

ENJOYING GRACE

A STUDY THROUGH PHILIPPIANS

A Commentary by Zach Adams

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Enjoying Grace | Commentary on the Book of Philippians
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Table of Contents

Philippians 1:1-2	<i>P.</i> 1-11
Philippians 1:1-11	<i>P.</i> 12-23
Philippians 1:12-30	<i>P.</i> 24-35
Philippians 2:1-11	<i>P.</i> 36-47
Philippians 2:12-30	<i>P.</i> 48-58
Philippians 3:1	<i>P.</i> 59-69
Philippians 3:1-11	<i>P.</i> 70-80
Philippians 3:12-14	<i>P.</i> 81-91
Philippians 3:15-21	<i>P.</i> 92-102
Philippians 4:1-23	<i>P.</i> 103-115

Philippians 1:1-2

Philippians 1:1-2, “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Book of Acts closes with the Apostle Paul, a Roman citizen by birth, on his way from Jerusalem to Rome to stand trial before Caesar Nero. The year is 62 AD and the beloved Apostle is being held in the capital city under house arrest. Keep in mind, Paul is under constant supervision — being guarded by a four-man rotation of Roman soldiers.

As he awaits word of when his case will be heard, Paul wisely utilizes his time by writing letters, known as his Prison Epistles. Paul will pen a letter to Philemon in addition to three specific churches located in Ephesus, Colossae, and this church in Philippi (north eastern Greece)!

Aside from writing these letters, we also know Paul ends up witnessing to the men guarding him. From Paul’s perspective he wasn’t a prisoner of Rome; instead, as a “bondservant of Jesus Christ”, Rome was now his prisoner! He literally possessed a captive audience!

It would appear from the substance of this letter that upon hearing of Paul’s incarceration, this Philippian church immediately sends a man named Epaphroditus to Rome with financial aid in order to help cover some of Paul’s practical needs. Note: A full examination of Paul’s writings will reveal this church gave such a gift on five separate occasions.

Then, when it was finally time for Epaphroditus to leave Rome and return home to Philippi, Paul writes this letter to the church in order to express his thanks. It's why he addresses his note "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons."

As you read through the Pauline Epistles, you will discover that this letter to the Philippians reads much differently than the others. Paul doesn't have to defend his character or justify his apostleship. He doesn't rebuke them for teaching false-doctrines or falling prey to heresy.

Actually, it's rather amazing that Paul never once mentions the word sin, nor does he feel inclined to speak out against the works of the flesh or the carnal living! Instead, all of Paul's exhortations center upon these believers going deeper in their love and unity with each other.

There is no question this Philippian church Paul had founded some 11 years earlier, held a special place in his heart. The letter is written both warm and tender. As we work our way through the text, you will see how Paul gushes with both a joy and a deep longing for his friends.

In order to understand Paul's special relationship with this church, which I think is vitally important for you to fully grasp through the substance of what he writes, I want to look back at the time the Apostle spent in Philippi, recorded in Acts 16 and then in Acts 20!

For context, the Apostle Paul began this second missionary journey with Silas and later Timothy possessing a clear course of action. The plan was to revisit the churches he'd planted during his first trip, but as he begins to make arrangements to move from the region of Galatia into new, uncharted territories, Paul encounters an interesting obstacle.

In Acts 16:6 we read, "Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia." After traveling through the region of Phrygia (Antioch) and all of Galatia, the plan was to move further East into Asia.

And yet, it's at this point something peculiar occurs...We read, "They were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia." This Greek word "forbidden" implies the Holy Spirit

hindered them. So verse 7, “After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them either. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.”

It’s likely that after being unable to travel directly into Asia, Paul maps a new course hoping to figure out another way to access this area. Because this plan also fails to materialize, it would seem he now recognizes “the Spirit” was behind all of these unspecified setbacks. As such Paul decides to head west — the opposite direction to the port city of Troas. While I am not sure how “the Spirit” closed the door for Paul to venture into Asia, one thing is evident... The Spirit was acting with intention! Always remember a closed door is often the Spirit’s way of leading you to the open door He wants you to walk through.

