him to carry their gift to Paul (4:18). His name which was common in those days, means, ‘devoted to Aphrodite’ (the Greek goddess of love). He was now a Christian and he had a new love, a new devotion. It is obvious that he loved his precious Saviour and that he delighted in serving him. Epaphroditus took back to his church the letter of Paul which we are now reading. While away from Philippi, he had been very ill and close to death. The news of his illness had reached his church causing some anxiety (26–27). He had risked his life to go to Rome with their gift for the apostle. He had done this *for the work of Christ* and Paul urged them to receive him *in the Lord with all gladness* (29–30). He urged the Philippians to hold godly leaders such as Timothy and Epaphroditus in esteem (29). Do you honour God’s servants?

Paul described Epaphroditus as ‘*my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier*’ (25).

- They were united in the Christian faith (*my brother*). Paul was most grateful to Epaphroditus who had ministered to his need at great personal risk. We are children of God and this is shown in our concern for one another.
- They were united in the work of the gospel (*fellow worker*). Paul and Epaphroditus had put the need of *the work of Christ* before any personal consideration.
- They were united in the battle against the powers of darkness and false teaching (*fellow soldier*).

All Christians have needs. Epaphroditus and the Philippians saw Paul’s need and ministered to it (25). Do you seek to make yourself aware of the needs of others (without being a busybody)? What are you doing to minister to their needs? Such ministry may be very costly, but it is of great value in the church. **What kind of brother (or sister), fellow worker, or fellow soldier are you?**

We are the circumcision, who ... have no confidence in the flesh

Paul was about to close his letter, writing, *Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord* (1), when he felt the need to warn them against false teachers, particularly Judaizers (2–11) and sensualists, who lived for their own lusts and who *set their mind on earthly things* (17–19). The church has always been under threat from false teaching and the apostle emphasises the need for vigilance with a threefold ‘*Beware*’. He was not polite about those people who perverted the gospel of Christ. He wrote, ‘*Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!*’ (2). We must never compromise with false teaching nor welcome false teachers among us. Christian leaders must build up and encourage the church with good and solid teaching from God’s Word. They also have a solemn duty to warn against false teachers and to be intolerant of them (cp. Matthew 7:15–20; Acts 20:27–31; 1 Tim. 1:3).

The Judaizers gloried in the mutilation of the flesh. They insisted that Gentile Christians had to be *circumcised according to the custom of Moses* in order to be saved (Acts 15:1). The circumcision required by God however is a spiritual work wrought by the Holy Spirit in the heart (3; cp. Romans 2:29; Colossians 2:11). Those who know this ‘circumcision’ in their heart *worship God in the Spirit* being motivated and directed by him who has worked within them (cp. John 4:23–24). They *rejoice in Christ Jesus* and not in religious rites such as circumcision, and they *have no confidence in the flesh* (3). **We must rely entirely on the Lord Jesus and his work of dying on the cross and rising from the dead for our salvation.** If we place any confidence in our own works or ritual for salvation we are heading for disaster.

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.
On Christ the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.*

(Edward Mote)

What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ

If anyone could have confidence in the flesh, it was Paul. He more than fulfilled the requirements of the Judaizers. He was circumcised according to the law of Moses and was of excellent Jewish stock. He had been a Pharisee and could not be faulted for his zeal in keeping the law. This zeal for the law had driven him to persecute the church (4–6). What was Paul's attitude to these things now? *But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ* (7).

Paul was aware that his former trust in his Jewish pedigree and training to obtain salvation had been a great hindrance to his trusting in Christ. We must never think that we are right before God because we enjoy certain privileges or do certain things. Here are some modern examples of misplaced trust:

- 'I was born in a Christian country.' Where we are born does not make us a Christian.
- 'I was brought up in a Christian home.' This is a great privilege, but it cannot save you. You must have a personal experience of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in your life.
- 'I go to church.' Judas Iscariot and many other wicked people attended places of worship
- 'I have been baptized.' Baptism cannot save you; beware of placing your trust in it.
- 'I always try to do good.' This is highly commendable but it can be a great hindrance to you and keep you from seeing your great need of Christ to save you from your sins.
- 'I never do anyone any harm.' We are all sinners against God and we will be judged for our sin.

