

Christ's Church and the Apostles (30-100 CE)

Letter to the Philippians

Readings: *Philippians 1:1-4:23*

Reflections:

- Letter to the Philippians: Philippi was one of the first churches established in Europe and was a community deeply devoted to supporting Paul. They are referred to as the Macedonian community in his letter to the Corinthians and though they had all social classes present in their community (see Acts 16) they had many who were very poor (see 2 Corinthians 8:2). It appears from Paul's writings that he prided himself in not taking support from his churches (see Acts 20:33-35; 2 Corinthians 11:7-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:8) but apparently Philippi was an exception. As we read this letter we see the deep bond that Paul feels towards this community as well as his desire to deeply encourage them. There are two interesting questions about Philippians. Where and when was it written? Is it a single letter or a composite letter similar to 2 Corinthians? Although in this particular ordering of Paul's writings it is assumed that Philippians was written during the Roman imprisonment around 59-63 CE. It is very likely it could also have been written while he was in Ephesus around 55 CE. Scholars note about the suffering Paul experiences in Asia Minor (see 2 Corinthians 1,8 as well as 1 Corinthians 15:32). Paul refers to the Praetorium in Philippians 1:13 as well as to Caesar's household in Philippians 4:22. These would align with the imperial guard or government house at Ephesus/Caesarea. It could also refer to the Praetorium camp in Rome. There is another piece of evidence that favors Ephesus. There are numerous trips referred to in the letter where people are going between Paul and Philippi. This strongly favors Ephesus which was close to Philippi. With this said, many scholars are now favoring an early date of 55 CE and Ephesus as the location. The writing style of this letter also aligns more closely with Paul's early writings. Now the second question is fascinating. It would appear that Philippians is a compilation of a number of shorter letters. Here are the sections: 1) Philippians 1:1-3:1, 4:4-7 with 4:21-32 possible as this first letter's ending moved to the end of the compilation; 2) Philippians 3:2-4:3, 8-9; 3) 4:10-20. At the end of this commentary I will include the possible divisions of Philippians that will make it quite clear how the scholars identified these divisions. Obviously there is debate among scholars but it is well worth looking at. Those that prefer a unified approach to Philippians suggest that Paul wrote a bit of Philippians and then receives news from Philippi and then writes in a

completely new direction based on the news he receives. In any case, much of Philippians is some of the most encouraging words written by Paul.

- **Salutation:** Paul changes his normal introduction as an “apostle of Jesus Christ” to refer to him and Timothy as “servants of Christ”. Paul throughout this letter will emphasize the importance of Christ as a servant and our calling to be servants of Christ. We should note that the word translated “servant” in the Greek is “doulos” which refers to someone who sells themselves voluntarily to be the slave of another. So the most accurate translation is “bondservant” rather than “servant” or “slave”. We should also note that in this opening salutation that Paul refers to both overseers and deacons (see Titus 1:6-7; Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Timothy 3:1-7). These are the two common leadership categories within the first church. Overseers or Elders were the local church leaders and the deacons or better translated “ministers” were those who provided practical service within the churches. We should remember that churches during this time operated almost exclusively out of homes.
- **Reflections upon imprisonment – expression of love:** As is typical Paul begins by sharing how he is praying for this church. Paul introduces here in his prayer another important theme of this letter, joy. For Paul joy is rooted in confidence in the faithfulness of Christ and love that is ours in Christ. It transcends our circumstances, even being in prison and temporary suffering. We see in this opening prayer how Paul deeply loves this community of believers and his complete trust in Christ to grow them to maturity. Those in spiritual leadership at times are tempted to get discouraged with the Christians they serve because they see how flawed and spiritually immature they are. It is important to realize that our confidence rests solely on Christ to bring both us and them to maturity to Christ. It is ultimately Christ who is changing us from the inside out according to his power at work within us (see Ephesians 3:20,21). We see that Paul’s prayer is focused on these believers being changed from the inside out through a deep, tangible experience of God’s divine love that enables them to discern and embrace God’s best and therefore live fruitful lives reflecting his true righteousness. Our outward maturity always flows from an inner security from the love of Christ driving out all fear from our lives.
- **Imprisonment a blessing:** Paul now affirms that his imprisonment has been used by God to advance his mission. Paul’s imprisonment has gotten the word out to the entire palace community and as a result one of the key centers of power in that region is hearing the message of Jesus. Also, other Christian leaders are motivated by Paul’s courage to speak more boldly about Jesus. So for Paul, rather than seeing his circumstances as restricting the advance of the message of Jesus, he sees how God’s ways are higher than his ways and are actually accomplishing the message in a completely different way than he anticipated. It takes looking at our difficulties through the lens of complete faith to see how God can use our difficulties and suffering to advance his purposes. Although we often don’t like this and for good reason, suffering is one of the key aspects of what it means to be a fully surrendered follower of Jesus. As we will see, suffering for Jesus is a third theme Paul will expand on in this letter.