Verse 9 explains why Asia wasn’t in the cards... “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’” As Paul is waiting for the Lord to tell him where to go, at some point “in the night”, he receives “a vision of a man of Macedonia (Greece) pleading with him to come and help.” And it’s in this moment everything crystalized for Paul. The Spirit had resisted him going into Asia because He wanted the Gospel message to move into the heart of the Roman Empire! Most amazingly, Christianity is about to take a significant leap into Europe.

Verse 10, “Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we (pronoun implies Luke has joined the crew) sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them. Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days.”

Now that Paul has received his marching orders, he wastes no time getting after it! Luke says, “Immediately we sought to go!” from Troas — Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke sail to Samothrace for a quick layover before heading on to Neapolis, where they proceed another 10 miles inland to the city of Philippi, known as the capital of the region of Macedonia.

Originally founded in 356 BC by Philip of Macedon, the city of Philippi would later become the retirement community for Roman military veterans. As a result of its strong Roman presence, the city was officially dubbed a colony of Rome and money flowed into the city for renovations. Philippi also was placed under the municipal law of Rome and was directly governed by two military officers appointed by the Roman senate. The city was Italian soil!

Luke tells us that after chilling out “in Philippi for some days”, Acts 16:13-14, “On the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.”

Since “on the Sabbath” Paul and the crew aren’t visiting a local synagogue as was their custom, but instead go “out of the city to the riverside where prayer was customarily made” we can conclude a minimal Jewish community existed in Philippi. As a matter of fact, we are given the indication the only Jewish representation was a group of “women who met there.”

As Paul shared the Gospel with these ladies, Luke tells us “a certain woman named Lydia heard” whom “the Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.” Because of the description of Lydia provided in the text, it’s likely she was a Roman citizen from a wealthy family of Thyatira, who sold fabric to the Roman nobility living in Philippi.

Most incredibly, this woman Lydia becomes the first convert in Philippi... Acts 16:15-18, “And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us.

Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, ‘These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.’ And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed,

turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And he came out that very hour."

Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke end up using Lydia's home as their base of operations while ministering in Philippi. Whether they "went to prayer" every Sabbath, we're not sure; what we do know is that "for many days" they end up being hounded by "a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit" who was continually crying out that they were "servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." Not exactly the PR who'd want!

How long this occurred we don't know, but things reached such a boiling point that "Paul, greatly annoyed", eventually commanded the spirit to come out of her! The language indicates he resisted dealing with the situation until he could literally no longer take it!

Though I fully believe God had a plan to liberate this young girl, Paul knew what the reaction would be. Without this spirit yielding a supernatural result, this girl would no longer be of any value to her masters — which would in turn bring some heat upon Paul and his budding ministry. I'm convinced Paul waited because he had to prioritize his ministry. A work needed to occur in Philippi (the formation of this new church) before he kicked the hornets nest.

Verse 19, "But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, 'These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.'"

While Paul's ministry in Philippi was yielding fruit, it clearly came at a cost... First, "they seized Paul and Silas and drag them into the marketplace to the authorities." Then they accuse them of "troubling the city" by "teaching customs which are not lawful for Romans to receive or observe." A violent opposition coupled with an unfounded allegation is dangerous!

In response to these charges we read verse 22, "Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with

rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks."

Don't forget what Paul's really guilty of... At this point all he had done is ministered to a group of women and cast a demon out of a slave girl! Still, what does Paul get in return? Luke tells us that after being stripped naked, "the magistrates tore off their clothes", Paul and Silas are then "beaten with rods" in the public square. Luke says, "They laid many stripes on them!"

Then these men, bruised and bloody, are "thrown into the inner prison." It should be pointed out that Roman prisons were often nothing more than subterranean pits making them cold, dark, filthy, and poorly ventilated. Since the "jailer was command to keep them securely" not only are Paul and Silas' hands fastened to a wall, but their feet were "fastened in the stocks", which was a form of torture. Yet, in spite of all of these things, look at their reaction...

Acts 16:25, "But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." In using the word "but", in a literary sense, Luke is placing the reaction of these men in context to everything that has just happened to them.

