

Paul's Love Letter From Prison
Studies In Philipians - "Foundations"

In this series we will be considering the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philipians. I've called these talks, "Paul's love letter from prison". I've used this title because, as we shall discover, Paul dearly loved the Christians at Philippi.

The city of Philippi was in what is today modern Greece, but in Paul's day was East Macedonia. It took its name from King Philip, the father of Alexander the Great. Its chief interest for those interested in studying the Bible is that it was the first place in Europe to be reached by the good news - the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The very interesting account of this is found in the book of the Acts and chapter 16. It will be helpful if you have a Bible to have it open at Acts chapter 16.

Twenty years after the return of the Lord Jesus to heaven, Paul was on his second great missionary journey. His call to go to Macedonia had come from God in a vision. He saw a man of that region and heard him saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us". So, along with Silas, his faithful co-worker in the spreading of the gospel, Paul arrived in Philippi on the Sabbath Day. Going down to the riverside they found some women meeting together for prayer. Among them was Lydia, a business woman from Thyatira. She was a trader in the expensive purple cloth worn by the more wealthy people of that time.

We are also told that Lydia was a "worshipper of God". It is clear that Paul started to talk to these women about the Lord Jesus Christ and explain to them the gospel. Lydia listened intently as Paul told how Christ had died so that her sins could be forgiven. She listened as he said that she could only truly know God through the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus. And in verse 14 of Acts chapter 16 we read: "The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message". Lydia became the first known convert to Christianity on the continent of Europe.

This woman believed in God, she prayed to Him and met with others of like mind, but she did not know him as a loving heavenly Father. Before she could enter into such a relationship with God, her sins had to be forgiven. This only became possible as she heard the gospel and God himself opened her heart to respond to it.

Listening friend, have you responded to the message of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ? Have you received Him personally and experienced the joy of your sins forgiven? It is not enough just to believe in God, as Lydia certainly did, for sin must be dealt with before we can truly know God and be his child.

This was to be the first of several interesting and crucial encounters that Paul and Silas were to have in Philippi. God was going to establish His church in that place, and He was going to bring to salvation people from very different backgrounds. Lydia was probably a quite wealthy business woman, but the next convert was very different.

For several days, Paul and Silas found themselves being followed and tormented by a slave girl who was possessed by an evil spirit. This agent of Satan recognised who these men were and it caused the girl to cry out continuously: "These men are serving the Most High God". Finally we read that Paul became troubled by this and in the Name of Jesus Christ he commanded the spirit to leave the girl. The Bible says, "At that moment the spirit left her".

Here was the power of God at work against the forces of the evil one. The Lord Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, and that includes authority over Satan and his evil minions. It was in the Name of Jesus that the demon was cast out of this sad, ill-used girl. We must never fear the devil for his power is limited and through Christ we can be sure of victory.

Because of Paul's action, the evil masters of this girl complained to the authorities and had Paul and Silas stripped and beaten and thrown into prison. Satan is always at work in opposition to the gospel and the work of God's servants. But, as we have just discovered, although Satan is powerful, our God is omnipotent - He is ALL powerful, and His sovereign will must prevail. Even in this trial that befell Paul and Silas, God was at work and arranging another encounter with another completely different person - the Philippian jailer.

The jailer was commanded to guard these two servants of the Lord very carefully, so he put them in a high security cell and chained their feet in the stocks. It was no doubt a dark, dirty and damp place, but it always touches me to observe the reaction of these fine servants of Christ to their situation. Instead of mourning their probable fate, and complaining about what had happened to them, we are told, in verse 25 of Acts 16, that "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing praises to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them."

What a great testimony to the grace of God in the lives of these men! What a witness it must have been to the others in that awful place! Surely there is a lesson for us to discover in this! No, it is not easy to sing and pray in adversity, but the man or woman whose confidence is wholly in the Lord can know such strength and peace, even in the darkest hour. Take courage from this if you are passing through a time of trial, and praise God that He is with you in the midst of it all, and will deliver you in His good time.

The Lord did deliver Paul and Silas for as they were singing and praying a great earthquake shook the prison so that all the doors flew open, and the prisoners' chains fell off. What a shock that was for the jailer as he was awakened and thought that all his prisoners had escaped. Knowing that he would be held responsible he was about to kill himself when Paul shouted out, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

What would go through the mind of this man at that moment? He doubtless knew why Paul and Silas had been arrested and brought to his prison. Perhaps he too had heard their singing and seen their quiet confidence in their God. So, he rushes into the prison and falling down trembling before the men of God, he asks the most important question it is possible to ask: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Given such an opportunity, Paul and Silas do as they did down by the riverside to the women, they explained the gospel. They tell this trembling, fearful jailer that he needs to be saved from his sins and that the only way is through Christ. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved", they tell him, and if your family also will believe, they too will be saved. Verse 32 goes on to say, "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house." The gospel is a message of hope and forgiveness and salvation for all of the family, for all who will repent and believe the gospel.

A fine gospel preacher once said to his audience, "You must all be prepared to understand the "ABC" of the Christian gospel if you are to become children of God." The "ABC" is this:

(A) ACCEPT that according to the Word of God you are a sinner.

(B) BELIEVE on the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God who died for your sins.

(C) COME just as you are in faith to Him, receive Him as your Saviour, and ask Him to receive you, just as you are.

Did you get that? Accept, Believe and Come, just like the Philippian jailer and his family did, and you will be blessed with God's great salvation.

Shortly after this Paul and his companion were requested by the authorities to leave Philippi, but they left behind the foundations of a church that would later grow and become a living testimony to the saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have discovered just three of the encounters that Paul and Silas had in this city. Three completely different people, from different backgrounds, yet they all had to come to God

the same way - through faith in Christ. Three people whose lives were transformed when Christ came in.

It was some ten years later, while Paul was again in prison, that he wrote his letter to the Philippian church. It is, as we shall see in this series of studies, one of the most personal and affectionate of his letters. It shows clearly that this local church had a very special place in Paul's heart. They in turn had a great love for this servant of God who had brought the gospel to them.

Paul's Love Letter From Prison

Studies In Philippians (2)

After our brief introduction last time, we begin now our discovery of Paul's Letter to the Christians at Philippi. If you are able to have a Bible open as you listen to the programme, this will help you to follow along as I refer to the letter. If you don't have a Bible do not worry as I will be quoting the Scriptures as we go along.

We will start by looking at chapter 1 and at the opening verse. In this verse Paul introduces himself and Timothy as "servants of Jesus Christ." A servant is one who puts his will and his abilities at the service of someone else. The term Paul uses here is actually a "bond-servant". This is one who willingly serves out of love for their master. Someone has put it like this in describing this relationship of Paul and Timothy to the Lord Jesus Christ: "The ties of Calvary bound them to the service of their Saviour and Lord forever".

We note also in this first verse that Paul addresses the complete church. He says, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons." This letter is not addressed to the leaders only, but it is to all the believers in that local church. "All the saints in Christ Jesus" included them all and establishes the New Testament principle that EVERY believer in Christ becomes a saint at conversion. Not a saint in the sense that it is usually understood today, that is someone regarded by men as especially godly or eminent in some way, but one who has been set apart and consecrated by God Himself to His service.

So, this description "saint" applies to everyone who has committed their life to the Lord Jesus Christ, and it carries with it the privileges and responsibilities of service and obedience. If you are a Christian believer, you are not only a child of God, you are a saint - set apart for your Lord.

By the way - I understand that the word "saint" occurs some ninety-seven times in the Scriptures, so it is obviously very significant.

In verse 2 of Philippians chapter 1, we discover Paul's affectionate greeting to these believers: "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Here are two lovely words, "Grace" and "Peace". Grace in the Scripture speaks of the free, unmerited favour of God towards us. It is from God's grace that all our blessings flow. Peace is something that everyone longs for, but true peace only springs from the knowledge of a true relationship with God as Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ. We read in the Scripture that our Saviour has "made peace through His sacrifice on the cross". Through His blood, shed for our sins, we have peace with God.

In verse 3, Paul breaks into a song of thanksgiving: "I thank my God every time I remember you." Thankfulness is an abounding feature of Paul's life and of his letters. This great man of God seizes upon every opportunity to give thanks, and we would do well to follow his example. In this verse his thanksgiving is for every remembrance he has of his beloved friends at Philippi. He is thinking of their faithful friendship and co-operation in the work of the gospel. He recalls that, along with himself, they had laboured, suffered, triumphed and rejoiced in the Lord. He goes on to say that in his prayers and supplication for them he was filled with joy as he remembered the fellowship he had with them in God's service.