- Joy over preaching: Paul now refers to some self-centered leaders who are claiming to follow Christ and yet oppose Paul's ministry. They apparently were out trying to preach in a way that would cause Paul more grief in prison. Yet Paul even takes this completely awful situation and looks for good. For Paul, even if their motives are wrong, at least the message of Jesus is getting out. How different would our experience of unity be among Christians if people affirmed those they disagreed with rather than tore them down? Paul models here incredible humility.
- Paul's dilemma: Paul now reveals his sense of vulnerability and yet deep confidence in Christ. He is hopeful that he will be released and is trusting in the power of prayer and the work of the Spirit. The Spirit here is referred to by Paul as the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Again we see a strong unity between Jesus and the Spirit. Even though Paul believes he will be released, he leaves this with God. He shares that he has some fear, that he may buckle under the pressure but is choosing to remain confident that whether in life or death, he will remain true to Jesus and Jesus will be glorified through his testimony. Paul is keeping himself focused on the fact that he is in a "win, win" situation. If he dies, he sees Jesus immediately. If he lives, he gets to have the joy of advancing the kingdom. So either way, he is a winner. Now Paul is still confident he will be restored to this community and will carry on with his mission but he wants them to embrace this same approach to life of simply trusting Christ in all things. It is easier said than done but Paul provides clear modeling for what it means to trust Christ even when faced with death.
- Various exhortations – stand united: Once we trust Christ, then anything can happen and we are ok. Paul encourages them to stand completely unified in their suffering. Difficult times have a way of dividing relationships. Our resources become thin, we start to become self-protective and defensive. Soon our relationships falter and we scatter. Paul states that our intimate relationship with Christ is our source of security to stand unified as a testimony to the truth of our message. Our personal experience with Christ's love, tenderness and compassion through the Spirit should fuel our own expressions of that same love, tenderness and compassion as we stand together and care for each other during tough times. A unified, suffering church is a sign to the truth of Christ. It is not enough for us to believe the right things, we must walk the walk and that includes suffering for Christ.
- Imitate Christ's humility: Humility frees us to be other-centered. This is one of the most foundational aspects of being Christ-like. Paul inserts in this passage what most scholars believe is an early church song they would sing in their home churches. It is completely Christ-centered and tells the complete story of Christ from beginning to end. We see Jesus is portrayed as existing and equal to God (the Greek actually says, "did not consider equality with God as grasping him" and so there is no mistake that Paul and the early Christians viewed Jesus as one with God and co-equal in all regards) and then giving all of that up to become a servant and one who humbles himself through death for us. This song also makes it clear that Christ now has all authority on heaven and earth because of his resurrection and ascension to the right hand. It concludes with a simple summary of how someone is

restored to right relationship with God and is rescued. You simply have to accept Jesus as Lord, Lord of all and Lord of your life. If you submit to Jesus as Lord of your life, you get him as Savior too. This song is one of the best early pieces of evidence that the belief in the divinity of Jesus and the meaning of his death and resurrection was not a later theological invention but was the first understanding of the earliest disciples.