Luke is seeking to illustrate how absolutely abnormal it was that following a violent arrest without provocation, false accusations without reason, an unmerciful beating without cause, and an unjust imprisonment as if they were criminals of the worst order — Paul and Silas responded to their circumstances by "praying and singing hymns to God!"

In their suffering, these men resisted the natural urge to doubt their purpose (what did we do wrong), take pity on themselves (woe is me), complain about their plight (this is not fair), or even grow angry over their current state of affairs (a desire for vindication). Instead, Paul and Silas made a decision: they would rely on the God behind their circumstances by coming to Him in "prayer and the signing of hymns."

This detail that "the prisoners were listening to them" is not an accident. I can imagine the sound coming from the bowels of this prison around midnight was the strangest noise any of

them had ever heard. You see the reaction to Paul and Silas' praise caught everyone's attention because it was completely abnormal. How could these men praise God when the natural reaction would have been to curse Him?

I hope you understand your life demonstrates a greater manifestation of the supernatural power of God when your circumstances are difficult, as opposed to when everything is hunky dory! The reason the world listens with greater attention when a Christian suffers is because they want to see if your reaction will be any different from their own.

Verse 26, "Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, 'Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.'"

As Paul and Silas are singing to the Lord during the midnight hour, we're told "suddenly" or literally without forewarning "there was a great earthquake" that shook the prison so not only were "all the doors opened" but "everyone's chains were loosed."

Then "awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open" we read the "keeper of the prison... supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword to kill himself." According to Roman law the penalty for allowing a prisoner to escape custody was that the soldier responsible would assume the escapee's sentence. Realizing the severity of the situation this Jailor decides it would be better to kill himself than suffer a humiliating death.

Consider the scene! Though Paul and Silas have been thrown into prison unjustly, they have maintained their Godly character by praying and worshipping the Lord! Then, in the midst of their worship, an earthquake supernaturally opens the doors and loosens their chains...

While it would have been easy to see this as the providence of God making way for their escape, recognizing what would befall this Jailer if they fled, “Paul called with a loud voice” pleading with the man to “do himself no harm, for they were all there.” Amazing!

I’m convinced as Paul saw the scene unfolding, he couldn’t help but realize this earthquake was not intended to be a means of escape, but instead was designed to create an opportunity whereby they could minister to this Philippian Jailer!

It’s my opinion, in this moment, Paul realized this Jailer was the man from Macedonia in his vision... Verse 29, “Then the Jailer called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’”

Well, if there had been any doubt in Paul’s mind as to the larger purpose behind his present situation it was dispelled rather quickly by this Jailer’s question... “What must I do to be saved?” Talk about an open door! The man wants Paul to tell him how to be saved!

Acts 16:31-34, “So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.”

The Jailer asks a simple question, “What must I do to be saved?” and Paul responds with a simple but profound answer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!” Not only has Lydia, her family, and the slave-girl received Jesus, but now this Jailer and his entire family believed and “were baptized!” Note: This is all happening in the middle of the night!

Acts 16:35-37, “And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, ‘Let those men go.’ So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, ‘The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace.’ But Paul said to them, ‘They have

beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.’”

Paul’s concern was that while the magistrates had come to recognize both he and Silas were innocent of the charges that had been levied against them, releasing them “secretly” when they had been accused “openly” would do nothing to publicly set the record straight.

Paul wisely understood that the only way to keep his name from being tarnished (which might have compromised the effectiveness of this new church) was to demand a public acquittal! This is why he decides to play his trump card by letting it slip that he and Silas had been “beaten and thrown into prison” as “uncondemned Romans.” This was a huge no-no!

Verse 38, “And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city. So they went out of the prison, entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.”

After getting what he wanted and following their release from prison, Paul with Silas return to “the house of Lydia” where they visit with “the brethren” before “departing.” Note: Since we’re told “they departed” Paul chooses to leave behind Luke to pastor this new church.

While Paul “departs” Philippi after only a short time with them, this wouldn’t be his last visit. According to the first several verses of Acts 20, during his third missionary journey and directly following an extended period of time ministering in the Grecian city of Ephesus, Paul eventually passes back through town, specifically in order to visit with this church.

