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1

TRIUMPH IN SUFFERING

SALUTATION, 1:1-2

THE WARM, INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP of Paul and Timothy to the church at Philippi is indicated in the absence of apostolic titles, also omitted in the two letters to the Thessalonians and Philemon. As Marvin R. Vincent expresses it, "The character of the whole epistle is reflected in this introduction. It is unofficial, affectionate, familiar, unlike the opening of the Galatian Epistle, and more nearly resembling the introductions to the two Thessalonian letters."¹

Since Paul's first memorable visit to Philippi about A.D. 52, there had been many friendly contacts as both Paul and Timothy had visited the church frequently. Paul had been there twice in A.D. 57.² Timothy also had been at Philippi several times (Ac 16:1-3; 17:14-15; 19:22; 20:3-4; Phil 2:19-23). The church had ministered to Paul's physical wants (2 Co 11:8-9; Phil 4:15-16), and just prior to the writing of this epistle had sent another love gift to Paul through Epaphroditus (Phil 4:15-18). Probably no other church provided the loving fellowship and thoughtfulness so encouraging to Paul in his prison experience.

Instead of claiming apostolic office and title, Paul and Timothy are described simply as "the servants of Jesus Christ," literally slaves of Jesus Christ. Although in Philemon Paul calls himself "a prisoner of Jesus Christ" (Phile

1:1), and in Romans and Titus he refers to himself as a slave in addition to the mention of his apostolic office (Ro 1:1; Titus 1:1), only here is the expression used alone in the salutation of Paul's epistles. Significantly, he takes the same place as Timothy who had had such an effective ministry in Philippi. Timothy is mentioned with Paul in seven epistles: 1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Timothy, who was with Paul in Rome during most of his imprisonment, is omitted only in Ephesians in the prison epistles.

The letter is addressed "to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi." The expression "saints" is a general designation of those dedicated to God, and therefore holy or sacred; hence, reserved for God and His service. It is used both for angels and men.³

The mention of bishops and deacons indicates the advanced state of organization of the church at Philippi now composed of mature and gifted believers from whom recognized leaders had come. As A. R. Fausset notes, "This is the earliest epistle where bishops and deacons are mentioned, and the only one where they are separately addressed."⁴ Of course, as early as Acts 6, men were appointed in the church to serve in a way similar to deacons. Although not called deacons, the prominence of this appointment of men to special service in Acts seems to recognize its significance. Elders were appointed in every church as early as Acts 14:23, and are mentioned in Acts 11:30; 20:27-28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13.

As Calvin and most commentators since have understood it, the address to bishops and deacons is evidence that a bishop is equivalent to a pastor or teacher, and that a deacon usually is the one in charge of charity and temporal things in the church. As Calvin states.

The titles, therefore, of *bishop* and *pastor*, are synonymous. And this is one of the passages which Jerome quotes for proving this in his epistle to Evagrius, and in his exposition of the Epistle to Titus. Afterwards there crept in the custom of applying the name of *bishop* exclusively to the person whom the presbyters in each church appointed over their company. It originated, however, in the human custom, and rests on no Scripture authority.⁵

The custom of appointing bishops and deacons was characteristic of the early Christian communities.⁶ While not mentioning his own apostolic office, Paul extends the courtesy of recognition to these church leaders, and with it a subtle suggestion that the unity of the church (which seems to have been threatened) could be maintained by proper recognition of leadership.

After the epistle is introduced with the usual salutation found in all of Paul's epistles, the apostolic greeting is extended, "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." The words "grace" and "peace," wonderfully significant of the Christian's relationship to God, beautifully express the content of Christian salvation and the triumph of Paul in suffering, which is the theme of chapter 1. In grace, the unmerited favor of God toward those who have trusted in Christ is revealed, and with it the whole sustaining power of God for the Christian is embraced. The result is "peace," peace with God through Jesus Christ, and the peace of God, the inner, supernatural tranquility which is produced as the fruit of the Spirit (Ro 5:1; Phil 4:7; Gal 5:22). Although a customary form of greeting, it expressed the longing of Paul's heart that the Philippians would realize to the full the wonderful provision of God for both grace and peace.