- Work at righteousness: Paul encourages them to take what God has given them freely and fully apply it to every aspect of their lives. This inside out transformation is not something magical but rather the result of an intentional partnership with God to receive divine love and develop new mental and emotional habits as we cultivate healthy lifestyle patterns and relationships.
- Be examples of peace: Paul gives them some practical advice about how they can live as examples of Christ (remember their unity when they suffer is a sign of the truth of Christ) within their own context. Paul uses the image of them being stars in the night as they seek to hold out to people the message of Jesus – the word of life. So what is the advice? Do everything without complaining or arguing but allow the difficulties of suffering and even the challenges of living in relationship with other flawed Christ-followers to purify your devotion to Christ. Purity is not only remaining free from moral sins but also being pure in the kind of grace, tenderness and compassion we show others even when we are hurting. Paul is modeling this to them and he calls them to joyfully embrace this journey even as he has.
- Timothy to come soon: Paul now highlights Timothy as an example of someone who is other-centered and a true servant. Paul is sending Timothy to help maintain a good connection between Paul and the Philippian churches.
- Commendation of Epaphroditus: Paul affirms this man because apparently he came to help Paul but got sick. Paul doesn't want him to be embarrassed by his apparent inability to complete the task and so is strongly affirming him before his own community. Paul uses strong words like "my fellow soldier" and "he almost died" to ensure they know that Paul has the greatest respect for him.
- Christians should be joyful: Joy is a natural outworking of feeling secure in the love, power and purposes of Christ. When it is not naturally flowing because we are experiencing pain and difficulty, we should then take on a joyful attitude as a mental discipline. This is all a part of worshipping God, living a Christ-like life, and partnering with God to develop new mental and emotional habits. If we habitually complain and become snippy when things don't go our way, we will never press into the life Christ has for us. Paul challenges them to intentionally adopt an ongoing practice of rejoicing in all the good stuff God has done in their lives...and there is a lot for any Christ-follower!
- Various warnings – Overconfidence in heritage: Paul here inserts some very harsh words. As we mentioned at the beginning this section may begin a distinct writing from Paul. Paul is tackling those who are claiming to follow Christ but are attempting to force a legalistic

application of the Torah, particularly circumcision. Paul doesn't mince his words as he calls them "mutilators of the flesh". Who is truly set apart for God and circumcised in the heart? Paul again makes it clear that it is those who are filled by the Spirit and are being changed from the inside out.

- Paul's Jewish heritage: Paul here gives an excellent summary of how he was basically the most religious guy you could find. When Jesus reached out to Paul, Paul was by his own admission persecuting the church because he was obsessed with religion. If anyone is going to boast about being an Israelite, Paul wants to make it clear that he has more right to boast in his ethnicity and religiosity than anyone else.
- Exchanging human confidence: Here we have one of the most clear and beautiful personal descriptions of someone who is completely submitted to Jesus and living in true relationship with him. Paul here begins by declaring as Jesus would call it, his poverty of spirit. Paul has lost everything and considers it all "dung" or "rubbish." All that matters is to know Jesus, his Lord, intimately. He is pursuing a right standing before God based on trusting him, not from religion. Knowing him means knowing him in his power to make our dead lives come alive again and also sharing in what it means to suffer with him in his mission to rescue as many people as possible. To know Christ is to share everything with him and to make that our highest goal.
- Righteousness a struggle: Intimacy with Christ and being changed from the inside out is a process. Paul models his own process of growth and is open about how he must actively leave behind anything that gets in the way of his relationship with Christ and keep pressing on. Paul, like an athlete, keeps his entire focus on his ultimate goal and prize, being with Jesus. Paul concludes with a statement that again shows his own trust in Christ to grow people to maturity. Paul encourages those who are mature to join him in this passionate pursuit of Christ and yet if others see things differently, then he will leave that with Christ to help them understand his will for their lives. Paul isn't into power and control with people. He trusts Jesus to continue to work in their lives.
- Warning against worldliness: Paul warns against those in their community who are not submitting to the Lordship of Jesus but rather still focused on self-centeredness and seeking to gratify their own desires. Followers of Christ see themselves as citizens of heaven and as loyal to an entirely different kingdom and way of doing life. Paul calls them to put their hope in Jesus who is changing them but will ultimately transform their own bodies as he brings all things under his control. We sometimes struggle with self-control. Paul says, don't lose hope. Jesus will ultimately transform us and then that battle will be over. As we wait for Jesus to do this though we must stand firm in our resolve to live as his counter-cultural citizens here and now.
- Concluding thoughts – women to reconcile: Speaking of unity, Paul inserts a plea for two particular women who have served in some form of ministry or leadership to agree together. Apparently their rift has made it all the way to Paul and he wants to see them