Intercession - praying for others - should be a great source of joy to us as believers, because in doing this we are following the lovely example of our Saviour. His great prayer of intercession for us is recorded in John chapter 17, and I encourage you to read it again and again, and so be blessed as you are reminded of Christ's loving concern for His people. Interceding for others, as Paul did for all the churches he wrote to, is a great

privilege. I wonder how many fellow-believers you have remembered with joy in your heart today as you have prayed?

We have already noted that Paul was filled with joy as he remembered their partnership, or fellowship, in the gospel. He says in verses 4 and 5: "I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now..." That word 'partnership' has to do essentially with co-operation in the grandest, noblest sense. It was a wonderful fellowship in declaring the good news of Jesus Christ. In another of his letters the apostle describes the gospel as "The power of God for salvation", and his whole life was devoted and committed to the spread of this glorious, life-giving message.

As we read chapter 1 of this letter to the Philippians, we discover that Paul mentions the gospel five times: In verse 5, as we have just seen, it is PARTNERSHIP in the gospel; in verse 7 we read of the believers DEFENCE of the gospel; in verse 12 we have the ADVANCING or FURTHERING of the gospel. When we come to verse 27 we have a different thought, here it is the believers' CONDUCT, or way of life, which is to be a testimony to the effectiveness of the gospel. And then, also in verse 27, he talks about "Contending as one man for the faith of the gospel." Here we have UNITY in the declaration of the Christian faith. One Bible commentator says about this: "Christians face a common foe; they should not fight each other ever, but should unite against the enemy of our souls - Satan and the forces of evil".

Come back now to verse 6 and discover how Paul has confidence in the spiritual growth of the Christians at Philippi:

"...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."

He is reminding them that on the very day that they became Christians, God began to work in their lives, to change them for good. To change their attitudes, their desires and the whole purpose of their living so that they might bring glory to Him. Paul is confident that God would complete that work in them as they sought to live for Him and serve Him.

There is a lovely verse in a hymn written by Augustus Toplady that perfectly describes this process: "The work which His goodness began, the arm of His strength will complete; His promise is 'Yea' and 'Amen' and never was forfeited yet." In other words, here is something that we can be sure of as believers, that God will work out His purposes in us and through us, and He will bring them to completion. May this be your experience as you are obedient to His Word and allow Him to change you day by day into the likeness of the Lord Jesus.

You will remember that I have called this series of talks on Paul's Letter to the Philippians, "Paul's love letter from prison". As we look now at verses 7 and 8 of chapter 1, you will understand why I have used this title. Paul says in verse 7:

"It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Jesus Christ."

What is Paul saying here? I feel he is saying that he loves them as well-proved Christians who, like Paul, had laboured and suffered for Christ, and who had shared in God's grace with him, whether on trial, or in prison, or travelling about preaching the good news.

W.E. Vine, a well-known Bible-teacher of the past in England, once said: "The gospel both overthrows its foes and strengthens its friends." This is certainly true of Paul and of these Philippian believers.

The apostle finishes his loving commendation by referring to the longing that he has for them all. He calls God to witness how greatly he yearns for them with the affection of

Jesus Christ his Lord. Here is another evidence of the marvellous grace of God in the life of Paul. That he, as a strict, law observing Jew, now had such a love for these Gentile believers shows that God's grace had broken down the ancient enmity that there was, and now they were all one in Christ Jesus their Lord. God is still doing this today, and it is a powerful testimony to the gospel when enemies are reconciled, when old hatreds are turned to love, and when there is unity between individuals and groups who were once bitterly opposed to one another. Only God can do this through the transforming power of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, Paul turns from these expressions of love and thanksgiving for the Christians at Philippi, and in verses 9 to 11 he prays for them:

"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God."

Here is a prayer that is suitable for us all as we seek to live for our Master and Lord. As I finish this talk, let me summarise this prayer of Paul for these believers:

He desires that their love for one another, and indeed for all people, might grow, as we might say, "By leaps and bounds." The more they would appreciate God's love for them, so their love would abound.

He desires that their understanding of the things of God would increase, and that they might always aim for what is best and pleasing to God in their lives.

In doing this, says Paul, you will bring glory and praise to God. May you and I seek to be like these Philippian Christians for whom Paul had such a high regard and to whom he wrote this letter with such affection and love in Christ.

Paul's Love Letter From Prison

Studies In Philippians (3)

We continue our studies in the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippians. This time we are looking at verses 12 to 30, and I've called this section, "A reminder of Paul's prison circumstances". This letter was written from Rome where the apostle was under house arrest awaiting his trial. So, in verse 12 he refers to this and says:

"Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel."

What a statement of faith in the purposes of God this is! Some might have seen Paul's imprisonment as a hindrance to the spread of the gospel, but Paul says, if anything it has helped considerably! This is another example of God at work in overruling the destructive plans of Satan.

Verses 13 and 14 show us that something positive resulted from Paul's arrest and confinement:

"As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly."

It is a remarkable fact that persecution often has the effect of transforming quiet and more reserved and even fearful Christians into courageous witnesses. If, as you listen to "Discovery" today, you are going through a time of persecution or suffering for the Lord Jesus Christ, take courage from Paul's example. He looked beyond his immediate circumstances to see the purpose of God in it all. And the Lord does have a purpose for you, just as he did for Paul. Listen to what the apostle Peter has to say on this question of suffering as a Christian, in 1 Peter 5 verses 9 and 10:

"Resist the devil, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered for a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."

May you know His sustaining grace in your time of need.

We have already discovered that Paul's burning ambition was that at all times he would preach Christ and Him crucified. In verses 15 to 18 of Philippians chapter 1 he turns to the subject of the gospel and the question of preaching this wonderful, life-giving message from the right motives.

(Verses 15 to 17)

"It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains."

Paul says that it is of great importance that we always present the good news for the right reasons, with honest hearts. He says that some were preaching out of envy and were jealous of Paul's success. They were exalting themselves rather than their precious Lord. Martin Luther, that great preacher of centuries ago, once said to would-be preachers, "See that pride, covetousness and envy do not follow you into the pulpit." If you are one to whom the Lord has given the privilege and responsibility of publicly proclaiming the gospel, that is a sound piece of advice.

However, Paul also says in these verses that others were preaching out of goodwill and with sincere love. Their motives were right and pure, seeking only to bring glory to their Lord Jesus Christ, and they knew that Paul was imprisoned for his courageous defence of the gospel.

Verse 18 shows us that Paul had his priorities right:

"But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, I will continue to rejoice!"

What a lovely word that word "rejoice" is! Many believe that this Philippian letter could be called the epistle of joy or rejoicing. Let's take a moment to discover a few examples:-

In chapter 1 verse 4 we have JOY IN PRAYING, and in verse 18, as we have just seen, it is JOY IN PREACHING CHRIST. Then in verse 25 it is JOY IN THE FAITH, and in verse 26 it is JOY IN CHRIST JESUS. He, our precious Lord, being our greatest source of joy.

Now, we may not always feel like rejoicing in our circumstances, but we always have reason to rejoice in our Lord - in what He is, and in that which He has done in saving us. We can rejoice in what He is doing for us now in the presence of God as our Great high Priest. And we can be filled with joy as we think of what He will do for us in the future when He returns or calls to take us home to glory.

Paul commenced his letter by telling the Philippians that he prayed for them all the time, and now in verse 19 he mentions the fact that he knows that his Christian friends in Philippi are praying for him:

"I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance."

What an encouragement this must have been for Paul in prison, to know that his brothers and sisters in the Lord had not forgotten him, but they were praying for him. And what an encouragement to the Philippian believers to know that through their prayers Paul expected to be delivered. The source of Paul's courage and strength was twofold, it was the prayers of God's people, but it was also "the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

Someone has said that "our prayers cut channels for the river of God's gracious Spirit." That is a lovely thought because no sincere prayer ever fails, it cuts a path for God to work along. In his prison circumstances, Paul needed courage, patience and wisdom. He could only meet the difficulties as he received the heavenly supplies. It was for these that his friends prayed.