If you are not a Christian, the things that you may imagine will gain you favour with God, you must count loss for Christ. You must not trust in them but count them as rubbish if you are to gain Christ (8). This is not a criticism of good and wholesome practices, but of trusting in them to save us. **There is a world of difference between being religious and being a Christian!**

The excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus

For Paul, the most precious and desirable treasure was *the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus* (8). What is this ‘surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus’ (ESV)?

- It is far more than knowing about Jesus; it is enjoying a personal relationship with him (*the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*; 8).
- It is to *gain Christ* (8). This means gaining the perfect, eternal, merciful, gracious, glorious Son of God to be our Saviour, our Lord and our dearest Friend. This is a wonderful privilege!
- It means to *be found in him* (9), not relying on our own goodness to save us, but on his righteousness which God imputes to us (or ‘puts to our account’). This means that we are no longer condemned for our sins (Romans 8:1).

If we are genuine in our Christian faith, we will want to know God better. How can we obtain a more real and practical knowledge of God in our experience? William Hendriksen points the way: ‘One gains such experiential knowledge by wide-awake attendance at public worship and proper use of the sacraments (Heb. 10:25; cf. Matt. 18:20; 28:19; Luke 22:14–20; 1 Corinthians 11:17–24); by showing kindness to all, practising the forgiving spirit, above all love; by learning to be thankful; by studying the Word of Christ both devotionally and exegetically so that it dwells in the heart; by singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to the glory of God, and continuing steadfastly in prayer; and thus by redeeming the time as a witness of Christ to all men (Col. 3:12–17; 4:2–6)’ (COMMENTARY ON PHILIPPIANS, pages 167–168). **A lazy, easy-going attitude to the things of God will never bring us closer to Christ. A daily experience of fellowship with Christ will keep us from backsliding and will bring a contentment and joy that this world cannot know.**

*O that my soul could love and praise him more,
His beauties trace, his majesty adore;
Live near his heart, upon his bosom lean;
Obey his voice, and all his will esteem.* (William Gadsby)

The fellowship of his sufferings

We saw yesterday that Paul's supreme ambition was to know the Lord Jesus better. He writes of *the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus* (8). He also wanted to be more like his precious Saviour. This involves knowing *the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death* (10). The desire to know the power of his resurrection is not a desire for power to feed selfish ambition (cp. 2:3). It is the daily experience of his power in our lives to cleanse us from sin and to make us more holy so that we glorify God; it is power to practise the graces of self-denial and humility.

Most of us would love to have more of God's power in our lives, but are we prepared to go the way of suffering? We have already seen that suffering comes to us as a favour from God (1:29). This suffering is more than that which is experienced by every human being whether Christian or not (eg. sickness, disappointment, pain, grief). It is suffering because we belong to Christ – denying ourselves and taking up our cross each day, (Luke 9:23). This means making choices that cut across our own desires for the sake of Christ, not taking the easy or most comfortable option. *The fellowship of his sufferings* means that some will mock us and despise us because of our faith and love for Christ; it means enduring hatred and persecution for the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12–14).

If we want to know Christ better and be more like him we have to be *conformed to his death* (10; cp. Romans 8:13). This means dying to sinful desires and avoiding any path that we know will lead us into temptation. Paul was not casting any doubt on whether he would be raised in the day of Christ in verse 11. He knew that dying to self brings life in the risen Saviour and at the end, glory. Then, he, and those of us who belong to Christ, will be free from sin and will see him. **Are you willing to follow Christ on the pathway of suffering as well as of joy? What do you know about *the fellowship of his sufferings*?**

I press on

There is no perfection for us this side of heaven, but that does not mean that we should not aim to be perfect. If we do not aim at anything we are bound to miss, but if we have an aim, we may get a little nearer to the target. Paul is at pains to point this out in these verses: *Not that I have already attained, or am now perfected; but I press on* (12). The Greek verb, ‘to press’ (12,14) is from the same word as that translated, *persecuting* (6). There was no complacency about the apostle’s attitude to working out his salvation (2:12). He pressed on, he exerted himself to lead a godly life and to grow in the knowledge of his Saviour.

