Philippians Study

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Studies in Philippians

The purpose of this study is to investigate the apostle Paul’s letter to the Philippians chapter by chapter. There are some very important topics in this letter: joy, thanksgiving, the Gospel, being in Christ, and unity.

Paul wrote this letter to a church he founded in Philippi (50 AD), the first church in Europe. It was written while he was in Roman custody (61 AD). His purpose is to encourage them as they faced persecution, internal struggles, and heretical teachers.

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Philippians

Session 1: Founding of the church in Philippi and an introduction to the letter to the Philippians

The Church in Philippi
The main theme of the Book of Acts is the Holy Spirit working in and through (and in spite of) the early church to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ from Jerusalem throughout the Roman Empire. This involved the founding of many churches. The story of the founding of the church in Philippi is found in Acts 16. Since the Book of Acts was written by Luke, and Luke was with Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:40-18:23), Acts 16 often uses the first person “we.” During his second missionary journey the Apostle Paul, along with Silas, Timothy, and Luke, traveled to Philippi. Although they had intended on going to Asia and Bythinia, God had other plans, and one night God gave Paul a vision of a Macedonian man calling for help (16:9). In response to this vision, as Luke writes, “we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them” (16:10).

Philippi, in northern Greece, was originally established by Greek colonists from Thasos in 360 B.C. Its original name was Krenides. In 356 BC, Philip II—King of Macedon and father of Alexander the Great—took over the city and renamed it Philippi. It was situated on a key East-West trade route—the road between Rome ad the eastern territories—that was later reconstructed and renamed the “Via Egnatia” by the Romans. In 42 BC, the heirs of Julius Caesar (Mark Antony and Octavian), defeated the assassins of Julius Caesar (Brutus and Cassius) in the Battle of Philippi, held in the fields near the city. Philippi was a Roman colony populated in part by retired Roman soldiers Philippi had a rich military heritage. It was also a prosperous city due to both the nearby gold mines and because it was a major trade center along the “Via Egnatia.” The people enjoyed the privileges of Roman citizenship.
Founded by Paul in roughly 50 AD, the church at Philippi was the first church in Europe and was largely Gentile. The church began when the team of Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke met with some Jewish women at their place of prayer in Acts 16. Their first converts were a wealthy upper class Asian businesswoman, Lydia, and her family; a demon-possessed lower class Greek slave girl; and a middle class Roman jailer and his family. Despite racial, economic, gender, and political differences, the church grew to be very healthy and filled with joy. The congregation at Philippi supported Paul's ministry and remained close to Paul.

Take a moment and read Acts 16:6-40 for the account of the church’s beginning. The founding of the church in Philippi was marked by the following main events:

- Call and journey to Philippi (16:9-12)
- Conversion of Lydia and her household (16:13-15)
- Exorcism of a slave girl (16:16-18)
- Paul and Silas thrown in prison (16:19-24)
- Earthquake and conversion of jailer and family (16:25-34)
- Paul and Silas released and encouragement of church (16:35-40)

The Letter to Philippians

Philippians was one of the last letters Paul wrote, having penned it from Roman custody sometime around 61 AD. Paul's house arrest in Rome is chronicled in Acts 28:14-31, and this seems to be the circumstances in which the Philippians came to Paul's aid, and the circumstances in which Paul wrote his letter. He wrote it to encourage them in the middle of their suffering. Paul's primary motivation for writing this letter to the church at Philippi was to thank them for their generous financial gift they had sent to him while he was imprisoned in Rome. Like modern support letters, he includes not only his gratefulness, but also a report on his own condition and greetings to his close friends among them. However, as an apostle in the church, he takes this opportunity to encourage them as they faced persecution, internal struggles, and heretical teachers. To further these hopes, he recommends to them the faithful brothers—Timothy and Epaphroditus—who could ministry to them in a more specific and ongoing fashion.

Paul showed his gratitude to the Philippians for their generous gift to him (1:3-11), and then demonstrated through his own example why the Philippians should be thankful and joyful as well, no matter what their circumstances, because of God's generosity toward them (2:12-18; 4:4-19).

Importantly, the church at Philippi was not filled with the kind of sin that we see in such places as Corinth or heresy that we see in such places as Galatia. Paul briefly addresses a particular instance of discord within the body: two women, Eudoca and Syntyche, are at odds with each other. Paul emphasizes the importance of reconciliation and agreement among God's people for the sake of the Gospel. For the most part, the church at Philippi was doing well. In his absence, Paul’s loving and gracious pastoral tone of affection warns them against a possible slide into heresy and is markedly different than his terse tone in some other New Testament letters.

Outline of Philippians:
- Chapter 1—Intro, Thanksgiving, and Paul's Situation
- Chapter 2—Christ’s Humility, Timothy and Epaphroditus
- Chapter 3—Righteousness through Faith
- Chapter 4—Unity for the Sake of the Gospel and Summary
Discussion
Please read the entire letter to the Philippians. This will take about 10-15 minutes. Notice the frequency of Paul’s use of the words “joy,” “rejoice,” “in Christ,” and “Gospel.” For this session, focus your discussion on the topic of joy. We will look at the other themes (thanksgiving, Gospel, fellowship, etc) in the next session. Below are some key “joy” verses, but it important to read them in the context of the entire letter.

1:4—"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy…"

1:18—"The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice…"

1:25-26—"Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me."

2:2—"Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose."

2:16-18—"But even if I am being 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."

2:28-29—"Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy…"

3:1—"Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord."

4:1—"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."

4:4—"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice."