The general form of verses 1 and 2 follows the custom

of the first century in writing letters. Such correspondence usually begins with the name of the writer, and Paul follows this custom in all of his letters. After the name of the writer there is usually an expressed prayer or wish for the well-being of the person receiving the letter. This is often followed by a brief statement of what is being communicated. While the body of the letter often differed, it usually closed with a prayer or benediction. The form of Paul's letter, therefore, is not unusual; its content and inspiration set it apart. Archeological discoveries confirm that Paul's letters were similar to the letters of others. As J. H. Harrop points out, letters were used not only for ordinary social purposes, but to express philosophic, scientific, and other literary productions, some having more rhetorical character and more definite plan than others, as illustrated in the epistle to the Romans.⁷

THANKSGIVING FOR THEIR FELLOWSHIP IN THE
GOSPEL, 1:3-8

Philippians, like 1 Thessalonians, which is a letter of appreciation for the faithfulness of Christians in Thessalonica, is essentially a thanksgiving for the work of grace in Philippi, and for their thoughtfulness in sending Epaphroditus with a gift to Paul in prison in Rome. With a full heart he writes, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you." Paul's heart was filled to overflowing as he reviewed in his mind how God had worked in Philippi in leading them to salvation, in forming the church, his own sensational deliverance from jail at Philippi, the subsequent development of the church, and their kindness to him on many occasions. The Philippians were constantly in his prayers, and an unfailing source of joy and satisfaction (v. 4).

The apostle's prayer life is a remarkable aspect of his total

testimony and is frequently mentioned in his epistles (Ro 1:9; Eph 1:16; Col 1:3, 9; 1 Th 1:2; 2 Th 1:11; Phile 4). In his busy life on his missionary journeys as well as now in his imprisonment, Paul dedicated many hours to prayer. In our modern day when program and publicity and promotion characterize the Lord's work, it is sometimes overlooked that without prayer no eternal work can be accomplished for God. Paul's prayer life is a noble example to all who would be effective in Christian work and testimony. No doubt the Philippian church had also prayed for him, and this forms part of their fellowship with him. He mentions, "your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now" (v. 5). Their fellowship was not only social and spiritual, but they were fellow laborers through their prayers and gifts in all that Paul had wrought, as he states in Philippians 4:15-16.

Significant in the early verses of this epistle is the reference "to all the saints in Christ Jesus" (v. 1), and "you all" (v. 4). One of the problems with which the apostle deals in chapter 4 is a minor rift in the church; it was of a social rather than a theological nature, and Paul was seeking to heal it on the basis of their common love for him and for the Lord. The word "all" is repeated twice in 1:7 and again in 1:8. The fact that he can thank God for each one of them sets a high standard for relationship between a pastor and his people, whether in the first or the twentieth century. Many pastors would have difficulty thanking God for everyone in their flock.

His joy in their present fellowship is matched by his confidence in the certainty of their future perfection at "the day of Jesus Christ." This expression, which occurs three times in Philippians (1:6, 10; 2:16) and three times in Paul's other epistles (1 Co 1:8; 5:5; 2 Co 1:14), is probably a

reference to the day when Christ will come for His church (1 Th 4:13-18). If so, it is used in contrast to “the day of the Lord,” which contextually refers to the time of judgment and the millennial kingdom of Christ on earth. The day of the believer’s perfection will be the day of his translation or resurrection. Meanwhile, Paul is confident of God’s continual working in them. Having saved them, God would complete His work of grace in their future deliverance and glorification.

Paul’s confidence in God and in the Philippians has sound basis in the past evidences of their faith mentioned in verse 7. He declares his confidence is fitting “because I have you in my heart,” and “in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.” An alternate translation, “because you have me in your heart,” as Lightfoot points out, is not supported by the order of words in the original.⁸ His reference to “in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel,” is not evidence that his trial had already begun. It is rather that the Philippians had shared his suffering, as well as his labors, and had been partakers of the same triumph over suffering made possible by the grace of God.

In these seven verses of introduction, an amazing expanse of theological truth had already been introduced. The words “servants,” “saints,” “grace,” “peace,” “prayer,” “joy,” and his expression of confidence, thanksgiving, and hope constitute an impressive background for the rest of the epistle.

The apostle’s thankfulness for them, his joy in their fellowship, his confidence in their ultimate spiritual triumph, and his assurance that they are partakers of the grace of God only serve to increase his love for them. Paul calls upon God to record how greatly he longs after them in the compassions of Christ. He yearns for them as a mother for a child. He

mentions that Epaphroditus had the same feeling toward them (Phil 2:26). His longing for them was born of the Spirit who had produced the fruit of love in Paul's heart. As F. B. Meyer expresses it, "The Apostle had got so near the very heart of his Lord that he could hear its throb, detect its beat; nay, it seemed as though the tender mercies of Jesus to these Philippians were throbbing in his own heart."⁹ Having the heart of Christ and His compassion transforms all human relationships; places love on a supernatural plane; enables us to love the unlovely, the unthankful, and the indifferent; and impels us to prayer. This is the heart and compassion of God supernaturally implanted in the human breast. This compassion is further expressed in the following passage which reveals Paul's deep concern for them.