Though the stay was short and we have no specific record of what occurred during his time in Philippi, one thing of note does happen — Luke rejoins Paul in his missionary travels. The implication being that this church was now established with solid, local leadership!

My point in looking at Paul’s history in Philippi is really two-fold... First, background always provides greater color and context. The Philippian church was important because it was

the first established in Europe! Which is really an astounding fact when you consider Paul had no intention of traveling West until the Spirit hindered him from going East!

I think Paul was fond of the Philippians and the time he spent there because he knew it had been a work of God entirely. Paul had no plans to travel to Philippi. After following his vision in Troas, there was no question Philippi was exactly where he was supposed to go.

Paul had a love for this church because what God accomplished in Philippi marked a significant turning point in Paul's life. From this moment forward, as he continued further and further away from Jewish influence, Paul really would become the Apostle unto the Gentiles.

But there is another reason, I think it's important to look back at Paul's time in Philippi before diving into his letter. Because the letter is so personal you need to know who "the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi" actually were — the people Paul is writing to!

When Paul thought of the Philippians, there is no question he thought of Lydia and those women he first ministered to down by the river. Paul thought of Lydia's family and how gracious it had been that she opened up her home to strangers.

I'm sure as Paul was writing, he thought of the slave-girl he'd liberated from demon-possession. there was no question some 11 years later she was now all grown up. Paul probably thought about her husband and family. Most importantly how Jesus had so radically transformed her life!

Beyond all of this... In writing to these Philippian saints, Paul thought of the Jailer and his family. What a crazy night that had been! The beating, earthquake, desperation, salvation, a baptism in middle of the night! Man, God works in mysterious ways!

Paul was invested in this church in Philippi! He had personally suffered in order to see this church birthed and established. Paul had made sacrifices for their wellbeing — even going so far as to leave behind his personal doctor to insure this baby church grew to be healthy.

Paul loved these Philippian believers dearly and it's clear they reciprocated this love with an equal fervor. In the years that followed Paul's visit, there is no doubt this church blossomed. The foundation Paul had laid remained firm and the Gospel was changing countless lives.

As we close and in context to his experiences in Philippi, Paul pens this letter seeking to accomplish three simple goals... First, Paul wants them to know how thankful he is of them. Not only is he grateful for the work God was doing through them, but their willingness to support him financially and partner with him in the ministry was deeply humbling.

Secondly, Paul will write in order to address an honest concern. Think about it... In his Philippian imprisonment Paul had been supernaturally freed. I'm sure it was only logical that these believers wondered why, in his Roman incarceration, the same thing hadn't occurred.

In this letter Paul is going to explain that God actually takes two very different approaches when it comes to delivering His kids from suffering. Sometimes God grants deliverance from our trials, while in other instances, His grace is designed to deliver us through those trials.

And finally, Paul writes because he wants these believers to know that because their joy was based in the amazing grace of God and not their present circumstances, they could truly rejoice in whatever situations they found themselves facing.

The vertical peace discovered when one bases their spiritual life on God's grace blesses that person unspeakable joy regardless of their horizontal environment. As we study this letter you will see that the Apostle Paul, writing from a Roman cell, unsure if he'd live or face a brutal execution, was at peace because he was presently enjoying grace!

Philippians 1:1-11

Towards the end of his third missionary journey, Paul arrived in Jerusalem against the advice of his closest friends. Not only had the political and religious environment become a powder keg, but the fear was that Paul's presence was all that was needed to light the fuse.

Sure enough, almost immediately following his arrival, Paul ends up in the center of the action and a riot ensues! Not sure what exactly was cause for all the hubbub, the Roman guards sweep in and arrest the Apostle. Then, knowing it would be virtually impossible to get a fair hearing before the Jewish Sanhedrin who wanted him dead, Paul, a Roman citizen, wisely invokes his right to have his case presented before Caesar Nero.

This request is obliged and under guard of the empire, Paul makes his way to Rome where he's ultimately placed under house arrest. Though we don't know the specifics of the timeline, it's likely Paul remained in custody for two years waiting for his case to be heard.