4:10—"I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me."

Concluding Summary
The Greek for “joy” is related to the noun charis, "grace, favor" or "that which delights." “Joy” (chara) means "the experience of gladness" or "rejoicing and merriness" and is similar its verb form (chairo), which means "rejoice, be merry." Sometimes Christians act as if Christianity were a sorrowful religion. It is not. It is a religion of joy and love.

The leading thought of the letter is joy and gratitude for being in joint-participation in the furtherance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1:5-7). The words "rejoice " and “joy” appear sixteen times in the Letter. This epistle of joy rises to two great spiritual peaks in 2:5-11 where Paul presents the kenosis (the self-emptying or self-humiliation of Christ) and in 3:10-14 when he reveals the drive to know the resurrection and the call of God in Christ. The Judaizers, with their legalism and meanness, have followed Paul to Philippi and there is an echo in chapters one and three of their opposition to Paul and the message of the Gospel that brings joy.

Closing Prayer (Proper 28—BCP, page 236)
Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
In the last session, we studied the founding of the church in Philippi and read the entire letter focusing on the idea of joy and rejoicing. This week we will look at some other key topics in the letter as they relate to joy and rejoicing.

Paul writes the church about joy and how it can be found in the darkest and most painful seasons of life. Throughout the 104 verses of the letter, the key words that appear include “joy” or “rejoice,” “in Christ,” and “Gospel,” which appears more than in any of Paul’s other letters. Together, they reveal that the secret of our joy is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and it going out even through our pain, trial, and affliction. Thus, joy as presented in Philippians is less a feeling based upon our circumstances and more in experiencing the comfort and forgiveness that comes from faith in Jesus Christ and what he did for us. As illustrations of a life lived for joy, Paul includes the story of Jesus’ joy in suffering (2:6–11), along with his own (3:4–14). According to Paul, because of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, joy is possible in the midst of loneliness (1:1-11), suffering (1:12-18), death (1:19-30), humility (2:1-11), temptation (2:12-30), conflict (3:1-11), exhaustion (3:12-4:1), anxiety (4:2-9), and poverty (4:10-23).

We will see how thanksgiving, the Gospel, being in Christ, and fellowship are connected to joy in the letter to the Philippians.

**Discussion Topics**

1. **Thanksgiving**: Paul showed his gratitude to the Philippians for their generous gift to him (1:3-11), and then demonstrated through his own example why the Philippians should be thankful and joyful as well, no matter what their circumstances, because of God's generosity toward them (2:12-18 and 4:4-19). Read these passages. For what is Paul thankful? What are some ways that Paul expresses thankfulness? Discuss the idea of thankfulness and how it is a response. Discuss how thankfulness is reactive and not proactive.

2. **Gospel**: In Philippians, Paul has mentions the Gospel frequently: "the fellowship in the gospel" (1:5), "confirmation of the gospel" (1:7), "progress of the gospel" (1:12), "defense of the gospel" (1:17), "worthy of the gospel" (1:27), "striving for the faith of the gospel" (1:27), "service in the gospel" (2:22), "labor in the gospel" (4:3), and "the beginning of the gospel" (4:15). Read these verses 1:18 and 3:4-9 and list key elements of “the Gospel.” What is the central message of the Gospel?

3. **In Christ and in the Lord**: One of the characteristic phrases in Paul’s writings—and John's writings (Gospel of John, John 1, John 2, John 3, and Revelation)—is "in Christ" or "in the Lord," the common Greek prepositional phrases are en Christo or en kuriō. Here the preposition en is used to designate a close personal relation in which the object of the preposition is viewed as the control influence. We see this phrase again and again in Philippians. Below are some “in Christ” verses. Why is being “in Christ” significant? What does it mean to you?

1:1, 14, and 26—"To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi….Most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged….Your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me"

2:19, 24, and 29—"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon….And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon….Welcome him in the Lord with great joy."

3:1, 3, 8-9, and 14—"Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!…For it is we who are the circumcision who glory in Christ Jesus….That I may gain Christ and be found in him….The righteousness that which is through faith in Christ….I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."
4:1, 2, 4, 7, 10, and 21—"You should stand firm in the Lord….I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord…Rejoice in the Lord always…And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus…I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me…Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus."

4. Fellowship and Unity: The effect of the Gospel for human relationships is fellowship, unity, and selflessness. Koinonia is another keyword in Philippians. "Partnership" (NIV), "sharing" (NRSV), and "fellowship" (KJV) is the Greek noun koinonia, "close association involving mutual interests and sharing, association, communion, fellowship, close relationship." It is used often to describe relationships with God and with others in the Christian community, as it does here. It sometimes edges into the meaning of "participation, sharing," as in 3:10 "sharing his sufferings" and in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16). The Philippians, beloved as they are by Paul, have some bickering and dissention going on. You can see this thread going throughout the short letter, sometimes subtly, by inference, and sometimes head-on. Read these verses and discuss the topic of fellowship and unity.

1:5—"I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."

1:7—"... All of you share in God's grace with me."

2:1—"... if any fellowship with the Spirit...."

3:10—"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings...."

4:14—"Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles."

4:15—"Not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only."

Concluding Summary
The most famous phrase in the Declaration of Independence is “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” Happiness is not guaranteed, but the pursuit of it is. And we are all on the hunt for joy and happiness. Psalm 16:11 says: “In your presence there is fullness of joy, at your right hand are eternal pleasures.” But rather than look to God, we tend to look in a few other places (Rom 3:10-18).