Here, then, is another lesson for us to discover from this letter: that we should cultivate in our lives the ministry of prayer one for another. In so doing we will open up channels of blessing in the lives and circumstances of those for whom we pray, and it will be a source of great joy for us, too.

In verse 20 we discover the great hope and purpose of Paul's life as a Christian:

"I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will always have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death."

Paul's hope - his confident anticipation - rested completely in his Master and Lord. His overwhelming desire was that Christ would be magnified, or exalted, by his every action whether he lived or died. He sums it up in verse 21 by saying: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!" Everything in and about Paul's life centred on Christ.

We can look at it like this: The Lord Jesus Christ was THE SOURCE OF PAUL'S LIFE and He was THE SUPREME OBJECT OF PAUL'S CONTEMPLATION. Christ was the SPRING OF HIS HAPPINESS and THE SECRET OF HIS ABOUNDING ENERGY. THE OBJECT OF PAUL'S SACRIFICIAL LOVE was the Lord Jesus, and His glory was THE GREAT END OF PAUL'S ENDEAVOURS. Christ, and only Christ, was his total motivation. What a challenge this is to some shallow Christianity that we see today! What a challenge to me and to you that we would live Christ-centred and Christ glorifying lives!

It is this total trust in and dedication to the Lord Jesus that enables Paul to stress that if he were to die in prison or for his faith at anytime, that, for him, would be gain. Someone has written, "Death to a good man is the daybreak of eternal brightness." Calvin wrote to a friend just before he died, "I feel I am about to draw my last breath, happy, however, to live and die in Jesus Christ, Who is gain to all His children in life and death."

Such can be the confidence of all who trust in Christ for their salvation. Such was the confidence of the apostle Paul as he wrote this love-letter from prison to his beloved Philippians.

Paul's Love Letter From Prison

Studies In Philippians (4)

We come now to chapter 2 of Paul's letter to the Philippians, and it will be helpful if you have a New Testament to have it open at this chapter as you read.

Over this and the next three studies we are going to look at four individuals whom Paul presents to his readers as examples to follow and learn from. They are:

First, in verses 1 to 11, "The Lord Jesus Christ - the incomparable One"

Second, in verses 12 to 18, "Paul himself - the worker for Christ".

Third, in verses 19 to 23, "Timothy - his caring son in the faith".

Fourth, in verses 25 to 30, "Epaphroditus - the faithful messenger".

Today, then, we are going to consider our Lord Jesus Christ, the supreme example, the incomparable one.

We have discovered in our previous studies that Paul had a deep love and concern for the Philippian believers. In the opening verses of chapter 2, we gather that Paul had heard, that even in this delightful church, there were indications of some disunity and quarrelling. Listen to what he says:

"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose."

Paul urges them to consider the blessings of fellowship that they can enjoy in the body of Christ - the church. He reminds them of the unity they have with Christ Himself. Every true Christian is IN Christ, and Christ, by His Spirit, is IN every true Christian. They have the fellowship therefore of the Holy Spirit and they have the comfort of Christ's love for them.

Now, says Paul, seeing you are so blessed, make me happy by being like-minded, be at one in the Lord, do not be quarrelsome! Stand fast in one spirit and cherish harmony among yourselves. What Paul is saying in effect is this, - in harmony there is health, and in union there is strength. It is said that the King of Sparta was once asked why his city was not surrounded by walls. He pointed to the citizens of Sparta, who were all filled with one and the same enthusiasm, all one united band, and said, "These are the walls of Sparta - every man is a brick, and with these united as one, all enemies can be repelled!" Remember, listening friend, that, speaking of the church, Jesus said, "The gates of hell cannot prevail against it", and that is because we are kept by the power of God. But we have a responsibility, like the people of Sparta, to be seen to be standing together with one purpose, which for the Christian is the faith of Christ. The Psalmist rightly says, in Psalm 133, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity."

But there is another lesson to be learned as Paul goes on in verses 3 to 5 to speak about true humility:

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

The King James Version puts that last phrase like this: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Paul is now going to bring before these Philippian believers the incomparable example of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the unique, perfect, Son of God,

the only blameless, faultless man who ever lived. Here, says Paul, is the standard for your relationships with one another in humility. In effect he is saying that they should endeavour with all that is in them to cultivate a mind or attitude towards others like that of their Lord and Master.

The Rev. Guy King, a fine Bible teacher, describes the mind of the Lord Jesus like this: His mind was, "A Selfless Mind"; "A Sacrificial Mind"; and "A Serving Mind".

So, may our motives be inspired, our actions controlled, and our attitude towards others sanctified as we consider the mind of our Saviour.

In some Bibles this passage in Philippians chapter 2 is headed, "Imitating Christ's humility". Many Bible commentators describe this passage as a lovely hymn that teaches us about the person of Christ. Here this great follower of the Lord Jesus is describing the character and commitment to the service of others of his wonderful Master.

Listen to what he writes in verse 6 concerning Christ Jesus:

"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped ..."

This does not mean that Jesus merely resembled God, but that He actually Is God in every way. This is a statement of Christ's deity, the same message that we find at the beginning of John's Gospel:

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

John goes on to make it very clear that this "Word" is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, for he says that "The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us." And this is what Paul says in verse 7 of our passage:

"He made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."

The Lord Jesus took "the very nature of a servant", this is the message of Mark's Gospel and is the fulfilment of the prophecy found in Isaiah chapter 42. Someone has said that Jesus emptied Himself that we might be filled. He was born of a woman that we might be born of God. He became poor that we might become rich. He was made a curse that we might be made a blessing. "Oh, the riches of His grace!"

In verse 8 we read, "And being found in appearance as a man He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross."

Note that phrase, "as a man". Although He was truly God, yet He was also a perfect man. This is the message of Luke's Gospel, which tells us that "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Note, too, the phrase, "He became obedient to death". This is a sure token of Christ's deity as well as his authority, for only a divine being can accept death as an act of obedience. For ordinary human beings like you and me death is unavoidable, it is something all must inevitably face. But the Lord Jesus chose to die out of His great love for God first, and then for us sinners. As you think of the sacrifice and victory of Calvary don't you want to say, "Hallelujah! What a Saviour!"

We couldn't conclude our study of these tremendous verses in Philippians chapter 2 on a better note than by looking at verses 9 to 11:

"Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Because Christ willingly emptied Himself, and humbled Himself, and went to the cross for us, God has raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to supreme majesty, glory and dignity. One day He will be acknowledged by the vast universe as "King of Kings" and "Lord of Lords". Here is the message of Matthew's Gospel where Jesus is presented as God's rightful sovereign. What a glorious person is presented to us in these verses!

So what is Paul saying to these Philippian believers, and to us? Remember, he commenced this passage by saying to them: "Your attitude should be the same as Jesus Christ. Do not be selfish or vain, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." In all this the Lord Jesus is our incomparable example. What a difference it would make to our relationship with others if we were to follow His perfect pattern.

Paul's Love Letter From Prison

Studies In Philippians (5)

This time we will be considering Paul's teaching in Philippians chapter 2 verses 12 to 18. Last time we thought about the Lord Jesus Christ as the perfect example for all of His followers of humility and obedience to God. Now in these verses Paul's purpose is to press home to his readers the importance of following the Saviour's example in practice.

So, we read in verse 12: "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

In the opening phrase of this verse we are reminded again of Paul's great love for the believers at Philippi as he addresses them as "my dear friends". Christians should be dear to each other because we all love the same Lord and share the same blessings in Him.

Paul comments next on the obedience to Christ of these saints at Philippi. He says, "You always obeyed" when I was present with you and I want you to go on obeying now that I am absent from you. This reminds us of the words of our Saviour, "If you love me, keep my commandments." You see, the Christian life is one of submission to the will of God. There is an old hymn that says, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey".

Now what does Paul mean when he says, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling"? He is not saying that they are to work for their salvation. The Scriptures teach very clearly that no-one can ever merit salvation by the things they do. Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8 and 9: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no-one can boast."

What he is saying here is that we should, in practical ways, show the salvation we have by the way we live. We should work at our obedience to Christ and live lives that are holy, knowing that we are accountable to God. This is why he says we are to do it "with fear and trembling". In this way we will experience the true assurance and joy of our salvation.

In verse 13 there is a word of encouragement as Paul reminds his readers that they cannot do this in their own strength, but "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose." God is constantly working in the lives of His people through His Holy Spirit, to enable them to carry out His will. I find that a real encouragement, personally - do you?