Well, catching word of his predicament and pressing legal troubles, the church Paul had planted in Philippi (made up of many Romans) ends up sending Epaphroditus with a financial gift. In response Paul pens this letter and sends it back using Epaphroditus as his courier.

With the background color and context in mind, Paul writes this letter to the Philippians seeking to accomplish three simple goals... First, Paul wants them to know how thankful he is of their friendship and their financial gift.

Secondly, Paul writes in order to explain that while God sometimes grants us deliverance from our trials much like when he was in the Philippian jail. In other instances, His grace is designed to deliver us through our trials, like his present situation in Rome.

And finally, Paul writes to the Philippians because he wants them to know that because joy is based in the amazing grace of God and not one's present circumstances, they could rejoice in spite of whatever situations they might find themselves facing. As we study this letter you will see that the Apostle Paul, writing from a Roman cell, unsure if he'd live or face a brutal execution, was at peace because he was presently enjoying grace!

Philippians 1:1-2, "Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Because the letter begins with the order of "Paul and Timothy" with the first name always signifying preeminence, it's likely "Timothy" was acting as Paul's scribe. If you refer back, both men were well known by the believers in Philippi. Additionally, in chapter 2:19, Paul will even describe his intention to send Timothy to Philippi "shortly."

Right from the jump Paul introduces both himself and Timothy as being "bondservants of Jesus Christ." In the Greek this word "bondservant" is "doulos", which possessed an interesting distinction. Though the word does mean slave, the term *doulos* actually described a man or a woman who was a slave by choice, not obligation or by force.

In such instances the kindness of the Master ends up being so great that the individual chooses to remain a slave though they had been previously set free. Another way of translating bondservants would be love-slaves — and not in the kinky, perverted way. As it pertained to the Levitical Law, Exodus 21 lays out the legal process for becoming a *doulos*.

Though we live in a country that trumpets life and liberty, the truth is that freedom is really just a mirage. As Dylan famously sang, "You're gonna have to serve somebody!" Just look around our culture and you'll see a society of slaves. People are enslaved to drugs, sex and

porn, gambling, fame, money or a career, debt, thrills, a toned body, etc. The paradox isn't freedom from enslavement, but the freedom to choose who we want as our masters.

This is what makes this statement "bondservants of Jesus Christ" so profound. Paul is saying that, while Jesus had liberated them from their sin, he and Timothy had both made a free-willed decision to give up their rights to now serve Jesus. Their lives were no longer their own. They had chosen to surrender everything to Jesus out of a response to His incredible love.

And why was this important? Paul, who don't forget is sitting in a Roman prison awaiting trial before Nero was able to endure, because he knew his identity was not determined by his environment or circumstance. Since Paul never forgot he was a "bondservant of Jesus Christ", his present situation had no bearing on his purpose and therefore his joy.

As we mentioned, there is no doubt that in writing to "all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi", Paul was thinking of specific people: Lydia and her family, the slave-girl he liberated from demon-possession, and the Philippian Jailer and his household. These men and women were the folks Paul viewed as "saints in Christ Jesus."

Contrary to the perspective of sainthood developed by the Roman Catholic Church, the Bible defines all followers of Jesus as being "saints!" The Greek word *hagios*, literally means a most holy thing. Though sainthood has become a title that serves to honor someone of distinction, anyone Jesus died to save is most holy in the eyes of God the Father.

In addition to the "saints" — in this greeting, Paul also mentions the "bishops and deacons" of this Philippian church. In the original language this word bishop simply means overseer and the word deacon refers to a designated doer. The Greek word literally means one who executes the commands of another.

Though Paul doesn't mention any specific names and is likely speaking in generalities, you shouldn't overlook the fact the Apostle is affirming that within this local church in Philippi there was an organizational structure: Bishops, today known as pastors elders and then

Deacons. Both are presented in the plural implying that this church had several pastors and many deacons.

Look at Paul's first words to these Philippian believers. He begins, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." With the exception of the two letters Paul wrote to Timothy and the one to Titus where he adds the word mercy between grace and peace, every other letter Paul pens contains this same customary salutation.

When you consider the fact Paul had been a staunch enemy of Christ before encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus, I don't think it's an accident the very first word he writes in every single letter is Grace! For Paul, God's grace was the primary message of the Gospel!