Our contemporary culture and some religious types tell us that joy can be found in processes or principles. We are told that we can find joy if we follow “5 Steps to Being a Better Lover” or “7 Principles to Perfect Parenting” or “10 Rules for a Happy Retirement.” Some of these processes and principles come in religious packaging. Pop-spirituality encourages you to “Figure out what your heart wants” and to “Find some inspiration” and to “Give yourself permission to be enjoy life.” But be sure you “Don’t confuse joy and fun with irresponsibility.” These are 4 of Paris Hilton’s “7 Spiritual Lessons.” Joel Osteen’s Your Best Life Now offers “7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential.” To achieve joy you must 1) enlarge your visions, 2) develop a healthy self-image, 3) discover the power of your thoughts and words, 4) let go of the past, 5) find strength in adversity, 6) live to give, and 7) choose to be happy.

Where we rely on processes and principles, Paul offers thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is passive, not active. It responds to a gift. Thanking reacts to grace; it doesn’t proactively procure it.

We are also told that products or possessions (clothing, technology, houses, etc.) will deliver joy. Our culture is characterized by consumerism. A scene in the movie “Fight Club” describes consumerism well: “Like so many others I had become a slave to the IKEA nesting instinct. If I saw something clever, like a little coffee tables in the shape of a Yin-Yang, I had to have it: the Veksle personal office unit, the Hovetrekke home excer-bike, or
Where we are tempted to rely on possessing products, Paul offers the Gospel and how it makes us right with God and before God. In Romans, Paul explains the Gospel:

Romans 3:20-25 and 28 – “No one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood…For we maintain that a person is justified by faith, apart from observing the law.”

Romans 5:1-2: “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have obtained access to this grace in which we now stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God.”

This was a new idea in the ancient world, where religion had always been based on something human beings did to satisfy, appease, or please God. All the ancient religions worked that way. But Paul taught that nothing we do in ourselves is ever enough. Nothing we do in ourselves will ever satisfy. God has to work the work of divine loving and initiative. All we need to do is open our whole heart to it. Another word for this concept is grace. Grace means unmerited favor. We don’t deserve it. We get it anyway.

In Philippians 3:8-9, Paul writes: “For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”

The Gospel is so important to Paul, that he warns the church to “look out for” certain people. They include people who have selfish ambition and envy (1:15–17), opponents of Christianity (1:27–28), people with their own interests that conflict with Jesus’ (2:21), and religious “dogs” who seek to enslave people by their goofy rules (3:18–19).

If processes and products don’t work, perhaps there is a place where joy can be found. Some people try bars, some try a new job, some try a vacation, and some just start over somewhere else. Sometimes we “just need to
get away.” But because much of our problem is us, our problems follow. Sometimes we feel that we need to start over somewhere else and the ‘grass is greener’ syndrome kicks in.

According to Paul, the best and safest place to be “in Christ.” Being “in Christ” means being under the control of, under the influence of, in close association with Christ. Paul anchors all of the Christian faith in one's relationship to Christ. Therefore, any place where we are can be a place of joy, because wherever we go we are in Christ. And for those in Christ this world in not the end. In John 14:1-4, Jesus says: “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.”

When processes, possessions, and places don’t work, we hope that other people (the new boyfriend, a child, an affair) can bring us joy. Sometimes it is not the presence of another person, but the absence of someone from our life that we think will bring us joy.

When Paul refers to other people in Philippians, he does not suggest relying on other people for our joy or hoping for their absence because they bring conflict. Instead, Paul talks about fellowship and unity. Paul addresses a particular instance of discord within the body: two women, Eudooa and Syntyche, are at odds with each other. Paul does not agree with Jean-Paul Sartre’s line “Hell is other people.” Rather, others are an occasion for joy and reconciliation. He emphasizes the importance of reconciliation and agreement among God's people for the sake of the Gospel. Because of our reconciliation to God through Jesus, we are free to reconcile and be unity with others. We can love God and other because God first loved us. Our being forgiven of cosmic treason and rebellion toward God, can trigger our desire to reconcile with others (Matthew 18:23-35). Oswald Chambers once said: "We talk glibly about forgiving when we have never been injured; when we are injured, we know that it is not possible, apart from God's grace, for one human being to forgive another."

This unity and selflessness comes from the Gospel, which is based on the humility of God to come in the person of Christ. One of the most well-known and beautiful passages of scripture is found in the poem about Jesus Christ in Philippians 2:5-11. Using Jesus' own life as an example, he calls the Philippians to put aside their self-serving spirits and to serve each other. In chapter 3, Paul uses himself as an example of humility, explaining that God's grace is the only thing in which we can boast. By this he also starkly contradicts certain heretical teachers who preach that certain actions could merit God's favor.
Philippians

Session 3: Chapter 1—Introduction, Thanksgiving, and Paul’s Situation

There are four overlapping and emerging themes in chapter one of Philippians: thanksgiving and love for the Christians in Philippi, God’s sovereignty over all things, the importance of the Gospel, and encouragement during suffering. Before we look at these themes in the letter, we will begin by looking at Paul’s life and conversion, because they fit closely with each of these themes. Before his conversion, Paul hated the church and its message of Jesus’ Gospel. That is why he caused Christians to suffer greatly.

Paul’s Conversion

It is important to have an idea of Paul’s experience and conversion to understand what he wrote in Philippians. Paul was a highly educated Orthodox Jew with a passion for the Torah (i.e. the Law) and a position of total commitment to living it out in every aspect of his life. Saul (now become Paul) wrote about himself in Philippians that he had been “of the people of Israel,...a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless” (3:5-6).