reconciled. Paul asks for help from someone in the church to help these women reconcile. The term “Syzygus” may be this person’s name or a nickname “faithful fellow worker” or “loyal yokefellow”. In either case, the people who were receiving this letter knew who Paul was speaking too. Paul refers to the Book of Life. This is the heavenly registry for everyone who is a citizen in God’s kingdom. Is there a literal book in heaven that has everyone’s name or is this an image to capture the fact that God knows who are his? In either case, the main idea is that we can be secure in our relationship with God and he knows us by name.

- To seek peacefulness: Paul returns to his theme of intentional rejoicing and joy. He calls his readers to gentleness and to rest in the presence of Christ. Remember he is near. Paul then encourages their ongoing active conversation with Christ. As they talk with Christ about everything that is going on in their lives, particularly in their struggles, then that opens the way for them to experience true peace, a peace that passes all understanding or lack of understanding. Being secure in Christ is the only way for our hearts and minds to remain guarded against fear, worry, doubt and temptation to try to save ourselves. We must remember the battle of life is not fought against other people. It is fought in our hearts and minds as we allow God to change us inside out.
- Think of spiritual things: If the first step is to draw near to Christ in prayer to experience again the security of his love, then the second step is to actively direct your mind towards truth. We must actively rehearse truth to develop new mental and emotional patterns. Paul encourages them to focus their thoughts on those things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. In other words we should ask ourselves, does what I am thinking about right now align with the very best and truest aspects of all Christ has purchased for me? As we do this, then we will take peace in our lives to a whole new level. The peace of God will not only guard our hearts and minds but it will now go with us into all aspects of our daily life. We will start to live out of our peace.
- Paul content: Paul thanks this church for their renewed support for him. He wants them to know that he is truly content in Christ. Rather than being greedy he prefers to use this as a chance to model for them depending on Christ for everything. Paul has experienced the entire range from the good life to intense suffering. In all of this, he has learned the secret to contentment. I can do anything through Christ who gives me strength. Another way to say it is to say “Anything Christ wants me to do I can do through his power.” In other words, I don’t have to be my own defender or rescuer. I can completely depend on Christ to enable me to do whatever he wants me to do.
- Gifts fruitful to them: Paul again thanks them for faithfully investing in his ministry. Their sacrificial generosity is resulting in their gifts being received by God as worship as well as God making deposits into their heavenly bank account. Do we want to have an eternal retirement fund? When we give to the poor and to the kingdom, we are storing up reward for eternity. Sounds good to me! Why can we be radically generous? Paul concludes, “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” See Ephesians 1:3-14. God has true wealth to offer us now and into the future, not the wealth of

material riches but the wealth of being secure in his love and sharing in his mission in the world.

- Greetings and benediction: Paul ends with a second conclusion and so again we see evidence why some scholars believe this is a collection of letters rather than simply one single letter by Paul. Paul's final word? "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." Our spirits need to be completely soaked in the grace of Jesus if we are to stand in the midst of difficult times.

Philippians - Paul's Three Letters to the Philippians?

LETTER ONE – This may be a final letter from Paul that is seeking to smooth over the harsher tone of his first letter, similar to what happened with the Corinthian correspondence. The typical pattern for compiling writings is to order them according to length, starting from the longer and moving towards the shorter. Ordering was not based on chronology but length.