Paul often used the Greek games to illustrate his attitude to the Christian life (cp. 2:16; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27; 2 Timothy 4:7–8). Notice the single-minded and determined attitude of the apostle in his running of the race: *One thing I do ... I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus* (12–14). In the Christian race, we also have to *press on ... press toward the goal for the prize*. Those who are mature in Christ will always have this attitude and will never pretend that they have already ‘arrived’ (15–16).

The successful athlete does not look behind him as he runs. We too must *press on ... forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead* (12–13). We must not become discouraged because of past failure or complacent because of recent success. **Let us think of the discipline and dedication of any successful athlete. Are we prepared to be as keen to discipline our lives for Christ so that we will increase in our knowledge of God?**

*Long as my life shall last,
Teach me thy way!
Where'er my lot be cast,
Teach me thy way!
Until the race is run,
Until the journey's done,
Until the crown is won,
Teach me thy way!*

(B. Mansell Ramsey)

The enemies of the cross of Christ

False teaching comes from many directions. Paul had warned the Philippians against the Judaizers who insisted that Gentile Christians must also keep Jewish ritual and tradition in order to be saved (2). He now warns against the sensualists who were against keeping any rules. These people are *the enemies of the cross of Christ* (18–19). They teach that ‘anything goes’ and give themselves over to unrestrained lust in order to fulfil their own selfish greed and immoral desires. The apostle had a great love for the Philippians and as he writes, the tears flow from his eyes. He is weeping because these *enemies of the cross of Christ* are trying to turn the members of the first church established in Europe from the gospel of Christ.

We must always recognise that false teachers and those who live for sensualism are *the enemies of the cross of Christ*. They preach self-indulgence, whereas the friends of the cross of Christ preach self-denial (Luke 9:23). Their god is their stomach, they set their mind on earthly things and they are doomed to destruction (18–19). It is a solemn thing to notice that the apostle says that there are *many* who lead this self-indulgent way of life while claiming to be Christians. The same peril is still with us at the end of the twentieth century.

What were the *earthly things* on which they had set their mind (19)? They are things such as immorality, indecency, filthy desires, covetousness, foul temper, malice, blasphemy and filthy language (Colossians 3:2, 5, 8). These things are not permitted for any Christian, nor should we want to set our mind on *earthly things* if we truly love the Lord. These things are our deadly enemies! The apostle Peter writes, ‘*Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul*’ (1 Peter 2:11). We must never look to lukewarm or worldly-minded professing Christians for an example. They are not right with God! Paul urges the Philippians to follow his example and that of other godly people (17). **Is your life a pattern of heavenly-mindedness and godly living, an example worth following?**

Our citizenship is in heaven

Philippi was a Roman colony (Acts 16:12), and its people prided themselves in their Roman citizenship with all its privileges. Paul reminded the Philippian Christians that they had a more glorious citizenship: *Our citizenship is in heaven* (20). Our names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20; Hebrews 12:23) and God is our heavenly Father who loves us and cares for us (Matthew 6:25–33). We are part of a wonderful family which is in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 3:15). We have Christian loved-ones and friends who are now in heaven and one day we will join them.

As citizens of heaven, we must not set our minds on *earthly things* (19). Any Christian who truly loves the Lord Jesus will not follow the vile practices that are common in the world. There is always the danger, however, for us to become preoccupied with the things of this life. We must *seek those things which are above* (Colossians 3:1) and remember that we are *strangers and pilgrims on the earth, desiring a heavenly country* (Hebrews 11:13–16).

Are you eagerly waiting for the return of Christ from heaven (20)?

What a wonderful day that will be! He will transform our poor, weak, decaying bodies, raising them to immortality (21; cp. 1 Corinthians 15:51–53; 1 John 3:2). He is almighty in his power *by which he is able to subdue all things to himself* and he will transform our bodies by that same power. Do you groan within yourself (Romans 8:23) on account of physical weakness, disability, or constant pain and discomfort? When our blessed Saviour returns, *there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain* (Revelation 21:4). Let us *rejoice in the Lord* (3:1) and *stand fast* in him (4:1) for *our citizenship is in heaven*.

*We are travelling home to God
In the way the fathers trod;
They are happy now, and we,
Soon their happiness shall see.* (John Cennick)

Stand fast in the Lord

Paul had a great love and affection for the Philippian Christians. Notice how he addresses them as *'My beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown'* (4:1; cp. 1:8). Many of these Christians had been converted through his ministry at Philippi and his love for them is a challenge to all of us. Pastors must have a self-sacrificing love for every member of their church (even those who are difficult and awkward) and Christians must really love one another.