In Acts 7 and 8, Paul (who was then known as Saul) oversaw the stoning of Stephen. Stephen was a Christian who was killed after proclaiming the gospel of Christ to a crowd of irate Jews. As a result of this stoning many Christians fled to other towns and Saul went hunting for them. Acts 8:3 says, “Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.”

Acts 9 tells the story of Paul’s famous conversion to Christianity. In the aftermath of Stephen’s death (which Saul oversaw—Acts 7:58 and 8:1) and the resulting flight of Christians from Jerusalem, Saul embarked on a trip to the city of Damascus, in Syria, to identify and arrest certain Jews there who had become followers of Jesus. As Saul traveled along the road to Damascus, Jesus appeared to him in the miracle of a bright light and a voice that only he could hear. The voice said “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Saul asked, “Who are you Lord?” as he laid prostrate on the ground in shock. The voice replied, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city and you will be told what you are to do.”

So important was the Jewish Saul’s conversion into the Christian Paul that Paul himself told it again and again to his hearers. Luke, the author of Acts, included the story three times in his book (chapters 9, 22, and 26).
Please read Philippians chapter one and discuss these questions

1. In Acts 7-8, we saw that Paul killed Christians. In verses 3-11, Paul shows his joy, love, and thanksgiving for them. Discuss Paul’s conversion and how it points 1) to God’s grace (in saving him—enemy of Jesus) and 2) to Paul’s changed heart as he went from hating, hunting, and murdering Christians to loving and praying for them to understand the depth of God’s love—Eph 3:16-21. How does this relate to you?

2. Verses 6 and 12-14 reveal God’s sovereignty over all things. Notice that Paul refers to God’s providence to comfort and encourage. How can the reality that God is sovereign bring comfort to you and others?

3. In verses 15-22, Paul says it is important that “Christ is proclaimed.” What does it mean to proclaim Christ? What is proclaimed?

4. Paul discusses suffering in verses 22-30. What stands out to you about what he writes? How is this different from how most people—Christian or not—discuss suffering? How does it relate to John 16:33?

Concluding Summary

Thanksgiving and love for the Christians at Philippi (verses 3-11)

Paul, the former persecutor of Christians, here communicates that he is genuinely thankful for the Christians at Philippi—which include a wealthy merchant, Lydia, and her family, a poor slave-girl, and a middle class jailer and his family: “I thank my God every time I remember you” (1:3). In many of Paul’s letters, he similarly expresses his thanksgiving for the recipients (Romans 1:8 and 1 Corinthians 1:4). See his prayer in Ephesians 3:14-19. One of the reasons Paul was so loved by the Christians at Philippi is because they knew he was genuinely thankful for them. In addition, Paul shows no restraint in revealing his love for them: “For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus” (1:8). Paul is compassionate toward the Christians at Philippi because, in spite of his formerly persecuting Christians, he had been shown compassion and mercy by Jesus Christ: “I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord… because he appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy… Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost” (I Timothy 1:12-15). In the same way, Jesus demonstrated compassion and love to Paul, he demonstrated it to all of us both in his disposition toward us (“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd”—Matthew 9:36) and his death on the cross for our sins (“God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us”—Romans 5:8).

God’s sovereignty over all things (verses 6 and 12-14)

Paul addresses God’s sovereignty, the working out of which is often referred to as “providence,” in all things both in the lives of the Christians at Philippi (“I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ”—1:6) and in his own life (“I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel”—1:12). Remember that as Paul was writing this letter he was imprisoned in Rome and unable to continue on his missionary journeys throughout the Roman Empire. And yet, as he makes clear, God used his imprisonment to spread the gospel even more. God does the same thing in our own lives—working out his purposes in our circumstances, through our circumstances, and in spite of our circumstances—as we see in Paul’s letter to the Christians suffering at Rome: “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose”—Romans 8:28.

Everything in the gospel of grace, even the very fact that we believe, points to Him. It is all a gift. Therefore, the value of Christian faith rests not in the fact that we believe, but in the person in whom we are believing—Jesus Christ.
Importance of the Gospel (verses 15-22)

Paul makes it clear that preaching the gospel is not only more important than personal suffering (“what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel”—1:12), but also more important than the motivation with which it is preached (“What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice”—1:18). The heart of the gospel preached by Paul is found in 1 Corinthians—“For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures” (15:3-4).

Prophesying the crucifixion of Christ, Isaiah 53:10-12 says—“It was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, the Lord makes his life a guilt offering… he will bear their iniquities…. he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” Isaiah went FROM the historical event of Jesus’ cross TO its significance as a substitution. This is all over the place in the NT. Watch as the NT passages look at the shameful, humiliating, excruciating, painful, public, and degrading death of Jesus, and then says “FOR” us, sin, me, you. That is substitution.

See Rom 5:6-8, 1 John 2:2, 1 John 4:9-10, and 1 Pet 3:18. They all say something like this—God demonstrates his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died (historical fact, historical truth) FOR our sins (application and significance). That is substitutionary atonement. 1 Peter 3:18 says it twice—Christ died FOR sins once for all, the righteous FOR the unrighteous. 1 John 2:2—He is the atoning sacrifice FOR our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Encouragement during suffering (verses 22-30)

Paul addresses how God has worked in his own suffering for the gospel (see 2 Cor. 11:23-28 for a list), and that even if his suffering were to end in death, which it ultimately did, he would still be better off for it: “For to me, living is Christ, and dying is gain” (1:21). This reflects that Paul’s relationship with God through Christ was not a religious amenity, but the core of his being. As he wrote to the Christians in Galatia: “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me... the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Paul also reminds those at Philippi that their suffering for the gospel, while difficult, is actually a gift from God, a gift he and they share: “For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have” (1:29).