PRAYER THAT THEY MIGHT BE FILLED WITH THE
FRUITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, 1:9-11

The fruit of the love and compassion of Christ finds its highest expression in prayer. Having mentioned his thankfulness and joy as he prays for them in verses 3-5, Paul declares that the content of his petition is fourfold. In his first petition he prays that their love "may abound yet more and more." How often the Scriptures remind us that love is the primary quality of Christlikeness. It was this quality which should distinguish disciples of Christ from all others (Jn 13:35). Love is the first of the fruit of the Spirit, without which all the other fruit loses its luster (Gal 5:22-23). It is the greatest of the three great virtues—faith, hope, and love (1 Co 13:13), and the indispensable quality to every spiritual gift, whether it be tongues, prophecy, faith, sacrifice, or martyrdom (1 Co 13:1-3). Too often in listing theological fundamentals of the faith, love as a fruit of the Spirit is omitted. It is actually the *sine qua non* of Christianity today,

as well as in the Philippian church. Particularly because there had been a rift in the spiritual fellowship of the Philippian church, alluded to in 4:2, the great need of the Philippians, like the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2, was to return to their first love (Rev 2:4).

In this, the only possible standard is love which continues to abound increasingly. Such love, however, is more than just emotion. It is love rooted "in knowledge and in all judgment." The word for love is *agape*, the deepest word for love in the Scriptures. The knowledge to which love is to lead is, as Lightfoot expresses it, "*advanced, perfect knowledge*."¹⁰ Here it means spiritual knowledge, theological knowledge, the comprehension of the total revelation of God concerning Himself, man and salvation. It is only as we comprehend the love of God toward us, unworthy as we are, that we can in turn love those who are imperfect. Then he adds, "in all judgment" (the word occurring only here in the New Testament), referring to "*feeling*," "*perception*," "*insight*," and "*experience*."¹¹

As Lightfoot expresses it, "Love imparts a sensitiveness of touch, gives a keen edge to the discriminating faculty in things moral and spiritual."¹² As knowledge deals with general principles, so perception and insight deal with its application.

The love for which he is praying is that which comes from the heart of God who is omniscient, infinitely discerning, and fully aware of all the deficiencies of His creatures, and yet is impelled to love because He is a God of love. Such love cannot be static, but must abound.

In his second petition in verse 10, Paul logically proceeds from his prayer for love abounding in knowledge and in judgment to the corresponding quality of a discriminating sense of values expressed in the clause, "that ye may approve

things that are excellent.” The idea of approval comes from a word meaning “to examine carefully” or “to test.” The conclusion “that are excellent” more literally means “to discriminate between things that are good and bad,” or things that are opposed to each other. Spiritual discernment sorts all things out as good or bad in the sight of God determined by divine rather than human criteria. An accurate translation would be, “that ye may discriminate between things that differ.” The same expression occurs in Romans 2:18 where it speaks of knowing God’s will and of being instructed out of the law. In a world which has lost its sense of value, a Christian must have unusual sensitivity to what really counts.

Such discernment leads to the third petition of Paul, “that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.” By “sincere” is meant they would have purity of motive, a purpose in life obviously pure and unsullied by selfishness, sin, or worldly standards. The Greek word translated “sincere” is usually considered to be an interesting combination of two words referring to sunlight and judgment, indicating the genuineness of anything examined in the full light of day. Such sincerity in motive leads to a life that is without offense to God or man when judged by God’s standards. The desire of the apostle is that the motivation of the Philippians in their service for God would stand the searching test of judgment at the climax, the day of Christ, the day of their resurrection or translation.

The fourth petition of the apostle is that the Philippians would be “filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ.” This is a summary statement gathering in all that has preceded—their love, their discernment, and their being without offense. To these spiritual qualities must be added all the other “fruits of righteousness,” an Old Testament expression (Pr 11:30; Amos 6:12) also used by

James (3:18). The fruits of righteousness which are mentioned are those which come from their relationship to Jesus Christ rather than to the law (Phil 3:9).