In 156 times the word is used in the New Testament grace takes on a redemptive quality describing an act, whereby God avails His favor to those who fundamentally don't deserve it — those unworthy! Some have defined the concept of grace as unmerited favor. Other's have more creatively described grace using the acrostic, "God's Riches At Christ's Expense."

In the Greek this word "grace" is "charis" which simply means "favor". With that said, it should also be pointed out that this word "charis" derives from the Greek word "chairō" meaning "to rejoice". In essence, God's grace is an unmerited, bestowed favor that yields rejoicing!

Back to Paul's salutation... "Grace to you and peace!" It's not an accident that every time we see the coupling of these two words in the Bible, the order is always the same. You see it's impossible for a person to experience the peace of God until they've first come to peace with God — which is only possible when one accepts God's grace.

It's simply a truth that if your salvation or sanctification had or still has any basis on your works or lasting merit, your worthiness, real peace with God would be unattainable. If your status with God was predicated upon your performance in any way, how could you ever be at ease? How would you ever know you've done enough? You'd never be at peace.

You see, the only way you can truly have peace with God is when you first find rest in the knowledge that your standing with God is based on His amazing grace, made available through a work Jesus has accomplished for you, and not one you attain and maintain.

To this point, according to Paul, both “grace and peace” are not something that man can manufacture or create for himself! “Grace and peace” are something that must be given by God alone... They both originate in Him before being extended to us. Paul says, “Grace and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.” Neither God’s favor nor His peace can be earned or found apart from His willingness to bestow them.

If you’re tired of trying to earn God’s approval... Tired of trying to be good enough... Tired of the striving, and the fighting, and the failing... If you long for peace with God, know this is exactly what Jesus came to provide and that He’s more than willing to give it you! Never forget... The human soul will never find peace apart from the grace of God!

Philippians 1:3-8, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

Just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.”

Following his greeting, Paul continues, “I thank my God!” In the original language the phrase “I thank” can be translated as “I’m so grateful!” The Greek word “eucharisteō” described an action of thanksgiving manifesting from a feeling of gratefulness. It’s the same word we also

translate as Eucharist — partaking of communion out of thanksgiving. The point is that Paul was communicating to the Philippians how he was feeling — he was feeling thankful.

Don't overlook the significance of this... Imagine you're in this Philippian church knowing that your friend Paul is in prison and his outlook is extremely bleak. Finally, Epaphroditus has returned from Rome and he's carrying a letter from Paul. Though you'd completely understand it if Paul came across a little bummed out or depressed over his present situation, how incredible it must have been to instead hear of his joy and thankfulness!

Right from the beginning of his letter to these Philippians Paul is making it known that his current dynamic hadn't robbed him of the ability to be thankful and possess joy! His earthly outlook, though undoubtedly ominous, hadn't robbed him of his heavenly perspective.

Paul continues by attributing his joy to three specific things... First, Paul attributes these feelings of thanksgiving to "every remembrance" of these Philippian believers. As he thought about these dear saints... As he reminisced on the time he'd spent with them... His labor of love while in Philippi... The way they'd just reciprocated his love by sending financial aid to support him in the ministry, Paul is overcome with thanksgiving!

In a general sense, Paul's friendship with these Philippians and the memories he had of them proved to be a great source of joy even in the midst of his despair. In Matthew 6:19-21 Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." Jesus sums up His point by saying, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Understand there are only two things you'll be able to take with you to heaven: Your friends and your memories! Paul cherished these Philippian believers so much he even says, "I have

you in my heart!" For the Apostle, these men and women were his "treasure" and as such no earthly circumstance could steal from him the joy he found in them.

Aside from Paul's joy stemming from "every remembrance" of these Philippians, Paul was also filled with a feeling of thankfulness as he considered their "fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now." In the Greek this word "fellowship" or "koinōnia" described their willingness to partner with Paul in the furtherance of the Gospel!

Paul then adds an example as to the depths of this partnership when he says, "Inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace." Though Paul was in a prison unable to plant churches as was his mission, these Philippians were still fully behind him. They didn't bail when things got tough.