The Christian has many enemies (3:18) and must *'therefore ... stand fast in the Lord'* (4:1). The apostle had earlier written, *'Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel'* (1:27). He uses similar words to exhort the Corinthian Christians, *'Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave be strong'* (1 Corinthians 1:13).

We live in very difficult and challenging times (cp. 2 Timothy 3:1–5) and there are many pressures upon us to compromise and to be content with a worldly lifestyle (cp. 3:19). Many Christians want to be entertained in church services rather than to worship God with a sense of awe and wonder. Many evangelical churches have embraced a charismatic style of worship; this would have once been unthinkable.

If we are to *stand fast in the Lord*, we must discipline ourselves to make time for personal devotions. We must ground ourselves in God's precious Word and be fervent and faithful in prayer. Towards the end of the second part of John Bunyan's *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS* the pilgrims saw 'a man upon his knees, with hands and eyes lifted up, and speaking, as they thought, earnestly to one that was above ... When he had done, he got up, and began to run towards the Celestial City ... Then said Mr Valiant-for-Truth, "Who is it?" ... Mr Honest said, "His name is Stand-fast; he is certainly a right good pilgrim"' **We have a glorious future (3:20–21) but there are many enemies who seek to turn us aside from the gospel of Christ. As we stand fast in the Lord, he will help us and strengthen us.**

Whose names are in the book of life

The devil attacks the church through false teaching (3:18–19) but a more subtle form of attack comes through bringing division between believers. Paul remembered the time when Euodia and Syntyche had laboured with him in the gospel and he tenderly pleaded with them to be reconciled with each other, *to be of the same mind in the Lord* (2–3). Paul urged his *true companion* (whose identity we do not know) to help these women resolve their differences. Hendriksen takes the name for *companion*, which is ‘Syzygus’ in the Greek, to be the name of a person. The task of reconciling those who have fallen out with each other requires great tact, wisdom, understanding, patience and trust. The Lord Jesus said, “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*” (Matthew 5:9).

Paul wrote of the two women and of his fellow-workers, *whose names are in the book of life* (3; cp. Daniel 12:1; Luke 10:20; Revelation 13:8; 20:15). We are fellow-citizens of heaven and we will be there together one day. No one is perfect and we can easily irritate each other by our remaining sinful traits. Satan will do all that he can to exploit our differences. Let us not harbour grudges or ill-feelings against a fellow-Christian or we will become bitter and our usefulness in Christ’s work will be diminished.

It is a terribly sad affair when Christians refuse to sort out their differences and remain entrenched in their views, blaming the other for the breakdown in fellowship. Such differences often have wider repercussions and they hinder the progress of the gospel. There are procedures set out in Scripture for dealing with disagreements, but even churches which are sound in doctrine often fail to apply them (cp. Matthew 18:15–20). If we do not use these procedures, how can we enjoy God’s blessing upon us? We must also pray for those who have wronged us (Matthew 5:44). **If you are not talking to a fellow-Christian, can it be right, can you be right?**

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

In the closing verses of his letter, the apostle opens up to us the secret of true and lasting happiness. He has already urged the Philippians to *rejoice in the Lord* (3:1) and he now writes, ‘*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice!*’ (4). Why is such an exhortation necessary? We do not always feel happy in our Christian walk, we do not always feel like rejoicing. We must never let our feelings condition our lives, however; if we do so, we will be up and down like a yo-yo. We may be carrying heavy burdens, but the Lord will help us if we cast our cares upon him (1 Peter 5:7).

How can we *rejoice in the Lord always* when everything seems to be going wrong, when we are ill, when we are suffering? The Philippians knew that Paul was not telling them to do what he did not do himself. They knew how with Silas he had sung the praises of God from a filthy Philippian dungeon after being unjustly arrested and beaten (Acts 16:22–34). Paul was again in prison for the sake of Christ. What did he have to rejoice about at all times? What do we have to rejoice about? We should daily rejoice in our wonderful Saviour who has saved us from our sin at tremendous cost. We should rejoice in the blessings of our salvation, such as peace with God and eternal life and a glorious future in heaven for ever. We should rejoice that our Father in heaven is sovereign over every circumstance in our lives and that he is with us. We should rejoice in daily fellowship with the Lord and in his love and goodness to us each day. We should rejoice in our fellowship with other Christians, and so we could continue to count our blessings.