The fruits of righteousness comprise evidences of transformed character by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the resulting works of righteousness which fulfill the will of God in the individual life. So, it is a holy life and a holy character manifesting the fruit of the Spirit. Hendriksen expresses it:

Paul prays that in the hearts and lives of the Philippians there may be a rich spiritual harvest, consisting of a multitude of the fairest fruits of heaven; such as, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22, 23), and the works which result from these dispositions. One of these works, a very important one, is soul-winning (Prov. 11:30).¹³

What Paul is seeking to be fulfilled in their lives is not something which is a product of human effort or legalism, nor is it advanced by the Judaizing party in Rome referred to in Philippians 1:15, or by any other natural source. It must be a supernatural work of grace in answer to prayer.

The ultimate goal of his prayer is not only transformation of the Philippians, but through this to bring glory and praise to God. The thought is not that God will praise them, but rather that the Philippians will be an occasion of manifesting God's glory and of bringing praise to the Lord. The depths of Paul's concern and love for the Philippians, and the high standard of conduct and experience here described, succinctly express the true goals in life for any Christian. Love with discernment and perception, distinguishing the good from the bad, sincerity of motive and purity of life, and abundance of the fruits of righteousness produced by the grace of God are the hallmarks of spiritual attainment, both for the Philippians and for us.

In this introductory section to the epistle, Paul has underscored two important aspects of Christian faith and life. The first is the assurance of salvation, and the certainty of glorification based on the grace of God and the finished work of Christ, although manifested experientially by a contemporary work of grace in the lives of Christians. The apostle is, first of all, rejoicing in the salvation of the Philippian Christians. Second, satisfied as to their supernatural salvation, he is burdened that now they will go on to achieve the full fruit of the Christian life and the fruit of the Spirit, including love, joy, holiness, and service. They had attained much, but there was still more to be realized in their Christian faith.

PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT AS AN AID TO PROCLAMATION
OF THE GOSPEL, 1:12-18

The experience of Paul of suffering in prison gives remarkable insight into the purposes of God in permitting the affliction of His children. As is so often the case, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee" (Ps 76:10). What appears on the surface a great tragedy—an effective preacher and missionary rendered immobile for years in the most fruitful period of his life—turns out to be an effective platform of personal witness in Rome and a time for quiet meditation which permitted the writing of the precious prison epistles which, with the epistle to the Romans, are the heart of Paul's revelation to the church.

To the Philippian Christians, grieving at Paul's confinement, the purpose of God in Paul's suffering is revealed as he says, "The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel" (v. 12). Instead of hindering the proclamation of the gospel, his cir-

cumstances had served to extend his witness and to testify to his triumph over suffering.

The problem of human suffering is one of the most profound theological and philosophic questions to confront intelligent minds. If there is a God, why does He permit suffering? And if He is a God of love, why in particular does He permit those who trust Him to suffer? The extent of human suffering in the world in the form of physical want—such as lack of food and clothing, the anxiety and fear of those who live in superstition or political oppression, and the intellectual suffering coming from the normal stresses and strains of life—are all beyond human calculation. Although many solutions have been offered, the Christian faith is the only comprehensive answer.

According to the Scriptures, suffering is caused by the fact of sin and a disordered world. Much suffering in the world is the natural consequence of the disobedience of Adam and Eve and the resulting sinfulness of the race. Sin has come by the will of man in his rebellion against God rather than by an act of God. It is understandable that a righteous God will need to judge sinful man. But obviously Paul is not suffering because he is a sinner.

How is human suffering explained as it relates to the child of God? Why should one like Paul, who has been saved by grace and whose sins have been forgiven and who has served God acceptably, be placed in such a situation as Paul was experiencing in prison? The answer is given in various portions of Paul's own epistles, and at least four major reasons can be enumerated to explain why Christians suffer:

First, suffering may come in the life of a believer because of failure to judge sin in his life. Paul refers to this in 1 Corinthians 11:31-32 where he writes, after calling attention to God's judgment on the Corinthians, "For if we would

judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” In other words, the Corinthian church had experienced physical weakness and even death because of their failure to judge their own sins. This, however, does not seem to be Paul’s difficulty.

Second, another reason for suffering is mentioned by Paul in Romans 5:3-5, which presents suffering as a means of gaining spiritual experience. Paul wrote there, “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” An outstanding illustration of this is the case in the Old Testament of Job who is described as a perfect and righteous man but nevertheless permitted to suffer, that through his suffering he might learn more of the nature of God and His dealings with man.