Closing Prayer (based on Ephesians 3:16-21)

Gracious Lord, we pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen us with power through your Spirit, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith. And we pray that we will be rooted and established in love and may have power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.
Having acknowledged his friends' suffering for the Gospel in chapter 1, Paul returns to the urgent matter at hand: the appeal in verse 27 that in the face of the opposition that is causing suffering, they stand firm in the one Spirit, contending for the gospel as a united community. Philippians 2:1 offers the basis of the appeal in 1:27, which has to do with their own Trinitarian experience of God: Christ's comfort, God's love and their common sharing in the Spirit. The concern of the appeal is expressed in 2:2, where he piles up three phrases that all say essentially the same thing: that their community life should be characterized by unity of mind and love. Only thus can they complete Paul's own joy. Thus the basis of the appeal is first of all the Philippians' own relationship to the triune God, which Paul and they share together, and second, his and their relationship to each other, brought about by their common relationship to the Trinity.

Please read Philippians chapter two and discuss these questions

1. How does Paul connect the encouragement of Christian unity to Christ’s humility?

2. What does the hymn (verses 5-11) tell us about who Jesus Christ is and what he has done?

3. How does God’s sovereignty relate to obedience? Discuss how verses 12 and 13 can encourage and comfort you regarding your inability to obey if God were not working in you so you will desire and act according to God’s good pleasure.

4. In verses 19-30, Paul writes about Timothy and Epaphroditus. Discuss what he writes about them. What does he commend about Timothy?

Concluding Summary

Christian Unity and Christ’s Humility (verses 1-4)
In the opening verses of chapter two, Paul exhorts the Christians at Philippi to unity, not just unity for unity’s sake, but a unity based on humility, with Jesus Christ as the supreme example. Paul emphasizes the need for unity in the church at Philippi: “Make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (2:2). Paul knows that a church needs to be unified in order to worship and witness effectively, for as Jesus warned in Mark 3:25—“And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.” On the night before Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world, he prayed on behalf of the church, “that they may all be one… so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21). God’s desire for unity among his people is also seen in the Old Testament: “Oh, how good and pleasant it is, when brethren live together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1). Unity among his people matters to God. The unity Paul encourages is based on Jesus Christ and characterized by Christ-like humility: “in humility, regard others as better than yourselves… let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (2:3b, 5).

The Person and the Work of Jesus Christ (verses 5-11)
Paul describes the humility of Christ in the words of a hymn used in the early church, a hymn that describes the deity, emptying, death, exaltation, and worship of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man—that is the heart of the mystery of the incarnation. As Paul describes, though Christ was “in the form of God, (he) did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited” (2:6). The New Testament contains a powerful description of the dual nature of Jesus Christ, that Jesus is fully God and fully man, in John 1:1-18. Moreover, as Paul points out, Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being found in human likeness” (2:7). We celebrate this at Christmas every year, the fact that the Creator of all things humbled himself and was
“conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary” (Apostles Creed, BCP 96). Not only was Jesus born in a barn, but he willingly took the form of a servant with the intention of giving up his life on our behalf, as he told the disciples in Mark 10:45—“For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Paul describes this: “he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (2:8).

Paul beautifully links the deity and death of Christ for the sins of the world in his letter to the Colossians: “For in him (Christ) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (1:19-20). The reason the phrase “even death on a cross” is used here is to emphasize that the form of Jesus’ death revealed the extent of his humility, for crucifixion was not only brutally painful, but horribly degrading as well. In fact, if one were a Roman citizen, one could not legally be crucified. Crucifixion was reserved for foreigners, slaves, and criminals. From his birth in a barn to his death between two thieves, Jesus identified with all of humanity, including the outcasts.

In the New Testament, the emphasis on Jesus’ death on the cross is not centered on its painfulness and degradation (Mark 15:24 is amazingly understated—“and they crucified him”), but rather its result: payment in full through the blood of Christ for the sins of the world. The reason Jesus’ death is sufficient for the sins of the world is because he is both fully human and fully divine. That is why John the Baptist identified him as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). That is why Jesus’ death on the cross is sufficient as the “propitiation” (sacrifice of atonement—see Leviticus 16) for the sins of the world (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2 and 4:10).

After Jesus’ death on the cross, where Jesus found himself in the lowest place possible, he was resurrected (Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-10; and 1 Corinthians 15:3-7) and, as Paul points out, exalted to the highest place possible: “Therefore God also highly exalted him” (2:9). The death and exaltation of Jesus is also powerfully summarized in the letter to the Hebrews, in which we are exhorted to “run the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:1-2). In his exalted place, Jesus Christ is to be worshipped: “At the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (2:10-11). In his sermon to the Sanhedrin (ruling order of priests) in Jerusalem, Peter proclaimed, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). We worship Jesus Christ because of who he is, the Lord, and because of what he did for us in his death and resurrection: “(Jesus) was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification” (Romans 4:24).

Again, this hymn about Jesus Christ is set in the context of Paul’s emphasizing the humility of Jesus, a humility that is to be emulated by the Christians at Philippi. In other places in scripture we see that humility is highly valued in God’s sight. Jesus describes this: “Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:5). Humility is also a doorway to God’s grace: “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6) and something with which we are to “clothe” ourselves (Colossians 3:12 and 1 Peter 5:5). Christ-like humility is to characterize our unity.