^{1:1} Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ;

To all God's people¹ in Christ² Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and servants: ^{1:2}
Grace to you, and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

^{1:3} I thank my God whenever I remember you. ^{1:4} In every prayer request I make on your behalf, I always pray with joy ^{1:5} because of your partnership in advancing the Good News from the first day until now, ^{1:6} being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ. ^{1:7} It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart. For whether I am in my chains and am defending and confirming the Good News, you all are partners³ with me in grace. ^{1:8} God is my witness, how I truly love you with the heart of Jesus Christ⁴.

¹ Or "set apart ones" or "holy ones" – this is a term used to denote those that are set apart by God

² Or The Messiah. Christ is the Greek form for Messiah. Both mean "Anointed One." Used of a king and so could also be translated "King Jesus."

³ Or "partakers"

⁴ Literally "how I long for you with the bowels of Jesus Christ" – the bowels rather than the heart was viewed by the ancients as the centre of true love. Paul is basically saying "I love you with all my heart through the love of Jesus Christ"

^{1:9} This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more⁵ in knowledge and depth of insight⁶ ^{1:10} so that you may discern what is best⁷ and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ^{1:11} being filled with the fruit of righteousness⁸ that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

^{1:12} Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the things which happened to me have turned out to actually advance the Good News. ^{1:13} It has become known throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ^{1:14} Most of our brothers and sisters in the Lord are gaining greater confidence because of my chains and becoming incredibly bold and fearless in speaking the word of God. ^{1:15} Now, for sure, some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry⁹ while others do so out of good will. ^{1:16} The latter do so in love, knowing that I am appointed to defend the Good News. ^{1:17} The former preach Christ insincerely out of selfish ambition, thinking that they can add even more troubles on top of my chains.

^{1:18} What does it matter? The only important thing is that in every way Christ is proclaimed, whether from false motives¹⁰ or in truth. In this, I rejoice! Yes, and will continue to rejoice. ^{1:19} For I know that this will result in my deliverance¹¹ through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. ^{1:20} My sincere expectation and hope is that I will in no way be ashamed but as always with great boldness, now too Christ will be honored¹² in my body, whether in my life or my death. ^{1:21} For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. ^{1:22} If I live on in this body¹³ it will mean productive¹⁴ work and yet I don't know what I should choose. ^{1:23} I am torn between the two. I want to leave and be with Christ which is far better. ^{1:24} Yet, for your sake it is more necessary for me to remain in the body. ^{1:25} Confident of this, I know that I will remain! Yes, I will remain with all of you for your progress¹⁵ and joy in the faith, ^{1:26} so that because of me, your joyful confidence¹⁶ will grow in Christ Jesus when I am with you again.

⁵ Or "may continue to grow"

⁶ Or "every kind of discernment"

⁷ Literally "the things that are excellent"

⁸ Or "with lives overflowing with the righteousness"

⁹ Or "hope to cause strife"

¹⁰ Or "in pretense"

¹¹ Or "vindication" or "salvation"

¹² Or "magnified"

¹³ Literally "the flesh" – also in verse 24

¹⁴ Literally "fruitful"

¹⁵ Or "growth" or "advancement"

¹⁶ Literally "boastings"

^{1:27} Just one thing: let your lifestyle be worthy of the Good News of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit and labor with one heart¹⁷ for the faith of the Good News ^{1:28} without being frightened in any way by your opponents. This is for them evidence of their destruction but for you of your salvation - and that being from God. ^{1:29} For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, ^{1:30} since you have the same struggle that you saw I had, and now hear I still have.

^{2:1} Therefore, if you have any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort in his love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any heart of love and compassion, ^{2:2} then make my joy complete by being single-minded, unified in love, and one in spirit and purpose. ^{2:3} Do nothing out of ambition or prideful conceit, but in humility, consider others more important than you. ^{2:4} Each of you shouldn't only look out for your own interests, but also for the interests of others.