Third, still another cause for suffering is that it is a device used by God to prevent sin in the life of a Christian. To this Paul alludes in 2 Corinthians where he stated his own experience of a thorn in the flesh:

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Co 12:7-9).

There is no evidence that Paul was imprisoned to keep him

from sinning, however, and his imprisonment was not his thorn in the flesh.

Fourth, an important reason for suffering is to increase the effectiveness of a Christian's testimony. This seems to be the best explanation why Paul was in prison. God had used this peculiar circumstance to give him a means of presenting many with the gospel who otherwise would have been beyond Paul's reach. Although he does not mention all the details, Paul states that because of his bonds in Christ, referring to the fact that he was chained constantly to a Roman soldier, the gospel by this means had been manifested "in all the palace, and in all other places."

The translation "in all the palace" (v. 13) is literally "in all the praetorian." As explained in the Introduction, the praetorium can refer to a palace or the place of residence of the governor (cf. Mt 27:27; Mk 15:16; Ac 23:35). This is the way it is rendered in the Authorized Version. There are, however, other possibilities, such as referring to the barracks or camp of the praetorian guards. A third possibility is that it refers to the guards themselves because the phrase is immediately followed with "and in all other places," or more literally, "and to all the rest." It has been argued by Lightfoot and many others that the best rendering is to consider the reference to the soldiers themselves, and accordingly is translated, "throughout the praetorian guard," which Lightfoot says is "the best supported meaning."¹⁴ If so, it supports the idea that Paul was in Rome. If it refers to a palace or a government house, it is argued that it might refer to a place other than Rome, such as Ephesus. The majority opinion supports Lightfoot; although, as pointed out in the Introduction, some have preferred one of the other renderings which would permit the letter to be written from Ephesus or some other place. If the majority opinion is fol-

lowed, however, Paul was guarded by imperial soldiers who were the cream of the Roman army, and the time of his writing was while he was in Rome, the center of the Roman government.

Whether in Rome or elsewhere, however, according to the custom, the apostle was probably chained to a Roman soldier twenty-four hours a day, with a new guard every six hours. No doubt this was a most trying experience which subjected Paul to all the evil characteristics and whims of his guard even when he talked to his friends, when he prayed or when he attempted to write. Always there was this Roman guard.

The circumstances, however, also afforded him the priceless opportunity of witness, and each guard heard Paul's story. The claims of the grace of God and the transformation it afforded in his life subjected him to the scrutiny of each guard to see whether his testimony was genuine. The slightest deviation, impatience, or irritation would disqualify his testimony to the guard, and any lack of consistency in life would soon be communicated to others. The apostle's sincerity and his glowing account of God's grace manifested to him apparently were effective as guard after guard came to know Jesus Christ in an effective way.

Only God knows what went on in the rented room in which Paul was permitted to live. There the guards heard the conversation of Paul with his intimate friends and were able to ask questions about the strange words which they heard from their prisoner. In the lonely hours of the dark night, illuminated only by the moon, many a guard probably heard the testimony of Paul—his early career as a Pharisee, his antagonism and persecution of Christians, his remarkable conversion, and the causes of his imprisonment. No doubt all this was the subject of much conversation in the prae-

torian guard, and raised sympathy among the soldiers as they understood his unjust imprisonment. His chains had become an effective line of communication to the elite soldiers of the Roman Empire who, if converted, could carry the gospel to the ends of the earth as they were moved from place to place. It reminds us that every circumstance of life is a platform on which the transforming grace of God can be manifested in the life of the Lord's own.

Paul's testimony was not limited to the guards, but was manifest "in all other places," literally, "to all the rest," that is, to other persons. What Paul said and did in that prison were apparently discussed, especially among the Jews who lived at Rome. These brethren of Paul in the flesh were very conscious, not only that Paul was a Jew, but that he was accused by his fellow Jews of breaking with the tradition of the fathers. Paul's prison had become a pulpit.

One effect of Paul's faithful and consistent witness was that "many," literally, "the greater number" of the brethren in the Lord were made more bold to speak the Word without fear. If Paul could preach in prison fearlessly, they could preach the Word outside prison. His influence was such that the great majority of Christians in Rome were encouraged to witness.