**God Working in Us to Will and to Do God's Good Pleasure (verses 12-13)**

Out of a place of Christ-like humility Paul instructs the Christians at Philippi to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (2:12b-13). Again, this points to the sovereignty of God, as we saw in 1:6—“I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.” Living out our new life in Christ, “working out” our salvation, involves surrendering to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This work of the Holy Spirit involves three main things: our being assured (and reassured) of our identity as God’s children (Romans 8:15-17 and Galatians 4:6-7), our being conformed more and more to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29 and Galatians 5:22-23), and our doing the things we were created to do
(Ephesians 2:10 and Hebrews 12:1). All of this is possible because of God’s gift of grace in Jesus Christ, as Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (2:8-10). Martin Luther writes: “The love of God does not first discover but creates what is pleasing to it.” God’s Spirit lives in us, so that now, we “bear fruit” that is good (Galatians 5:22-23).

Timothy and Epaphroditus (verses 19-30)
In Paul’s letters he will often commend specific people by name to his recipients, and in his letter to the Philippians he commends Timothy and Epaphroditus by name. Timothy converted because of Paul’s ministry and was Paul’s protégé. Paul writes that Timothy was “genuinely concerned” (2:20) about the Philippians and, “like a son with a father,” served with Paul in proclaiming the gospel (2:22). Timothy’s name appears with Paul in the salutations of seven of Paul’s letters. Timothy eventually became a bishop in Ephesus, and it is interesting to note that the last letter Paul wrote before being beheaded, was his Second Letter to Timothy. Epaphroditus, Paul’s “brother and coworker and fellow soldier” (2:25) is commended for his concern for the Philippians (2:26) and also because “he came close to death for the work of Christ” (2:30). The only mention of Epaphroditus in all of scripture is in this letter.

Closing Prayer (Collect for Palm Sunday, BCP 219)
Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
Philippians
Session 5: Chapter 3—Righteousness through Faith

The central theme in Philippians 3 is phrase “righteousness through faith.” In addressing this Paul first describes that when it comes to being righteous before God, it makes no sense to place one’s confidence in the flesh, that is, our own abilities (verses 1-8a). Second, he asserts that we are made righteous before God through faith in Jesus Christ (verses 8b-11). Third, he describes how righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ frees us to leave the past behind and move forward in our lives (verses 12-21).

Please read chapter three and discuss these questions

1. What is Paul’s point in verses 1-8 about not having confidence in the flesh? How is this relevant today?

2. In what ways are you tempted to “put confidence” in yourself?

3. According to verses 8 and 9, if we cannot trust in our own righteousness, goodness, or religiousness to be considered pleasing to God, then how can we be made right with God?

4. According to verse 13, how does righteousness by faith in Christ encourage us to think about our past? What does this mean for the good and bad things in your past?

Concluding Summary

No confidence in the flesh (verses 1-8)
In the first verse, Paul writes: “Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.” He then warns the Philippians of “dogs,” “evil workers,” and “those who mutilate the flesh” (verse 2). All three of these refer to one group of people, those who trust their ability to obey God’s law in order to be righteous before God. More specifically, he is referring to those who insisted that Gentile Christians be circumcised when converted to Christ in order to be in line with Jewish Christians. This was addressed at the Council of Jerusalem, which, as described in Acts, met because “certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (15:1). The council agreed not to enforce the rite of circumcision on Gentile converts to Christ, but the issue kept resurfacing. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul is not coy as he addresses those Gentile converts who, in spite of the ruling of the Council of Jerusalem, still insisted on circumcision: “Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law. You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” (5:2-4).

Along these lines Paul stresses to the Philippians that, as opposed to those who trust in their ability to obey the law, “it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh” (3:3). While on the surface this all may seem rather trivial, it is immensely important, because one’s salvation does not, cannot, depend on one’s perceived ability to be righteous before God through their own obedience to the law: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Although today there may not be heated arguments about the necessity of circumcision among Christians, there is often an idea that when it comes to being saved “we need to do our part” or “God helps those who help themselves” or that some people go to heaven when they die because “they were good people.” Paul is adamant that one cannot put confidence in one’s own flesh to be saved, but only in Christ.
One of the reasons Paul is so adamant here is because prior to his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), he trusted in his own righteousness before God, as he writes: “If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eight day (according to the law—see Leviticus 12:3), a member of the people of Israel (God’s chosen people—Isaiah 44:1, etc.), of the tribe of Benjamin (Benjamin and Joseph were the two favorite sons of Jacob because their mother, Rachel, was his favorite wife—Genesis 29, 30, and 35) a Hebrew born of Hebrews (he was not of mixed lineage, like the Samaritans); as to the law, a Pharisee (elite Jewish religious leader/expert in the law); as to zeal, a persecutor of the church (see Acts 7:59; 9:1-2; and 1 Timothy 1:13-15); as to righteousness under the law, blameless (before his conversion to Christ Paul thought he was righteous before God through his obedience to the law). And yet, Paul considered his impressive lineage and resume “as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord... For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (3:8b). Paul is quite blunt in the comparison of his lineage and accomplishments to his relationship with Christ, for the word for “rubbish” here actually could be translated as “garbage” or “dung” (KJV). Verses 8 is similar in intensity to Isaiah 64:6—“All our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” Our righteousness is compared to “menstrual cloths,” which are associated with one of the most extreme forms of ceremonial uncleanness under the Law of Moses (Leviticus 15:19-33; 20:18). They are of such a nature as to be disposed of immediately and never reused.