In actuality and within the larger context of his "chains", the word "partakers" implies the Philippians were likely financing Paul's legal fund! Because Paul was about to stand trial before Nero to give account for the Gospel and his specific role in its spread across the world. Note: Luke compiled both his Gospel and the Book of Acts to be defense briefs for Paul. The Philippians knew the stakes were high. Paul was representing all of Christianity!

Paul says these Philippians had partnered with him in the "defense and confirmation of the Gospel." This Greek word we have translated as "defense" is "apologia" which spoke of a formal legal argument. This word "confirmation" (only used twice in Scripture) described an actual settlement of a business transaction. It would appear Paul was thankful that these Philippians were willing to partner with him "in his chains" by financing his defense.

Finally, aside from his "remembrance" of them and their partnership with him, Paul found incredible joy in the knowledge that "He, speaking of the Holy Spirit, who had begun a good work in them would complete it until the day of Jesus Christ!" As a matter of fact, Paul was so certain of this incredible reality, he even declares he was totally "confident of this very thing!"

The implications of this statement are radical! Paul says, "He who has begun... will complete it!" First, Paul affirms Who started this "good work" in you. The work of salvation: regeneration, rebirth, being born again, does not originate via a work you accomplish. But rather it occurs the very moment the Holy Spirit indwells the individual!

In Titus 3:3-7 Paul writes, "For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

Second, Paul affirms Who "completes" this "good work" in you. The same Spirit who initiated the transformation continues the work until it reaches completion. What this means is that your sanctification: transformation, development of Godly attributes, Christ-likeness, does not occur via your works, but a continued work of God's Spirit in and through you!

Once again, writing in Galatians 5:22-25, Paul observes, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Then he concludes, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

Do you realize your spiritual life demands the cradle to grave involvement of the Holy Spirit? In Hebrews 12 Jesus is actually described as being "the author and finisher of your faith!" At no point in your spiritual life is the direct involvement of God's Spirit not paramount.

In actuality, so much grief is yielded when we forget that "He who has begun... will complete it!" God is not in the business of starting something in you He isn't willing to see through! And once more... At no point in the process does God need your help in His work!

Verse 8 is one of the many instances in this letter when Paul's love for these Philippians oozes forth. He writes, "For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you with the affection of Jesus Christ." In his thanksgiving for the time they'd had, the work they were doing together, and the result Jesus would ultimately yield, Paul deeply longed to be with them.

And yet, because he couldn't be with them physically, Paul spent his time interceding for them Spiritually. He's already mentioned the fact he "always in every prayer made request for them all with joy." Now Paul is going to relay the substance of his prayer...

Philippians 1:9-11, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

Look at the first item on Paul's prayer list... "I pray that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment." Note: Just because Paul prayed that the Philippians "love may abound still more and more", didn't mean they weren't loving. The idea behind this word "abound" was that their love would superabound, exceed its limit, excel, or overflow.

The reality is that Paul wanted to see their love for one another increase and deepen because he knew something important — Since there is no bottom to the depths of God's love for us there should be no limit to the love we should have for one another!

And yet, the origins of such a love are supernatural. The word Paul uses for "love" is "agapē" which described a divine love that originates with God, before flowing to us, and then from us to others. The word "agapē" is often found in the phrase, "The love of God."

In 1 John 4:10-11 the Apostle John made it crystal clear how all of this was to work. He writes, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

But notice that while Paul's prayer centers on a superabounding type of love, it's not a love without boundaries. As a matter of fact, Paul wants their love to "abound still more and more in knowledge (literally "precise and correct knowledge") and discernment (or judgment)."

Sadly, we live in a society that presents love as the willingness to accept all things, turn a blind eye to behaviors that might be destructive, and one that's void of any type of judgment. Not only is this dangerous to all those involved, but the truth is that this isn't love!

Understand... Love, in the purest sense, is not only willing to challenge what might be wrong, but will stand for what is true! Real love places eternal well-being over temporary feelings. It longs for what is best — over the acceptance of what isn't. Paul is encouraging them to a deep love, but one with appropriate guard-rales... A love that is tethered to truth.