It seems that a problem facing the church at Philippi was an undercurrent of disunity. We see this earlier in the chapter and Paul returns to the subject again as he reminds them that their salvation must have a practical result in the behaviour towards one another. He says in verse 14: "Do everything without complaining or arguing..."

The Children of Israel, who had also experienced the great deliverance of the Lord when they were brought out of slavery in Egypt, were constantly grumbling and murmuring against Moses their leader. In reality they were complaining against God. Because of this, they spent longer on their journey than was intended. Ingratitude and failure to submit to the Lord, and to the leader He had appointed, resulted in their often facing the Lord's discipline and a loss of blessing.

So Paul says to these Christians at Philippi, in verse 15:

"Don't complain and argue, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe, as you hold out the word of life".

By this sort of living you will be like lights shining for God in the darkness of this world, and so demonstrating the reality of the gospel, the word of life. To "hold out the word of life" implies not merely quiet, consistent beauty of character, but positive action for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. The Lord Jesus said, in His Sermon on the Mount, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." In John chapter 8 verse 12, Jesus also said, "I am the light of the world", and we should remember that after He returned to heaven He left His followers with the responsibility of reflecting his light in this dark world of sin.

You will remember that earlier in these studies we said that in this second chapter Paul sets before the Philippian believers four people as examples for them to follow. The first was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the greatest example of the lowly mind, or humility. The second person is Paul himself, "The Worker for Christ." And so we come to verses 17 and 18 where he says of himself:

"But even if I am poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me."

Paul truly sought in his life to exhibit the mind of his Lord and that mind was totally committed to the service of others. This total dedication of the apostle to the preaching of the Good News of Christ resulted in him suffering and being at the point of martyrdom more than once. We are reminded that he is writing this letter from prison in Rome.

Note that in verse 17 he says that he would be happy if he were called upon at any time to pour out his life in the service of his Master. Paul uses an illustration from the tabernacle offerings of the Old Testament to describe how he views his own service for the Lord and that of the Philippian believers. When a sacrifice was offered upon the altar, the priests would pour over it a drink offering. So Paul speaks of the Philippians as the offerers, their faith being in effect the sacrifice, and he, Paul, the drink offering poured out.

He was prepared to lay down his life for the sake of the gospel, but in humility Paul regards their dedication to Christ and their faithfulness towards him as God's servant as a greater sacrifice than his own. This causes Paul great joy as he thinks of his beloved Philippian believers and he encourages them to share in his joy, even though he is in prison and anticipates martyrdom for his Lord:

"I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me."

What an example Paul is of a truly humble and dedicated worker for Christ, whose whole purpose in life was to preach the good news and to bring glory and honour to his Master. We shall see further examples of this in this "Love letter from prison", as we continue these studies.

Paul's Love Letter From Prison

Studies In Philippians (6)

For this study we are going to concentrate on Philippians chapter 2 verses 19 to 24. In the previous studies in this series, which I have called "Paul's love letter from prison", you will remember that we have considered the Lord Jesus Christ as our one supreme example of the humble mind. Paul has given his readers a wonderful description of the Son of God who humbled Himself and became a man so that He might die on the cross for our sins. He has exhorted these believers to have the same mind as Christ by putting others before themselves and he has shown them that they must live together in oneness of purpose.

The Lord Jesus is the first of four examples that Paul brings before his readers and us in Philippians chapter 2. They are examples of how we should live and work together for the faith of the gospel. We saw last time that Paul himself was an example of one who was willing to dedicate his whole life to Christ's service, and even willing to lose his life, if that were God's will for him.

In the verses we are considering today, Paul reminds his dear friends at Philippi of yet another example of the mind of Christ seen another fine Christian believer. He writes about Timothy, "His caring son in the faith":

"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no-one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare."

Clearly, he must have been a rather special young man for Paul to make such a comment, and so he was. His name, by the way, means "honouring God", and as we discover something about him, we will see that he always sought to honour God in his life and service.

Timothy is introduced to us in the Scriptures in Acts chapter 16 verse 1 where he is described as "a disciple of Jesus Christ". One could have no better title than that. In a previous series of "Discovery" programmes on the subject of being Christ's disciples, we said that a disciple is a follower, a learner and an imitator of the Lord Jesus Christ. To live and work as a disciple calls for great discipline and devotion.

Timothy was brought up by his mother, Lois, who was a Jewess and a believer in the Lord Jesus, and by his grandmother Eunice. We know that from a very early age these godly women taught young Timothy the Scriptures. Paul mentions this in his second letter to Timothy, chapter 3 where he says:

"From a child you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus".

I want to stress here the great importance of Christian parents teaching their children the Word of God from a very early age. We are living in a world in which our children are exposed to much evil and godlessness. In His Word, the Bible, God has set out His standard for living for communities and for each of us as individuals. We find this standard set out for us in the Ten Commandments given to the Children of Israel through Moses. The Lord Jesus Christ summed up these commandments in this way: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, strength and mind and your neighbour as yourself."

Loving God with all our being; not stealing, lying, coveting or committing adultery, but truly loving our neighbour, these are things that are blatantly disregarded by the majority and is why we see such unhappiness and evil around us. How will our children know what God's Word says unless we teach them? All Christians who have the

responsibility for bring up and guiding children and young people, whether parents or grandparents or guardians, need constantly to show by the example of godly lives and the teaching of God's Word, the way in which our children ought to grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, may I say by way of encouragement to those listening who are also seeking in their churches or schools to teach children the importance of heeding the Word of God: You are involved in a very important work which can result in bringing children and young people to faith in our Saviour and Lord. Do not give up, but continue to teach faithfully the Scriptures, which are able to make wise for salvation those who will believe.

From this early teaching, Timothy progressed to such an extent that he became, as we have observed, a follower of Christ and Paul invited him to join with him, along with Silas and Luke, that fine Christian doctor, in the work of spreading the gospel. Because of this, Timothy was in Philippi when the good news was first preached there. We can be certain that part of his ministry would have been to help and encourage those who became Christians through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Through his own knowledge of the Scriptures, and from what he had learned from Paul, Timothy could teach these new "babes" in Christ.

Clearly, he came to love those Philippian Christians, and they in turn came to respect and love this faithful servant of the Lord Jesus. So, when Paul says in verse 20, "Timothy takes a genuine interest in your welfare", we can understand why. But note what he says in verse 21:

"Everyone else looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ."

We have already discovered, in the earlier part of this chapter, that Paul has had to rebuke some of the believers for a lack of humility and genuine concern for others. He has set before them the Son of God Himself as the supreme example of the lowly, humble mind that brought him from heaven as a man to die on the cross for their sins. So here, I believe, Timothy is being presented as one who sought to pattern his mind - his attitude to others - on the mind of Christ his Lord. Can it be said of you, or of me, listening friend, that our attitude towards our fellow Christians, and indeed towards all people, is patterned on that of our Saviour Who loved us and gave Himself for us?

Come now to verse 22 where Paul continues:

"But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel."

There was more to Timothy's example than the things he said, important though this was. It is not just what we say that people notice, but what we are. The Lord Jesus said: "By their fruit you will know them". The good work and life of Timothy were recognised by those who knew him, and says Paul, he has "proved himself as a son with his father". There had built up between the apostle and this young Christian a lovely "father-son" relationship. As we know very little about Timothy's own father, we can assume that the apostle Paul loved him as an adopted son, and had taken a great interest in his personal development. Timothy was in every sense Paul's "son in the faith".

I love Paul's mention of Timothy's fellowship in the work of the gospel. He helped to found not only the church at Philippi, but also the one in Thessalonica. He did some work at Berea with the believers there, and he gave spiritual help to God's people at Ephesus and Corinth. He is mentioned in Romans chapter 16 as Paul's fellow worker in the church at Rome. What a dedicated worker he was! Here was a man totally committed to the work of his Lord and Master, who travelled far and wide to serve Him.

As we come to verse 23, Paul says:

"I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how things go with me."

Paul was waiting to see how his appeal to Caesar for release from prison would turn out, and it was his intention to go to Philippi if he was set free. Paul longed to have his liberty, not for his own sake, but rather that he might be of further help to his beloved Philippians. He was confident "in the Lord" that he would soon come to them, but underlying this is his submission to the will of God for him at all times.

So, we have discovered three vital things today in the example of Timothy Paul's son in the faith:

First: The importance of teaching the Scriptures to others.