Righteousness through Faith (verses 9-11)

Paul then describes his salvation, or righteous standing in God’s sight, as being through faith in Jesus Christ alone: “being found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness of God based on faith” (3:9). Notice that Paul uses the passive voice, “being found in him,” as opposed to “finding” God. The Bible is not the story of people’s search for God, but a revelation of God’s seeking and finding people through Jesus Christ. Jesus makes that explicitly clear as he describes his mission as being “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10), and as he compares that mission to one finding a lost sheep or a lost coin (Luke 15:1-10).

This “being found” in Christ involves being made righteous “through faith in Jesus Christ,” and for further emphasis Paul rephrases the same concept, “the righteousness of God based on faith.” In his letter to the Romans, Paul addresses in detail how God gives us the gift of righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Here are two of the vital passages from Romans that highlight this:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith...in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith” (1:16-17).

“But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus” (3:21-26).

Out of gratitude for “being found” by God and being made righteous through faith in Christ alone, Paul reveals the passion of his life: “I want to know Christ” (3:10). Paul’s relationship with Christ gives meaning to his suffering and death, and also assures him of hope in the resurrection of the dead (3:10b-11). This applies to us as well, for our relationship with God through faith in Christ gives us meaning in the midst of suffering (Romans 5:3-5) and hope in the resurrection too (Romans 6:5 and 1 Corinthians 15).

Moving forward (verses 12-21)

Rather than being bogged down by the futile efforts of trying to be righteous before God through our own efforts, when we receive the gift of righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, we are set free to leave the past behind and move forward through faith in him: “this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.”
(3:13b-14). Paul concludes this chapter by pointing to the hope we have in Christ at his second coming: “We are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself” (3:20b-21). It is at the second coming, “the day of Christ,” that God will complete the work he has begun in all of us (Philippians 1:6).

Thus, in Philippians 3, Paul emphasizes that this work involves being made righteous through faith in Christ alone, not through our own efforts of the flesh. We are then set free to leave the past behind and move forward with the rest of our lives, living by faith in Jesus Christ, a faith that gives meaning to the suffering in our lives, a faith that helps us “press on” all the way to our death and resurrection. At that point, we will join Paul in heaven, along with the millions upon millions who have been made righteous through faith in Christ.

**Closing Prayer (Collect for the Second Sunday in Lent, BCP 218)**

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
Philippians

Session 6: Chapter 4—Unity in Christ for the Sake of His Gospel

Paul's central focus is being “in Christ Jesus” or “in the Lord” (1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 10, 13, 19, 21, 23). Notice how often this phrase occurs in the chapter four. Everything he writes in this chapter—exhortations, appreciations, and greetings—is bought under this theme. Typically (in light of his other letters), he begins his "concluding matters" with a series of brief exhortations (2-9). Paul’s concluding exhortations are tailored to the situation in Philippi. In these few verses, he ties together all the major themes of Philippians: unity (2-3), joy and rejoicing (4), God’s sovereignty (6), and the Gospel (7). Paul then thanks them for their gift (10-20) and ends with a series of brief greetings (21-23).

Please read chapter four and discuss these questions

1. Read verse 2 and discuss what you notice about unity.

2. “Don’t be anxious about anything” (6) is an amazing statement. How in the world can Paul write that? What do prayer, petition, thanksgiving and presenting requests have to do with anxiety?

3. The opposite of peace (6) is the peace of God described in verse 7. What does it mean for the peace of God to “guard” your heart and mind?

4. Verses 11-13 are about contentment. Discuss the common understanding of contentment as “self-sufficiency” and how Paul’s version (“Christ-sufficiency”) seems different. How might Paul’s view of contentment be comforting? Connect this to Paul’s view of God in verse 19.

5. Paul’s greeting in verses 21-23 is simply, but what can you learn about Paul’s theology from this final greeting?

Concluding Summary

**Final Matters (verses 2-9)**

In verse 2, Paul emphasizes the importance of reconciliation and agreement “in the Lord” among God's people. And this is not unity for unity’s sake, but for the sake of the Gospel. In verses 3, Paul mentions his fellow workers contending for “the cause of the gospel.”

Among the other exhortations in this section are to rejoice in the Lord, to let their “gentle forbearance” be evident to all (including those who oppose them), and to not be anxious about anything (given the present opposition and suffering), but let prayer and thanksgiving lead them to experience God's peace. The exhortations fall into two clear parts: verses 4-7, in which Paul appropriates his Jewish heritage, and verses 8-9, which reflect the best of Greco-Roman philosophical virtues.

The first set reflects the threefold expression of Jewish worship—rejoicing in the Lord, prayer, and thanksgiving—which are basic to the Psalms: “the righteous rejoice in the LORD” (Ps 64:10; 97:12) as they “come before him with thanksgiving” (Ps 95:2; 100:4) to pray in his sanctuary (Ps 61:1-4; 84:1-8). For Paul these are the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and especially of the believing congregation. Joy, prayer and thanksgiving, are evidenced outwardly by gentleness (v. 5) and inwardly by God's peace in their midst (v. 9). Paul, the theologian of grace, is equally the theologian of joy. He can do this because Christian joy is predicated altogether on one's position “in Christ.”
Paul deliberately conjoins the peace of God with praying in trusting submission with thanksgiving. This is God's response to the things that cause our anxiety. Peace is especially associated with God and his relationship to his people. Here it is the peace of God because God is the God of peace (4:9), the God who dwells in total peace and who gives such peace to his people. God's peace totally transcends the merely human, unbelieving mind, which is full of anxiety because it cannot think higher than itself. Our prayer to the God who is totally trustworthy is accompanied by his peace, not because he answers according to our wishes but because his peace totally transcends our way of perceiving the world.