^{2:5} Your attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus: ^{2:6} who -
being in the very nature¹⁸ of God,
didn't consider equality with God as grasping him,
^{2:7} but emptied himself,
took the nature of a servant,
and was made in human likeness.

^{2:8} And being found in human appearance,
he humbled himself,
and became obedient to death,
even, death on a cross.

^{2:9} Therefore God also exalted him to the highest place¹⁹,
and gave to him the name that is above every name;
^{2:10} that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
^{2:11} and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

^{2:12} So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. ^{2:13} For it is God who works in you to enable you²⁰ to both choose and act in line with his good

¹⁷ Literally "soul" - Or "mind"

¹⁸ Literally "form"

¹⁹ Or "highly exalted him"

²⁰ "to enable you" is added for clarity

purpose.^{2:14} Do everything without grumbling and arguing^{2:15} so that you may blameless and harmless^{2:1}, children of God who are faultless in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation. Among them you shine like stars in this world^{2:16} as you hold out the word of life. In this, I will boast on the day of Christ that I didn't run nor labor in vain.^{2:17} But even if I am poured out like a drink offering^{2:2} on the sacrifice and service that comes your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.^{2:18} In the same way, you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

^{2:19} I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon so that I also may be encouraged when I hear the news about you.^{2:20} For I have no one else who shares my heart^{2:3}, who will truly cares about you.^{2:21} For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.^{2:22} But you know he has proven himself and that, as a child serves with his father, so he served with me to advance^{2:4} the Good News.^{2:23} Therefore I hope to send him as soon as I see how things will go with me.^{2:24} But I am convinced in the Lord that I myself also will also come soon.

^{2:25} But I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker, fellow soldier as well as your apostle^{2:5} and servant of my need^{2:26} since he was missing^{2:6} all of you and was very distressed because you had heard that he was sick.^{2:27} For he really was sick, nearly to the point of death, but God had mercy on him. And not just on him, but also on me so that I might not have one grief on top of another^{2:7}.^{2:28} For this reason I have been very eager to send him to you so that you will be glad when you see him again and I will have less anxiety.^{2:29} Therefore, welcome him in the Lord with complete joy, and hold people like him^{2:8} in honor^{2:30} because for the work of Christ he nearly died as he risked his life to provide the help you were unable give me.

^{3:1} Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. It is no trouble for me to write these same things to you again and it is a safeguard for you.

^{4:4} Rejoice in the Lord always! I will it say again, Rejoice!^{4:5} Let your gentleness be known to all people. The Lord is near.^{4:6} Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and

²¹ Literally "unmixed" – the idea is that they would live simple, uncomplicated lives

²² "like a drink offering" – added for clarity, from the Jewish temple worship of pouring out a drink offering before God as an act of worship

²³ Literally "like-minded"

²⁴ "to advance" added for clarity

²⁵ Or "sent one" – someone sent with a message or a mission

²⁶ Literally "longing for"

²⁷ Literally "sorrow upon sorrow"

²⁸ "people like him" added for clarity

petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. ^{4:7} And the peace of God, that transcends²⁹ all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

^{4:21} Greet every one of God's people³⁰ in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me greet you. ^{4:22} All of God's people greet you, especially those who are of Caesar's household.

^{4:23} The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

LETTER TWO – This letter takes a harsher tone. It may have been sent after the first letter based on a report Paul heard about the influence of those pushing circumcision as well as two women causing some division. This may be Paul's second letter.

^{3:2} Watch out for those dogs! Watch out for those who do evil! Watch out for those who mutilate the flesh! ^{3:3} For we are the true³¹ circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, who have joyful confidence in Christ Jesus and no confidence in the flesh - ^{3:4} though I myself could have confidence in the flesh. If any of you think that you have reason to have confidence in the flesh, I have more: ^{3:5} circumcised the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; and as for the law, a Pharisee; ^{3:6} as for zeal, persecuting the church³²; as for righteousness according to the law – blameless!