Second: That the true worker for God will be concerned for others, and serve them with a humble mind.

Third: That the Lord Jesus is looking for dedication in those who would serve Him.

Paul's Love Letter From Prison

Studies In Philippians (7)

Our journey of discovery this time is going to take us into Philippians chapter 2 and verses 25 to 30. This section of "Paul's Love Letter From Prison" introduces us to his fourth example of one whose life displayed the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has an unusual name - it's Epaphroditus, which, by the way, means "charming" or "agreeable". And this is just the kind of man he was! One Bible commentary in describing this man of God, says he was one of the most attractive and heroic characters found in the New Testament.

Epaphroditus lived in Philippi and was well known and loved by the Christians in that place. He had been sent as a messenger by the church, carrying a gift of money to Paul from his fellow-believers. In verse 25 Paul recognises the concern of his friends in Philippi for his situation in prison when he says:

"Epaphroditus.... whom you sent to take care of my needs."

We note that Paul calls him "My brother", emphasising the bond of Christian family love. To belong to the family of God is one of the greatest privileges the Christian believer has. He goes on to describe Epaphroditus as a "fellow worker". This is a term borrowed from the workshop, where people work together as a team. It also has the idea of comradeship in it. Clearly, here was a man who could work well with others; this is something that is essential in □Christian□service. To do this, we must be prepared to recognise, and graciously accept, the differences of opinion and personality that exist in us all as individuals, and seek to work together in harmony.

When Paul spoke of Epaphroditus as his "fellow worker" he was, of course, talking about the great work of spreading the gospel. You may remember that we noted in chapter 1 and verse 27 of this letter that Paul talked about the need for these Philippians to "stand firm in one spirit, contending (or working hard) for the faith of the gospel." Epaphroditus was a man who worked hard to make the Lord Jesus known.

Paul also describes him as a "fellow soldier." This reminds us that as Christians we are in a spiritual battle against the forces of evil. Paul's picture here is of the Christians in that day, fighting side-by-side against the onslaughts of godlessness and wickedness. These truly were "comrades in arms", as the Phillip's translation puts it. Let us remember, that as followers of our Lord Jesus Christ, we will often be called on to be engaged in spiritual warfare as soldiers of the true King.

We need not be afraid, however, because the Lord has provided us with armour for this warfare. We read about this in Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians, chapter 6 verses 10 to 17. Read this passage prayerfully and be encouraged by it. If you don't have a Bible, here are some of the pieces of armour that God has provided for you to protect you from the powers of darkness:

"The belt of truth"; "the breast-plate of righteousness"; "the shield of faith"; "the helmet of salvation", and "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

In verse 25 of Philippians chapter 2, Paul describes Epaphroditus finally as, "your messenger, and the one who is taking care of my needs." This fine man of God was clearly willing to take on common or menial work, away from public notice. The work that he did, quietly and out of the sight of others, God took note of, as He always does. In ministering to Paul's needs there in that Roman prison, he was showing the love of Christ in a practical way. Someone has said that here Epaphroditus humbled himself, but God exalted him by having his work recognised and recorded in this letter. So may we be prepared to do whatever comes to our hand, for the Lord and to His glory.

Epaphroditus had travelled some eleven hundred kilometres to visit Paul in prison, and it seems clear that because of this journey he became very ill. In verse 27 we read that he almost died. However, says Paul, "God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me more sorrow". This fine man of God had become ill because of his faithfulness in carrying out his Christian duties. He almost died for the work of Christ and, as Paul says in verse 30:

"He risked his life to make up for the help you (the Philippian believers) could not give me."

We gather from all this that the illness was prolonged, and the recovery gradual, but in his mercy the Lord did heal Epaphroditus and he was able to return to Philippi. Some of the Lord's people in every age have been called upon to suffer illness, pain and discomfort. Through such trials they have learned patience and reliance upon God for His sustaining grace. Many a Christian character has been refined and enhanced as a result of such experience. Job is a perfect example of the Lord using suffering and the loss of health so as to prove and improve that man's faith and trust in Him.

One other touching picture that comes out of this passage is the concern that Epaphroditus had for his Christian friends at Philippi. He was worried that news of his illness would cause them distress. Because of this, Paul was eager to send him back to them speedily so that the believers might be relieved of their anxiety about him. These are further indications of the warmth of the love within this fine Christian church. So, Paul ends this section by encouraging the Philippians to welcome Epaphroditus back with great joy. In verse 29 he says that they should "honour men like him" because of his dedication to the work of Christ. The thought here is that such faithful men should be highly loved and regarded.

We do thank God for faithful men and women who, like Epaphroditus, have set us a godly example by the way they have lived for Christ. We have discovered in Philippians chapter 2 that Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus each reflected something of the spirit of the Lord Jesus in the way they lived. We see in them aspects of "sacrifice", "shepherding" and "suffering". Clearly, they had taken in, personally, something of the mind of Christ Jesus their Lord. He is our greatest example, and it is the will of God that every true Christian believer be conformed to the likeness of His dear Son.

Paul's Love Letter From Prison

Studies In Philippians (8)

We are going to look this time at Paul's letter to the Philippians chapter 3 and v. 1 to 11. He starts this section by encouraging his Philipian friends to "rejoice in the Lord". An Old Testament writer says: "You shall rejoice in all the good which the Lord your God gives you." Christians have a God and Father who has provided a wonderful salvation and who keeps us day-by-day, and sustains us with His grace. It is in Him that we find our joy. Someone has said, "Christian joy is rooted in the Lord, it will endure while God endures." Let's remember also that joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit as we discover in Galatians chapter 5.

In verse 2 of Philippians chapter 3, Paul tells his readers to watch out for those he describes as "dogs, those men who do evil and who are mutilators of the flesh." This is strong language, but these expressions are used to describe those who were bringing false teaching into the church. Here was a very real danger, and Christians in every age must be on their guard for those who would in any way destroy the truth of God or seek to add to it their own ideas.

In verse 3, Paul describes true believers who live by the truth of God's Word. He says, first: They worship God in the Spirit, or by the Spirit. In the fourth chapter of John's Gospel, the Lord Jesus said, "God is seeking worshippers who must worship in spirit and in truth." To worship God in this way is to pour out to Him, our heavenly Father, our love, praise, adoration and honour.

Second, he describes true believers as those "who glory in Christ Jesus." Christ is the one whom Christians seek to exalt and glorify as their Lord and Saviour.

And, third, the true believer puts "no confidence in the flesh." In other words they place no reliance on themselves or on their own attainments. Their whole dependence for salvation and for living as Christians is in Christ. Someone has said that "Flesh includes everything that is apart from Christ; without Him we are empty and nothing."

We come now to verses 4 to 6 as we discover together Philippians chapter 3. In these verses Paul gives us a self-portrait of his position before he became a Christian. He says that if anyone had reason to put confidence in themselves, he certainly had. He had the privilege of his birthright as a Jew, born of the tribe of Benjamin. He describes himself as "A Hebrew of the Hebrews" and one who, religiously speaking, was a strict adherent to Jewish Law, and in this regard faultless. He was a zealous defender of his religion in his persecution of the church. We also know that Paul had an education that was second to none. Intellectually he was outstanding.

When we come to verses 7 and 8, however, we find just what Paul now thought about all this: "Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake I have lost all things." You know, listening friend, I consider this statement of Paul to be one of the great personal testimonies of the Bible. The Lord Jesus Himself said, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?" Paul accepted the reality of that, and as a result gained everything by putting his trust in Christ as his Saviour and Lord. He expressed this in chapter one of this letter when he said: "For to me to live IS Christ." He counted all his past gains as rubbish so that he might win Christ - the greatest prize of all!

In this letter Paul is completely taken up with thoughts about his Lord. Christ is the centre and circumference of his thinking. We can discover seven aspects of Paul's wishes concerning the Lord Jesus. You might like to note these down and make them a study of your own.