There were, however, two factions among Christians in Rome. One group loved and followed Paul. The other group were the Judaizers (3:1-6) who held onto their Jewish traditions. Although they believed in Christ, they attempted to combine Judaism and Christianity. The inference that Paul's opponents were Judaizers, derived from his condemnation of them in 3:1-6, seems to be justified. Lightfoot, for instance, states,

These antagonists can be none other than the Judaizing party, who call down the Apostle's rebuke in a later passage

of this letter (iii. 2. sq.), and whose opposition is indirectly implied in another epistle written also from Rome (Col. iv. 11); see above pp. 17, 18.¹⁵

Ignoring the contribution of Philippians 3, Muller opposes this view, saying,

The idea, that Paul here has in mind the Judaizers, (so among others Bengel, Lightfoot, Meyer, Ellicott), must be rejected, for in these verses no *material* contrast is mentioned between their preaching and that of Paul, but only a *personal* one. Thrice the apostle pertinently declares that they preach Christ (15, 17, 18).¹⁶

Note, however, that Muller is arguing entirely from silence, and that it is not impossible for a Judaizer to preach Christ. It may be that the degree of their error was not as serious as in the Galatian churches, but there must have been something more than a personal antagonism to Paul.

Paul's message seems to have been too revolutionary for them. In contending for their point of view, however, they did preach Christ; and hence Paul refers to them as motivated by "envy and strife" (v. 15) and as preaching "Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds" (v. 16). They probably regarded Paul's imprisonment as an act of divine chastening. Others, inspired by Paul, defended the gospel of grace motivated by love of God and love of Paul.

Although Paul ardently defends the gospel of grace in the epistle to the Galatians, he concludes here that even if they preached with wrong motivation, "Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (v. 18). As Lightfoot points out, this is not a repudiation of the gospel of grace which he so vigorously defends in Galatians, nor is it a condoning of the Judaizing party. As Lightfoot puts it,

Here on the other hand the choice is between an imperfect Christianity and an unconverted state; the former, however inadequate, must be a gain upon the latter, therefore must give joy to a high-minded servant of Christ. In Rome there was room enough for him and for them.¹⁷

The greatest problem of the world then and now is not that the gospel is imperfectly preached, but that it is not preached at all. Instead of adding affliction to his chains, it brought joy to Paul that his presence in Rome had served to extend the preaching of the gospel.

Paul's entire experience recognized the wisdom of God in permitting Paul to suffer. Divine revelation offers the only satisfactory explanation as to why there is suffering in the world as a whole, and why even the godly suffer. Paul was in prison as a means of increasing his testimony, as an effective way to evangelize Rome, and to prepare him spiritually to write the prison epistles.

Although the reasons for suffering may not always be immediately apparent, by faith a Christian can assume "that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Ro 8:28). Many a great Christian was molded in character in the crucible of suffering, matured in loneliness, and prepared for greater usefulness in God's hands than if untouched by the storms of life.

PAUL'S SUFFERING AS AN AID TO MAGNIFICATION OF CHRIST, 1:19-20

Although it would be natural for Paul to consider the antagonism of the Judaizers as another aspect of his affliction, he rejoices in it, not only because it furthered the gospel, but because it stimulated prayer on the part of his friends. His circumstances being what they were, he expresses confidence that because of their prayers and "the supply of the Spirit

of Jesus Christ" (v. 19) literally, "the bountiful supply," he will experience salvation. By this he means God's total deliverance, not only spiritual but from the prison. The Spirit of God is both the one supplied and the Supplier of Paul's needs, both the Giver and the Gift (cf. Ro 8:9; Gal 4:6; and Ac 16:7, ASV).¹⁸

This living hope of the apostle leads to the reaffirmation of his supreme goal in life—to magnify or glorify Christ. He believes his future deliverance will be "according to my earnest expectation and my hope"; that his experience of deliverance and effective witness will leave him with nothing of which to be ashamed. Whether by life or death, he wants his witness to be so bold that Christ will be magnified in his body.

Paul expresses this fervently but delicately. He does not use the first person or say, "I will glorify Christ," but rather selects the future passive. The thought is not that the glory of Christ will be increased, but rather that it will be manifested and made apparent to others. This was his passion as hour by hour he bore witness to the guard at his side, and this was to be his testimony even to his tormentors, the Judaizers. His utter committal to this goal is indicated by his willingness to achieve it whether "by life, or by death."