^{3:7} But whatever was to my profit, I know consider these loss for sake of Christ. ^{3:8} More than that, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness³³ of the knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whose sake I lost all things. I count them nothing but rubbish³⁴ that I may gain Christ ^{3:9} and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that is from God and is by faith. ^{3:10} I want to know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ^{3:11} so that somehow I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. ^{3:12} Not that I have already obtained all of this or have already been made perfect³⁵, but I press on³⁶ to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

²⁹ Or "surpasses"

³⁰ Literally "set apart ones" or "holy ones" – also in verse 4:22

³¹ "true" added for clarity

³² Or "assembly"

³³ Or "excellency" or "complete superiority"

³⁴ Literally "dung" or "refuse"

³⁵ Or "mature" or "complete"

³⁶ Or "make every effort"

^{3:13} Brothers and sisters, I don't consider myself to have yet taken hold it, but one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and stretching out for what is ahead, ^{3:14} I press on toward the goal to win³⁷ the prize in the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus. ^{3:15} Therefore, all who are mature, should think this way. If on any point, you think differently, that too God will reveal to you. ^{3:16} In any case, we should live up to whatever level of maturity³⁸ we have attained.

^{3:17} Brothers and sisters, join with others in imitating me. Make note of those who walk this way, even as you have us as an example. ^{3:18} For I have often told you and now tell you again with tears, many live³⁹ as the enemies of the cross of Christ. ^{3:19} Their end is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. ^{3:20} Our citizenship, however, is in heaven, from where we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ^{3:21} He will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control. ^{4:1} Therefore, my sisters and brothers, whom I deeply love and long for, my joy and crown, this is how⁴⁰ you should stand firm in the Lord, my friends.

^{4:2} I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree⁴¹ in the Lord. ^{4:3} Yes, I ask you also, Syzygus, my true companion,⁴² to help these women who contended for the Good News at my side, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

^{4:8} Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or worthy of praise, think about these things. ^{4:9} Whatever you learned, received, or heard from me, whatever you have seen in me: do these things.

And the God of peace will be with you.

(Paul's ending was probably deleted in the compilation)

³⁷ "to win" is added for clarity

³⁸ Literally "we should walk according to the standard (or rule) we have attained"

³⁹ Literally "walk"

⁴⁰ "this is how" is added for clarity

⁴¹ Literally "to think the same way"

⁴² "Syzygus" could be a proper name or it could be description "true companion" or "true partner" – it is repeated in the translation to offer the reader both possibilities.

LETTER THREE – Possibly Paul’s first letter in response to a gift they sent to him with Epaphroditus

^{4:10} I am overjoyed⁴³ in the Lord that now at last you have renewed your concern for me. In fact, you were concerned for me but you lacked the opportunity to show it.⁴⁴ ^{4:11} I don’t say this because I have need, for I have learned to be content in any circumstance.⁴⁵ ^{4:12} I know how to live with very little and I know how to live with much⁴⁵. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being content,⁴⁶ whether full or hungry, with much or in need.^{4:13} I can do everything through Christ, who strengthens me.^{4:14}

Still, it is good that you shared in my hardship.^{4:15} You Philippians know that in the early days⁴⁷ of the Good News, when I left from Macedonia, no church⁴⁸ shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone.^{4:16} For even in Thessalonica you sent me gifts⁴⁹ again and again for my need.^{4:17} I am not looking for a gift, but I seeking what will increase⁵⁰ your account.^{4:18} But now I have everything I could want⁵¹ and more! I am full! For I have received from Epaphroditus everything that you sent me - a sweet-smelling fragrance, an acceptable and pleasing sacrifice to God.

^{4:19} My God will fully meet⁵² all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.^{4:20} Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever! Amen.

⁴³ Literally “greatly rejoice”

⁴⁴ “to show it” is added for clarity

⁴⁵ Or “I have experienced having little and I have experienced having much”

⁴⁶ “of being content” added for clarity

⁴⁷ Literally “beginning”

⁴⁸ Literally “assembly”

⁴⁹ “gifts” added for clarity

⁵⁰ Literally “the fruit of increase to”

⁵¹ “I could want” is added for clarity

⁵² Literally “fill up”