1. To KNOW Christ - chapter 3 v. 10
2. To GAIN Christ - chapter 3 v. 8
3. To MAGNIFY Christ - chapter 1 v. 20
4. To be FOUND IN Christ - chapter 3 v. 9
5. To be CONFORMED TO Christ - chapter 3 v. 10
6. To be WITH Christ - chapter 1 v. 23
7. To REJOICE IN Christ - chapter 2 v. 16

Now let's look at verse 9 of Philippians chapter 3. Paul says:

"I want to be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own - that comes from the law - but that which is through faith in Christ. The righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

I believe that here Paul is looking back to the moment in his own life when he personally decided that his own efforts to earn salvation were totally insufficient. He, like you and I, just could not reach God's standard of righteousness. Paul realised that he needed to place his entire trust in the Lord Jesus Christ - the only One who is completely righteous. The prophet Isaiah says in chapter 64 verse 6: "All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags". And in chapter 45 verse 24, "In the Lord alone is righteousness." This is why Paul says, here in verse 9 of our chapter: "I am now found in Christ and I have a righteousness that I never had as a sinner by trying to keep God's commandments - His law. Now, says Paul, my righteousness comes by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. One great Christian hymn-writer put it like this:

"Jesus the Lord our righteousness! Our beauty Thou, our glorious dress. In Thee I boast, in Thee alone; Jesus the Lord our righteousness."

I wonder, have you put off the filthy clothes of sin, and by faith put on the robe of righteousness that Jesus offers to all who will receive it, by faith in Him and His death on the cross to atone for your sins?

Finally, we come to verse 10 of Philippians chapter 3. Here Paul says:

"I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death."

What Paul means here is that he wants to live as Christ lived. In order to do this he desires two things:

First, to know Christ. This is not just head knowledge, but rather it is to experience in everyday life the power of the Holy Spirit that flows from being united with the risen Lord Jesus

Second, he wanted to become like Christ in Christ's death. Paul loved his Lord so much that he was willing to pour out his life if this was the will of God for him. To Paul, this was the true meaning of taking up his cross and following Christ his beloved Master, daily.

What an example he set for his Philippian readers and for us today. May the Lord speak to you today through Paul's love letter to Philippi. And may we be among those who put the Lord Jesus Christ first and foremost in our lives day by day.

Paul's Love Letter From Prison

Studies In Philipians (9)

We are continuing in chapter 3, and we are going to be looking at verses 12 to 21. If you don't have a Bible, don't worry as I shall be quoting verses as we go along.

In my previous talk we thought about Paul's EXAMPLE as he sought to be like Christ in his attitude and actions. This time we will think about Paul's ENDEAVOUR to continue and to make progress in his life as a believer. Someone has said that "In the Christian life there is: no standing still, no marking time and no resting on past achievements." That great Scottish explorer and missionary David Livingstone once said, in a letter to his missionary society, "Gentlemen, I am at your disposal to go anywhere, provided it be forward!"

The apostle Paul himself was always striving to achieve more for his Lord, so notice what he says in verse 12 of this chapter, "I press on". Another translation of the Bible puts it like this: "I pursue with vigour" or "I pursue strenuously." He goes on to say: "I take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." Paul never forgot that momentous day when the Lord Jesus Christ spoke to him from heaven as he journeyed to Damascus. He says here about that experience, that it was at that moment that Jesus took charge of his life and all that was to follow. One writer says about this, that "the purpose of this momentous meeting between Jesus and Saul of Tarsus was that from then on he would become a pattern saint; that God might show through him what Christ can do in a human life."

Paul was not yet perfectly like Christ. The process was still going on as he says in verse 12: "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on..." It was his supreme desire that he would become just like his beloved Master. This should be the goal of every true believer in the Lord Jesus, that we might be like Him!

In verses 13 and 14 Paul uses the metaphor of an athlete in a competitive race to describe his life and service for Christ:

"But one thing I do. Forgetting what is behind and straining towards the goal, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus."

An athlete who is keen on winning a race does not look behind, he keeps his eye on the tape and sprints to the line! This is the way Paul viewed his Christian life. I think there is a message and a challenge in this for all who have obeyed the call of Christ. When you became a Christian by personal acceptance of the Lord Jesus, you entered, as it were, the greatest race of all. The goal to achieve is to run life's race, which God has set before you, faithfully and obediently, and right through to the end. Writing to his son in the faith, Timothy, Paul could say towards the end of his life:

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing."

That's 2 Timothy chapter 4 verses 7 and 8.

The reward for commitment and consistency will be the crown of righteousness, awarded by the Lord Himself!

Note Paul says at the end of verse 14 of our chapter that all these things result from God's upward call to him as His servant. This is a personal call to all who would follow

Christ. It is a call which requires each one of us to look away from ourselves, and from earthly ambitions, to higher spiritual goals and attainments for our Lord.

Look now at verse 15 where Paul stresses the responsibility of all his readers in Philippi to follow his example and instruction in these matters. He says: "All of us who are mature should take such a view of things...."

He implies that this is what is expected of mature believers who are growing in their knowledge of Christ and likeness to Him. He goes on to say that God will make these things clear to them if they will allow Him.

Then in verse 16, Paul, reminds his readers that they should live up to the divine revelation they have been given. This, of course, includes us. In our day we have, in the Bible, the complete written word of God to guide and teach us. All true believers in Christ have within them the Holy Spirit of God whose ministry to us is to reveal God's truth and to bring to our remembrance those things that we have learned of Him. We who belong to Christ and to whom this truth has been revealed, should make this evident by the way we live our lives day by day.

In verses 17 and 18 of Philippians chapter 3, Paul sets before us an important contrast. In verse 17 he says:

"Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you."

Firstly, he encourages the Philippians to be followers or imitators of him. We should note here that only someone who was living a consistently godly life, as Paul was, could say such a thing. Someone has said that the beauty and grandeur of Paul's character are illustrated at every stage in his history, in his labour for the Lord and in his letters. He mentions others who were living the same kind of life as he was, and he encourages them, and us, to observe them with a view to following in their steps.

Secondly, the contrast comes in verse 18 where Paul mentions those whose lives are NOT to be followed. They are described as enemies of the cross, and in verse 19 as those whose "god is their stomach, and their glory is their shame." The goal of these people is to satisfy their own bodily desires, and they boast about things of which they should be ashamed. "Their mind", says the apostle, "is on earthly things"; they live as though they were going to live on earth forever.

There's another important contrast in verse 20. Speaking of the Christians Paul says: "But our citizenship is in heaven." In other words, the believer in Christ has no continuing place here. He is a pilgrim - or as one friend of mind puts it, "we are only tourists here!" The Christians true home is in heaven with our Saviour and with our Heavenly Father. From heaven we eagerly await the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, and what a prospect that is for every believer. How wonderful it is, whatever our present circumstances, to reflect on Jesus' promise found in John's Gospel chapter 14, where he says:

"I am going to my Father's house to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am."

Finally, for this programme, note verse 21 of our chapter where we discover a most wonderful promise, true for all who belong to Christ, but especially precious to those who may be suffering bodily weakness. We are all subject to age, suffering, sickness and death and limitations of the body, but we have this assurance:

"The Lord Jesus Christ, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body."

We say in response, "Amen Lord, so let it be!"

Paul's Love Letter From Prison

Studies In Philipians (10)

We come now to chapter 4 and we are going to consider verses 1 to 7. At the end of chapter 3 Paul reminded these believers that their citizenship is in heaven, and that they were eagerly awaiting the return of the Lord Jesus from heaven. Now he says, in verse 1 of chapter 4:

"Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends."

Before I say something about "standing firm in the Lord", let's think about Paul's love and regard for, as he puts it, his "dear friends." There is nothing to be compared with Christian friendship and fellowship. When a person becomes a Christian, through faith in Christ, they are placed into the body of Christ - the church - by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They are united with the Lord Jesus and are brought into a very special relationship with every other believer who loves the Saviour's Name. In my prayer-life each day, I personally am able to give thanks for Christian friends whom I have met from all parts of the world, because we who love the Lord share in communion with Him, and we have common interests in Him, which are unique.

Will you notice the delightful terms Paul uses to describe his dear friends at Philippi - "you are those I love and long for"; "my beloved brothers who I long to be with again; and," my joy and crown". There is very real affection in the heart of the apostle for these Philipians. They were his children in the faith, and his joy came from seeing them grow in their faith. The crown he mentions would be his reward for the faithful preaching of the Gospel. A crown he would receive at the coming again of his Lord.

Note now his exhortation to them to "stand firm in the Lord." To "stand firm" is to show stability, not to move away from the truth of God's Word. It's a call to faithfulness, whatever the circumstances. They are to stand firm "in the Lord", for He alone is the rock on which they are to stand. He is our strength and our guide and our example. Here is a lesson for us today, that we too should be "steadfast" and "standfast" Christians, faithful to the word of truth and depending entirely on the Lord every day of our lives.