Paul was not concerned as to how he would become the magnifying glass which would enable others of dim spiritual sight to see the glories of Christ. Sufficient for him was the thought that he could be the medium. Such has always been the true goal of the spiritually great. John the Baptist had said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 3:30). As Guy King has noted, an object can be magnified by the microscope, making the little big, or the telescope, making that afar off to be seen as if very near.¹⁹

TO LIVE OR TO DIE, 1:21-24

Paul's willingness to die if necessary for Christ was not necessarily an evil alternative. In the memorable statement of verse 21, in many respects the key verse of the epistle, he states the alternatives. For to Paul to live is Christ. By this he means that his life is wrapped up in Christ, in witnessing of Christ, in fellowship with Christ, in the goal to make his life a channel through which others might know Christ. For others, life may be different. As F. B. Meyer observes, life for the merchant may be wealth; for the slave, toil and suffering; for the philosopher, knowledge; for the soldier, fame; for the emperor, an empire.²⁰

But to die is not to give up Christ, but rather it is to gain. To die would be freedom from the chains, deliverance from self, the end of suffering, the curtain on strife, the beginning of a new life of freedom and abundance, the experience of being completely like Christ. The alternate claims of life and the glorious prospect of life after death conflict sharply in the mind of Paul. If he continues to live in the flesh, there would be fruit for his labor. There is obviously an ellipsis in thought. Probably he did not question whether to continue living would have produced fruit. There seems to have been assurance that he would live on. His thought is simple: If I do live on and produce fruit, would this be better than to die? Paul finds himself torn between the alternatives, perhaps preferring, if left to his own wishes, "to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (v. 23).

He recognizes, however, that if he remains in the flesh he can help others such as the Philippians (v. 24). The expressions in the original are perhaps more graphic than their English translation. He describes his conflict as being in "a strait," a verb meaning "to be held close"; hence, "to be distressed" or "tormented," "pressed from every side." The

word “depart” means to “loose” or “untie.” Literally it means “to break up,” as to break up camp as Israel did in the wilderness. The departure from earth to heaven is indeed breaking earthly ties and moving camp to heaven. But the tug of ties binding him to the earth and the need of those left behind make departure difficult.

ASSURANCE OF HIS COMING ACQUITTAL, 1:25-26

Having come to the conclusion that his continued life and ministry on earth are more needful than to depart to be with Christ, he proceeds confidently to assert his assurance of his acquittal at his coming trial, which would permit him to continue his ministry to the Philippians and others. In other words, because staying would be more helpful than going to heaven, Paul is assured of his release and his continual ministry.

Accordingly, he says, “I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith” (v. 25). This is not so much prophetic insight as human judgment; but, according to 1 Timothy 1:3, he fulfilled his purpose to revisit Macedonia. His renewed fellowship with them would contribute to the furtherance or progress of their faith, as well as their joy. This in turn would result in their rejoicing more abundantly in Christ, literally, “boasting,” because of answered prayer in bringing Paul back to them again. This was to be fulfilled in the brief period between his release from his first trial and his second trial and execution. At this time neither the apostle nor the Philippians realized how short the respite would be, and how near the time of his departure when the executioner’s ax would flash for one brief moment outside the gates of Rome. Yet now, as in the last moments of his life, he could declare, “The

Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom" (2 Ti 4:18).

Although the common belief that Paul was released from his first imprisonment has been challenged, there is considerable evidence that he fulfilled a fourth missionary journey which included a trip to Spain before the increased persecution under Nero broke out. References to a visit to Crete (Titus 1:5), the winter in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12), the trip to Macedonia which is not mentioned in Acts (1 Ti 1:3), the visit to Troas and Miletus (2 Ti 4:13-20), all support this view. The early church Fathers such as Eusebius, Clement of Rome, Chrysostom, and Hieronymus, interpreted the Scriptures as supporting the two imprisonments.²¹

EXHORTATION TO UNITY, FEARLESSNESS AND STEADFASTNESS, 1:27-30

In view of the possibility of Paul's visiting them soon or, in any event, hearing tidings of how they were getting along, he exhorts them, "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ" (v. 27). The verb literally means "to perform their duty as a good citizen." That is, they were to be good citizens of God's kingdom, and to act in a manner becoming those who have believed in the gospel of Christ.