Rejoicing in the Lord does not mean that we will always be smiling, even in times of trouble. At such times we rejoice within, knowing that God is with us and that he will bring us through. **We do not commend the Lord if we go around looking miserable and are no different from unbelievers.** Let us now come to the Lord and pour out our hearts in praise for all that he means to us and for all that he has done and is doing for us. *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice!*

Let your gentleness be known to all men

There is so much to challenge us in these verses that we must continue with the same reading. We are now urged, ‘*Let your gentleness (moderation AV) be known to all men*’ (5). Hendriksen points out in his commentary that the word ‘gentleness’ cannot be translated by any single word in the English language. He himself uses the word ‘big-heartedness,’ but states that any of the following words could be used — ‘forbearance, yieldedness, geniality, kindness, gentleness, sweet reasonableness, considerateness, charitableness, mildness, magnanimity, generosity. All of these qualities are combined in the adjective-noun that is used in the original. Taken together they show the real meaning.’ (COMMENTARY ON PHILIPPIANS, page 193). The same word is found in 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 3:2; James 3:17.

Let us be gentle, gracious and big-hearted, not from a sense of duty, but because we want to please the Lord. If we are rough, harsh or inconsiderate in our behaviour, we do not please him. We must show this gentleness not only to believers, but to all people. I again quote from William Hendriksen: ‘The Christian is the man who reasons that it is far better to suffer wrong than to inflict wrong (1 Corinthians 6:7). Sweet reasonableness is an essential ingredient of true happiness.’

Paul reminds us, that *the Lord is at hand*. This could be taken to mean that the Lord’s presence is among us or that he is coming soon. It is more likely to mean the latter in this verse. We must remember that the Lord Jesus may return at any moment. **Would we be ashamed with our present conduct if he was to return today? How is your gentleness being seen by others?**

*Gracious Spirit, dwell with me!
I myself would gracious be,
And with words that help and heal
Would thy life in mine reveal;
And with actions bold and meek
Would for Christ, my Saviour, speak.*

(Thomas T. Lynch)

Be anxious for nothing

Many people are stressed out and burdened with anxiety but God has given us a very practical cure. How are we to enjoy God's peace in our lives if we have many cares? We are *to be anxious for nothing* and commit *everything* to God in prayer (6). *In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God* (6). William Hendriksen describes *supplication* as 'the humble cry for the fulfilment of needs that are keenly felt' (COMMENTARY ON PHILIPPIANS, page 195). The Lord Jesus teaches us that we should not be anxious about our needs or about our future. Our heavenly Father knows what we need and he lovingly provides for those who seek first his kingdom and his righteousness (Matthew 6:25–34). We must turn care into prayer: *Casting all your care upon him, for he cares for you* (1 Peter 5:7). To be weighed down by anxious care is needless and faithless.

If we will place our trust in him, he will give us his peace at all times. *The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus* (7). If we are to enjoy this wonderful peace of God in our lives, we need to be disciplined in our thought life as well as in our prayer life (8). We live in a corrupt world and we must not listen to, watch or read anything that is unholy, but rather fill our minds with wholesome thoughts by feeding on the Word of God and good Christian literature (Psalm 119:105, 140).

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 (8). Paul was not writing from theory; the Philippians had seen the evidence of these things in his life (9). **How is your prayer life and your thought life?**

*O what peace we often forfeit!
O what needless pain we bear!
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.*

(Joseph M. Scriven)

I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content

As he comes to the end of his letter, Paul expresses his gratitude to the Philippians for their generosity to him (10–18). There had been a gap in their giving through lack of opportunity, but he had now received their gifts which were sent with Epaphroditus. Paul was not too proud or thoughtless to say, ‘Thank you’ and he *rejoiced in the Lord greatly* for the kindness of the Philippians (10). Do you show your appreciation to those who are kind to you? Do you rejoice in the Lord greatly for them? Do you ever send a ‘thank-you’ card or letter as an expression of gratitude to someone who has helped you?