In verses 2 and 3 of Philipians chapter 4, we come to a quite different situation. Of course, not everything was perfect in the church at Philippi, and Paul is concerned about two women in the fellowship who were having difficulty in getting on with each other. We are not told what it was they disagreed about, but clearly it had resulted in disharmony, and from what Paul says, this was hindering the work of spreading the Gospel. God's people are members of His family. It is God Who has brought us into the unity of the body of Christ - the church. It is, therefore, our responsibility to love one another, whatever our differences, and to maintain that oneness for which the Lord Jesus prayed in John chapter 17 verses 21:

"That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Turning now from these two individuals, Paul speaks to the whole church and in verse 4 uses a favourite phrase of his, in fact he uses it twice by way of emphasis: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" As Christians our joy comes from the Lord, and we find true joy in Him. The Lord Jesus said that as we experience his love day by day, so too we will experience His joy.

So, we have discovered three things so far in this fourth chapter of Philipians. In verse 1 we are to STAND FIRM - in the Lord. In verse 2 believers are to AGREE WITH EACH OTHER - in the Lord; and here in verse 4, we are to REJOICE - in the Lord.

Come with me now to verse 5 where we read: "Let your gentleness be evident to all." This has also been translated as "let your yieldedness or your sweet reasonableness be evident to all." This reminds us of something Paul says back in chapter 2, verses 4 and 5 where he is speaking about selflessness. He says there: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." What an example, but what a standard, our Master has left for us all!

We go on to observe why Paul teaches the Philippians to behave in this way towards one another. He says, "The Lord is near". This can mean two things: First, that the Lord is always near to His own noting all that we do; and, second, that the Lord's return could be at any time. Both meanings are a strong motivation for us to live lives that are pleasing to Him and an example to those around us.

Step by step, Paul is teaching these Philippian believers some very practical things about how to live as Christian believers. In verse 6 he goes on to say: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." The old hymn reminds us that it is a privilege to carry EVERYTHING to God in prayer. Whatever touches our life is important enough to take to the Throne of Grace. Somewhere I read this piece of advice, "Be careful for nothing" (in other words do not worry about anything); be prayerful for everything, and be thankful for anything."

Paul was remarkable for his habit of combining thanksgiving with his prayers. In all of his recorded prayers we observe his practice of bringing together, worship, praise, thanksgiving and intercession. He is saying here, "Let your cares become your prayers" and that will result in the promise of verse 7 becoming your experience. And this is the promise: "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

It is felt by many that the peace of God mentioned here is the tranquillity of spirit that God Himself enjoys, and that only He can give. The verse says that God's peace transcends - or surpasses - all understanding. In other words, the human mind finds it difficult to fathom God's peace. It is only those who, by faith in Christ belong to God, and in whom His Spirit lives, that can experience and appreciate this kind of peace.

Finally, Paul says that this peace of God "will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." In the midst of the battle, as we seek to live for Christ, we have the assurance of the peace of God, and peace with God, to defend us against the attacks of the enemy.

So, we have discovered Christian joy and Christian peace here in chapter 4 of Paul's love letter from prison." Are you experiencing such joy and peace in your life?

Paul's Love Letter From Prison

Studies In Philippians (11)

This time we will look at chapter 4 and verses 8 and 9. Someone has called this section, "A paragraph of mental health in a spiritual sense." So, let's start our discovery of God's Word by reading these verses:

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

As we look at these two important verses, I would like to suggest that Paul is asking his dear friends at Philippi to consider two things: First, A directive for THOUGHT; and second, a directive for PRACTICE. He says in verse 8, I want you to THINK about these things. One bible teacher says that, "the Bible teaches everywhere that we can control what we think as believers." We are all aware of the dangers of NEGATIVE thinking and the benefits of POSITIVE thinking.

In this statement of Paul's, the word "think" has to do with "reckoning", "counting-up" or "dwelling repeatedly" on the things he mentions. As we look at these things that Paul says we should fix our thoughts on, we shall see that they are six standards or elements of a strong and noble Christian character. Before we look at them, though, let's observe that all of these characteristics - true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable, apply in their entirety to our glorious Saviour and Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. They describe him perfectly, and as we keep our eyes and minds fixed on Him, we will discover the value of these virtues in OUR lives.

First then, we are to think about "WHATEVER IS TRUE", in contrast to that which is untrue, false or unreliable; rather our thoughts should be on all that is genuine and real. God's wonderful book, His written Word, the Bible, is the word of truth. In Psalm 119 verse 160, the Psalmist says of the Lord: "ALL your words are true, all your righteous laws are eternal." So, may we think today about all that is true, remembering that all that is not founded upon truth crumbles sooner or later.

Second, we are to think about "WHATEVER IS NOBLE". Perhaps a clearer description is "honest" or "honourable." This has to do with dignified or morally attractive conduct, the kind of behaviour that befits a true Christian.

The third thing on which we are to centre are thoughts is, "WHATEVER IS RIGHT", or whatever is "just." The Greek word used by Paul here is "DIKAIIOUS", and this translated as "righteous". In practical terms this means that in whatever we do we are required to act in the fear of the Lord. In our work for our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, we have to maintain the highest standards. In another of his letters, Paul puts it this way: "Serve not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God. And whatsoever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not to men."

We are discovering six things that the Christian should think about in Philippians chapter 4 verses 8 and 9. The fourth thing is "WHATEVER IS PURE." As far as the Christian believer is concerned, this virtue has to do with freedom from everything that is vulgar and sensual, selfish and mean. More especially, the thought is of chastity in thought and feeling, and in word and conduct. It has been said that "the enlightened child of God shrinks from moral defilement of every kind."

In His "Sermon on the Mount", the Lord Jesus taught His disciples, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." What a standard and what a blessing! The apostle James tells us in his letter that "the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all PURE."

We live in a very impure world, and our constant prayer must be that we will have that wisdom from the Lord Himself that will help us to live pure lives to His glory.

The fifth thing on which we should centre our thinking, Paul says, is "WHATEVER IS LOVELY." This word speaks of that which is "pleasing", "attractive", "agreeable" or "amiable". Someone has said that "love is the crown of all graces", and loveliness of character is a reflection of Christ's beauty. In a world where there is so much ugliness of character and behaviour, the Christian is to stand out with a character that is attractive and pleasing.

Now for the sixth standard for positive thinking. We are to fix our minds on "WHATEVER IS ADMIRABLE," or of good report. This has to do with that which is reputable or held in high regard in both what is said and what is done by the Christian believer. A good reputation among the people around us is a further evidence of Christian character. Paul said of Ananias, the man who helped him when he came to Christ, that he was "a devout man according to the law, having a GOOD REPORT of all the Jews..." That's Acts 22 verse 12. Such servants of God commend the gospel by the way they live.

So we have discovered together six standards upon which to fix our thinking: Whatever is TRUE, NOBLE, RIGHT, PURE, LOVELY, and ADMIRABLE. Finally, Paul asks the Philippians to consider things that are of virtue or moral excellence, as well as those which are praiseworthy. We have seen Paul's "DIRECTIVE FOR THOUGHT", we see now his "DIRECTIVE FOR PRACTICE." He wants to encourage practical and productive living in these believers. His word to us today about the teaching of these verses is this: give these things deep consideration, and with all your heart put them into practice.

In verse 9 there is some straight speaking by Paul. He says: "Whatever you have learned, received or seen of me - DO!" The word in the original text is an imperative - something that MUST be done. Paul was a living example of his teaching, which said "Right LIVING results from right THINKING". If a person thinks an evil thought for long enough, he will eventually do it. We need to guard our minds very carefully.

Paul's final encouragement in verse 9 is this: "And the God of peace will be with you." Here is a promise to those who keep their minds set on things above and who seek to live out lives which reflect the character of the Lord Jesus: "The God of peace WILL be with you." What a precious thought with which to finish this study.

Paul's Love Letter From Prison

Studies In Philippians (12)

Over the past eleven studies we have been discovering together the letter of Paul to the believers in Philippi. I called this series "Paul's love letter from prison" because Paul's affection for the believers in Philippi is very evident as he writes to them. We come today to chapter 4 and verses 10 to 23, and these verses will be our consideration for this and the next study.