The use of a political metaphor to illustrate spiritual truth comes out of the context that Philippi was a Roman colony where a Roman citizen such as Paul would be very conscious of civil responsibility. Paul uses the same metaphor in Philippians 3:20 and Ephesians 2:19. Although Paul repeatedly was accused of violating Roman laws, actually he was subject to the higher law of the kingdom of God. He wanted the Philippians to likewise be good citizens of the heavenly

kingdom. Although the Philippian church was independent, they respected Paul's apostolic office and wanted his approbation. Paul is stating in effect that he will sooner or later review the state of the church, especially in the matter of their unity. In keeping with the current problem in the church, he exhorts them to "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."

In his exhortation to unity, standing fast "in one spirit," he is probably using "spirit" in an impersonal sense rather than in reference to the Holy Spirit. They should have a unity of principle, attitude and motivation. This, of course, would come from the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The expression "one mind" is the translation of a word meaning "soul" or "life."²² It is the root of the English word *psychology* and, therefore, refers to the whole experiential aspect of man. In a word, Paul is appealing to unity in principle as well as action. Even the word for "striving" has a prefix translated "together" and, therefore, refers to united action. Although the Christian should be independent of the world, he should be dependent and guided by the Spirit of God in the united action with those of like mind. Conflicts within the church originate in human failure, not diversity of divine principle or guidance.

But all the problem was not within the church. They also had adversaries without, as Paul himself was experiencing. The adversaries—literally, "those standing against them," from the word for "lying" or "standing," plus *anti* or *against*—no doubt threatened persecution of the Philippian church. Paul exhorts them not to be intimidated. Although persecution and trial as they come into the life of a Christian may be interpreted by the unbelieving world as the disfavor of God—evidence that they are under God's judgment—they are actually just the opposite—evidence that they are separated

from the world that knows not salvation and knows not God. Their fearlessness was a token also of the certainty of their deliverance of God and of ultimate judgment on their adversaries.²³ As early Christians were thrown to the lions and tortured in many hideous ways, it may have seemed to the unbelieving world that they were forsaken of God. The very hatred of Satan and the extent of their suffering demonstrated that they shared suffering with Christ and Paul, which is naturally the lot of those who run counter to this world. Rather than avoid the suffering by compromise, Paul exhorts them to be willing not only to believe in Christ but to bear the suffering which often goes with it. Being in prison himself, he was able to say, "Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me" (v.30).

In mentioning his own suffering, he was not only referring to his present imprisonment but to the suffering which the Philippians themselves had observed in the founding of the church in Acts 16. Paul was no disassociated observer of what it means to suffer for Christ and was in a good position to exhort them to be like-minded. Paul's decision that he would prefer to continue living was undoubtedly motivated by his desire to help the Philippian church. In verses 26-29 four reasons are itemized:

First, that by his coming again to the Philippian church, their "rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ" (v. 26). Second, the prospect that he might visit them or, in any case, hear of their affairs, would tend to encourage them to Christian unity, to "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (v. 27). Third, his deliverance from prison, and faithfulness in suffering would encourage them to be fearless in their own proclamation of the gospel so that they would not be terrified by their adversaries (v. 28). Fourth, having observed Paul's faith-

fulness in suffering, they would be willing also to suffer for Christ's sake (vv. 29-30).

Chapter 1 as a whole sets the stage for the exhortations and revelations which were to follow. His evident love for the Philippians, his confidence in God's grace, and his earnest desire that they might attain to the utmost the fruits of righteousness which belong to the Christian faith all provided a platform on which he could exhort them to remedy what seems to be their only major failure—a lack of close fellowship and unity. Having already referred to his own testimony in suffering, in the next chapter he introduces three additional outstanding illustrations of those completely dedicated to the will of God—Jesus Christ, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. In it he demonstrates that unity is a by-product of walking with God.

This great introductory chapter to this epistle provides so much by way of revelation, inspiration and exhortation. The portrait it affords of the apostle Paul is in itself an example to all believers and one which should bring comfort and reassurance to those suffering for Christ's sake. The note of joy and thanksgiving, a testimony to his triumph over suffering, is prominent in the chapter, and is as a ray of sunlight in the midst of shadows. The dominant place of love in Christian relationship permeates the entire chapter and prepares the way for Paul's further exhortation to unity in the Philippian church. Paul's example and practice of prayer is a means of spiritual progress, and his earnest concern for the spiritual welfare of others is an exhortation for all to follow. His confidence in the will of God in the ultimate outworking for good, his triumph over suffering, and his earnest and supreme desire in all things—whether living or dying—to glorify Christ, provide the motivating principles which enable him to exhort the Philippians to unity, courage,

and steadfastness. How much has been communicated in comparatively few words, and how rich its content and inspiration.