Such peace will therefore guard our hearts and thoughts. In the Hebrew view the heart is the center of one's being, out of which flows all of life (Mk 7:21). God's peace will be the “guard” (a striking military metaphor) around our hearts when anxiety threatens. It will also guard our “thoughts”—those very thoughts that lead to fear and distress. As so often in this letter, such protection is in Christ Jesus. It is the Philippians' relationship to God through Christ that is the key to all of these exhortations.

With a “finally, brothers [and sisters],” Paul tells the Philippians believers to take into account the best of their Greco-Roman heritage. The words in verse 8 are the language of Hellenistic moral discourse. In verse 9, Paul adds “think about such things” because he intends them to select out what is good and praiseworthy from whatever belongs to the world around them, and to do so on the basis of Christ.

**Appreciation for the Gift (verses 10-20)**

In this section, three matters intertwine. First is his genuine gratitude for their recent gift, expressed three times in three variations (10, 14, 18). This is set, second, in the primary context of friendship: mutuality and reciprocity, evidenced by “giving and receiving” (15). Third, and most significant, everything is subsumed under the greater reality of the gospel (18-20). All of this leads to praise. Their “giving,” his “receiving,” and the partnership in the gospel climax in verses 18-20 with gratitude (from Paul), accolade and promise (from God to them), and doxology (from both to God). A passage like this should also be read in light of Paul's unsolicited, lavish praise of this church in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. This leads Paul to give thanks as “rejoicing in the Lord” (10) and as an outburst of praise to God's glory (20).

In verse 11, Paul moves into the Stoic stronghold of autarkeia (contentment based on self-sufficiency) and transforms it by means of the gospel into “Christ-sufficiency.” According to Stoicism, sufficiency or contentment comes from within; Paul's comes from without, from his being in Christ, on whom he is totally dependent and thus not independent at all in the Stoic sense. Because Paul and the Philippians are both “in Christ,” neither is dependent on the other for life in the world; but also because they are both “in Christ,” Paul received their gift with joy.

In verse 12, Paul writes: “I have gotten in on the secret of both having a full stomach and going hungry.” But Paul is neither reveling in the one nor complaining of the other. His various hardship lists make it clear he had experienced “plenty” of “want.” His relationship to Christ made them both essentially irrelevant. Thus he concludes: “I can do everything...through him who gives me strength.” With the “through him,” Paul transforms his very Stoic-sounding sentences into a sufficiency quite beyond himself, in Christ, the basis and source of everything for Paul. Thus “self-sufficiency” becomes contentment because of his “Christ-sufficiency.” While “everything” seems to be all-embracing and is often applied to one's activities, in context it refers primarily to living in “want” or “plenty.” Paul finds Christ sufficient in times of bounty as well as in times of need. This leads to verse 19. In the midst of their “poverty” (2 Cor 8:2), God will richly supply their material needs. In their present suffering in the face of opposition (1:27-30), God will richly supply what is needed (steadfastness, joy, encouragement). In their need to advance in the faith with one mindset (1:25; 2:1-4; 4:2-3), God will richly supply the grace and humility necessary for it. In the place of both “grumbling” (2:14) and “anxiety” (4:6) God will be present with them as the “God of peace” (4:7, 9). “My God,” Paul says, “will act for me on your behalf by ‘filling to the full’ all your needs.” “And God will do so,” Paul says, “according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”
Closing Greetings (verses 21-23)

Paul concludes with the standard greetings (21-22)—plus a “grace-benediction” (23). In verses 22, Paul writes: “All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to the Caesar’s household.” The significance of this would not have been lost on the Philippians, whose opposition stems from the fact that Philippi is a Roman colony, where devotion to Caesar had a long history. Paul and the Philippians have a common source of opposition: they suffer at the hands of Roman citizens loyal to Caesar and Paul suffers as an actual prisoner of Caesar. But God is sovereign. By incarcerating Paul at the heart of the Empire, they have thus brought in a member of the “opposition” within the very walls of the emperor's home. The “word of life” to which the Philippians hold firm (2:15-16) has already penetrated the heart of the Empire. They have brothers and sisters in Caesar's own household, who are on their side and now send them greetings.

Verse 23 is Paul’s normal grace-benediction found in all his letters. Like his introductions, Paul's closing greetings reflect the Gospel of grace. Instead of the standard farewell in Greek letters (erroso—literally "be strong"—see Acts 15:29), it is “grace of Jesus” that he wishes for the Philippians and prays will be with them. Thus the final grace serves to “bookend” his letters, which begin with "grace and peace" as part of the greeting (1:2).

Paul finds a ways to extend grace in everyway. In Paul's hand, conventions are never merely conventional. Everything, including these conventions, is brought under the influence of Christ and the gospel. Thus the final greetings of Philippians are to be given and received as “in Christ Jesus.” The final grace is also from “the Lord Jesus Christ,” so that the whole letter, from beginning to end, focuses on Christ. To miss this central focus on Christ would be to miss the letter altogether and to miss the heart of Paul’s theology.

Concluding Prayer (Proper 16 and Philippians 4:7)

Grant, O Merciful God, that we, being gathered together in unity, may show forth your grace and power among all peoples. May your peace, which transcends all understanding, guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus and in the knowledge of your love for us. Amen.