We shall start by discovering again the secret of Paul's tremendous achievements in his work for the Lord Jesus. Paul was always rejoicing and so he says in verse 10:

"I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed you HAVE been concerned, but you have not had opportunity to show it."

Paul is thankful for the practical love and concern that his Philippian friends had for him. They evidently supported him financially in his work as an evangelist. When he says "You had no opportunity", this was because they were having difficulty in finding a suitable messenger to carry their gift to Rome where Paul was imprisoned. We have already discovered in a previous talk that a fine Christian worker called Epaphroditus eventually undertook this important task. It is a good thing and pleasing to the Lord when God's people are able to support His work and His workers in a practical way. It both encourages the workers and ensures that the work can continue unhindered.

In verses 11 and 12 of Philippians chapter 4 we discover some important lessons as Paul writes about his attitude to the circumstances in which he finds himself. He says:

"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

It has been said that God's people do not measure sufficiency by abundance, but by the will of God, which they become aware of by what happens to them. Christians are persuaded that their lives are regulated by the providence and perfect will of God.

Paul had passed through many educational experiences in his life for Christ, his Lord and Master. When he says "I have LEARNED", he is saying in effect, "I am BEING instructed". This was a continuous learning process, every day of his life. You know, dear listening friend, that we are all students by experience in God's school of life. We are told that even our Lord Jesus Christ "Learned obedience by the things He suffered." If we are to follow Him closely, as Paul did, we must be prepared to learn from everything that happens to us, whether good or bad. The cross of his Lord was ever before Paul and he applied that to everything he did. He followed the teaching of Christ that His followers must take up their cross daily as they follow Him.

Paul had accustomed himself to dwell always on his blessings, and to lay more emphasis on what he had, rather than on what he did not have. I read somewhere that Paul was a "Master of Arts", that is he had mastered the art of being hungry without complaining; the art of being full without boasting; he had mastered the art of suffering without impatience; and the art of abounding without setting his heart on the things of this world. For the Christian believer, whose life is set apart for God, to have little with God, in the material sense, is better than having much without Him. As it says in Psalm 37 verses 16 and 17:

"Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked. For the power of the wicked will be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous."

We come now to verse 13. As Paul looks back on all these experiences he is able to say: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." This was not an idle presumption or boast. Paul knew, as I'm sure you do, that we can do very little of God's work in our own strength. When he writes about doing "everything" he means everything that was God's will for him to do. He had learned that the Lord's commands are the Lord's enablements. He knew that the Lord would never call on him to accomplish some task without giving him the necessary grace to do it.

The story is told of an inhuman slave master who was in the act of whipping the already lacerated back of a half-murdered slave, when he said, "What can your Jesus Christ do for you now?". He was given the amazing answer, by his slave, "He can teach me to forgive you, master." What a gracious and noble reply from one who was a humble servant of Christ, the Master Who truly loved him!

Notice now in verse 14 where Paul says, "It was good of you to share in my troubles." He was always grateful for their fellowship in its many forms. And in verse 15 he looks back on their generosity and practical love in the early days of his ministry to them. In fact, he writes that they were the only church that supported him at that time. Let us be sure of this, that what Paul was thankful for here would certainly be recognised by the Lord. Remember what the Lord Jesus said in Mark 9 verse 41: "I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name, because you belong to Christ, will certainly not lose his reward." The Lord is no man's debtor.

There is a further good lesson for us to discover in verse 17 of Philippians chapter 4. Paul writes, "Not that I am looking for a gift, but I AM looking for what may be credited to your account." Observe here that it is not the gift that Paul covets, but the rich spiritual blessing that the gift secures to the givers. I'm sure you know the saying that "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Generous and loving giving only reflects the goodness and grace of God, Who gave His Son for us, and through Whom He freely gives us all great blessings.

Paul goes on to say in verse 18: "I have received full payment and even more I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." The gifts of a generous church are accepted as a sacrifice well pleasing to God and to the lord Jesus. Such giving is worship, acceptable and honouring to the great giver of all things.

We have already observed that God is no man's debtor, and in verse 19 we have this assurance: "And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus." What we as believers give to God is substance well invested and which will yield a rich return - spiritual blessings in return for material gifts.

Paul's Love Letter From Prison

Studies In Philippians (13)

We come now to Philippians chapter 4 and verses 19 to 23. Paul says:

"And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings; especially those who belong to Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen".

I suppose the best known and best loved statement in this chapter is the one in verse 19 that we finished with last time: "And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus." We must observe that this follows immediately after Paul's commendation of the Philippians for their kind and thoughtful stewardship towards him and his fellow evangelists.

Every Christian believer knows by experience that God always makes provision for His people. One of the great titles given to God in the Old Testament of the Bible is "JEHOVAH JIREH", which means "The Lord will provide." You will remember that David in Psalm 23 says, "The Lord is my shepherd, I will not be in want." Let's look carefully at this great promise here in Philippians chapter 4, and break it down in this way:

First, "My God..." The Lord was very real to Paul. He was told by Ananias a disciple of the Lord, at the time of his conversion: "The God of our fathers has chosen you, that you should know His will." Much later on, in Acts 26 verse 22, as he stood on trial before King Agrippa, Paul could say, "I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to both small and great alike." Paul knew God in a personal relationship as HIS God, and he experienced the Lord's preserving grace and keeping power all through his life. Do you know God in this way? Are you enjoying and resting in His care and experiencing His daily help?

Then the verse goes on: "Will meet all your needs." Note that it does NOT say "All your WANTS"! Everything that you or I might want would not necessarily be good for us. Someone has said that in ourselves we are but empty vessels, but this gives the Lord room to work in us his miracles of bountiful grace. Are you trusting the Lord daily for your every need, spiritually and materially?

Third, our verse says that God will supply our needs "According to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus." This phrase shows us the means by which God will meet our needs. We are to recognise that as rich as God is, so rich is He in His giving to us. Note, too, that they are described as His "glorious" riches, and that they are found alone in Christ Jesus in whom all the fullness of God dwells. The hymn-writer put it like this: "Thou O Christ art all I want, more than all in Thee I find." God has blessed us as believers with every spiritual blessing in Christ our Saviour and Lord, and through Him He will meet us with all the resources of heaven as we trust Him.

If you are in need today, of whatever kind, grasp the promise of this verse that "My God WILL meet ALL your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

In verse 20 Paul seems to sum up all he has been saying in a lovely expression of praise to God: "To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen." How wonderful it is to know, dear fellow believer, that the Almighty god, in all His power, riches and glory, is the One Who evidences and assures us daily of His fatherly care in our lives.

We come now to the final verses of "Paul's love letter from prison." In verses 21 to 23 Paul is thinking of every individual believer in the church at Philippi. Every one of them had a place in Paul's large heart of love. This included the well known as well as the least known humble believer, for they were all precious, not only to Paul, but to the Lord

Himself. Notice that he describes them as "Saints in Christ Jesus", just as he did at the beginning of this letter.

You will recall that we discovered there that every Christian believer is made a saint at conversion. A saint is simply one who has been set apart for God by faith in Christ and by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is because of our relationship with the Lord Jesus that we are called "saints". We are saints "in Christ Jesus", it has nothing to do with our own merits, resolutions, endeavours or achievements.

The New Testament makes it clear that a true saint is one who has been cleansed by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore one in whom the Spirit of God dwells. He is one who is living in the experience and enjoyment of Christ's life and who is daily following His example.

Paul now shares with his Philippian friends something that is very special. He says in verse 22: "All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household." This is, of course, a greeting from all the believers in Rome, but in particular it is a special greeting from those who were members of the household of the Caesar Nero. Some would be slaves, others would be soldiers, including those guarding Paul, and still others perhaps officials in the service of the Roman court. We can't know who they were, but one thing is certain - they had all been reached by the gospel and had received it, and had been gloriously changed by it. No doubt many of them would have heard the message from Paul himself.

It has been well said that the gospel knows no boundaries for it can find its way into the humblest of dwellings as well as into emperor's palaces. The good news of salvation through Jesus Christ is the power of God for salvation for all who will receive it. Listening friend, have you received this message? Do you know that your sins have been forgiven because you have come to God in true repentance and put your faith in Christ as your Saviour and Lord? You can do this right now as you listen to "Discovery", and then write to us and tell us. Then we will be able to say to you as Paul says in the concluding verse of this letter: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with your spirit. Amen!"