Paul was a prisoner, but he was content! He wrote, *I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content* (11). He had learned to be content in every circumstance whether good or bad (12). Notice that we are not born with contentment; it has to be learned. How do we learn it? By committing all of our concerns to God in prayer and by trusting in his wise providence (6–7). We learn contentment by living for Christ (1:21) and by proving his sufficiency to give us strength and help as we need it (13). Paul testifies, *‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me’* (13). He did not depend on himself or on his own limited resources when he faced trials and difficulties. He proved the strength of Christ to help him through (cp. 2 Corinthians 12:10).

Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs wrote a book almost 350 years ago which has been reprinted and is available from Banner of Truth. The title is, ‘The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment.’ Yes, it is a very rare jewel which is possessed by few Christians. This is how Burroughs describes Christian contentment: ‘Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.’ **We live in a restless, turbulent world, but we should be different to those around us. A contented life commends the gospel! Have we learned to be content, whatever our circumstances? *Godliness with contentment is great gain*** (1 Timothy 6:6).

An acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God

These verses show why the Philippians meant so much to Paul. They did not take the attitude that it was enough to pray for him (and that was important). They also *shared* in his distress (14). From the time he had known them, they had *shared* with him *concerning giving and receiving* (15). True fellowship involves sharing and the apostle recalled how this young church had sent gifts again and again to meet his needs (15–16). They did not have the attitude, ‘Out of sight, out of mind’ but had a heartfelt love and concern for the apostle. They were motivated by love for God and for his servant, and they gladly gave to meet his needs.

Paul had not sought a gift from the Philippians but he expressed his gratitude for their latest gift that was sent with Epaphroditus (17–18). *God loves a cheerful giver* (2 Corinthians 9:7) and would make fruit abound to their account. The fruit of a generous heart is a greater detachment from earthly things, increasing joy and contentment in Christ. Moreover, on the day of judgment, the generous giver will be commended and rewarded by the Lord Jesus (Matthew 25:21,34–40).

We cannot buy salvation, but that is not to say that we should not give generously to the work of God. Paul described the gift of the Philippians to himself as *a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God* (18). The whole burnt offerings of the Israelites were also *a sweet aroma to the LORD* (Leviticus 1:9,13,17). In the New Testament, the term is used in the context of self-sacrifice and a total giving up of self. The Lord Jesus loved us and gave himself for us, *an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma* (Ephesians 5:2). The sweet aroma indicates that God is satisfied with the offering. **How do you think that God sees your giving to his work? Do you think that he is satisfied with your devotion to him as it is expressed through your giving to his work?**

My God shall supply all your need

There is a wonderful promise in verse 19: *My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus*. This promise is for bountiful Christians, who like the Philippians, obey God's Word. We cannot claim such a promise if we are disobeying God. This verse is not a blank cheque for us to claim from God anything we want. He will not supply every wish that we have but he will supply all our need. He loves us and gives to us *according to his riches* and his riches are beyond measure (Romans 8:32)! This promise covers all kinds of needs, including the need for grace and support in trouble and trials (Hebrews 4:16). Is it any wonder that Paul magnifies *our God and Father* (20)?

The great missionary, Hudson Taylor, never appealed for funds to finance his work in China. Someone once asked him if this was not a hand-to-mouth existence. 'Yes' replied Taylor, 'from God's hand to my mouth!' **What are your needs? Have you asked God to supply them?** He knows what you need and he will supply those needs in his good time. Are you trusting him and thanking him for all his mercies? God's promises are absolutely true and he will supply all of your needs. Let us trust him, praise him, and magnify him!

Earlier in his letter, the apostle Paul mentions the Christians in Rome. They had been encouraged to be bold in speaking God's Word because of his presence there as Christ's prisoner (1:14). He again refers to them here, passing on their greetings to the Philippians. Some of them worked in the service of Roman emperor Nero (22). They were bearing witness in a pagan environment. Let this encourage us to pray that the gospel will reach the people in countries which are hostile to the Christian message. Let it also encourage us to persevere in our prayers and witness for those we know and love, who are presently indifferent to the gospel. **When God opens doors, no one can thwart his sovereign will!** *Now to our God and Father be glory for ever. Amen.*

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