Paul continues, "I pray that you may approve the things that are excellent." In the Greek this word "approve" meant "to test, examine, try, or scrutinize in order to decipher whether something is genuine." In regards to the idea of "the things that are excellent" Paul is speaking to a standard by which we judge things... Our ability to effectively divide.

As it pertains to our spiritual lives, in 1 Corinthians 10:23 Paul writes, "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful, but not all things edify." The grand consideration for those saved by grace isn't good verses bad, but so often what is good verses best. In Hebrews 12:1 we're exhorted to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."

"I pray that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ." In the Greek this word "sincere" literally means "without a mixture" and the word translated "without offense" spoke of "having nothing to strike against." Paul's prayer is that these Philippians live lives of such internal character that it served to validate their external reputation.

Finally, Paul closes this section by saying, “I pray that you’re being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Paul desired more than anything that their lives demonstrated the person and righteousness of Jesus. Note how that was to occur. He says these “fruits... are by Jesus Christ.”

In this statement Paul uses the illustration of “fruit” because a fruit is nothing more than a natural byproduct — the opposite of manufacturing. Fruits develop organically. They aren’t made. In John 15:4-5 Jesus exhorted His disciples using the same illustration saying, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

Once again Paul was “confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” The same idea applied to the development of this “righteousness” — their ability to demonstrate the character traits of Jesus.

Never forget the power of the Gospel (your salvation and sanctification) resides in the Spirit’s ability to work in and through your life. You become more like Christ, not through your striving, working, or self-disciplines. In the end you become like Christ through a continued relational association with Jesus... “Abiding in the Vine!”

As we close this mornings study I can’t help but point out that Paul was able to be thankful and possess joy in spite of his circumstances for two simple reasons... (1) Paul never lost sight of his identity and was therefore never robbed of his purpose. Though he might have been a prisoner of Rome, he was first and foremost a “bondservant of Jesus Christ.” Paul will actually build on this idea in the verses to follow so we’ll leave this to next Sunday.

(2) Paul had joy because he kept his outlook others-centered. Consider... Paul is in prison with his very future in jeopardy. And yet, instead of complaining or for that matter expressing his genuine disappointments, Paul’s chief consideration centered on the well-being of the

Philippians! When most everyone else would have sent a list of requests for the Philippians to be praying for him about, Paul begins his letter by praying for them!

It is possible to be Enjoying Grace in whatever terrible situation you might be presently facing as long as you, like Paul, keep your perspective on two things: Jesus and others. I know it's cliché, but it's so true. Joy is found when you focus on Jesus and others before yourself.

Philippians 1:12-30

26 of our brothers and sisters who attended the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs were brutally murdered as they were worshipping Jesus. The disbelief. The anger. The rush to judgment. If you're like me, as I try to cope with the unimaginable, this week has been filled with all kinds of varying emotions. We're all Baptists!

As we're going to see in this section of Philippians, there is a difficult truth about life in a fallen world full of evil. Persecution and suffering are an inescapable reality. As this little Texan church knows all too well, following Jesus doesn't provide you an immunity to such horrors. Paul will even close this chapter writing, "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake."

As we mentioned, Paul was able to possess joy in spite of his circumstances for two simple reasons... (1) He was able to remain others-centered. And (2) Paul was never robbed of his meaning and purpose because he refused to lose sight of his identity. Sure, he may have been a prisoner of Rome, but Paul served a greater calling that no situation could ever deter. He was a "bondservant of Jesus Christ!"

In spite of all of these things, there was a point of confusion amongst these Philippian believers. Paul writes this letter seeking to clear up the said confusion — though there are times when God sometimes grants us deliverance from our trials, such as when Paul was in the Philippian jail. there are other instances when His grace is designed to instead deliver us through our trials much like Paul's present situation in Rome.

Friend, because of God's grace, please know lasting joy has been made available, independent of whatever daunting circumstance you might come to face. Not only does the grace found in Christ free us to forgive and liberate us from bitterness, but regardless of the trials or tribulations you might face, you can still enjoy the life which Jesus died to provide you!

Yes! The Philippians have continued to support Paul even in the midst of his Roman imprisonment — a reality that led Paul to open this letter expressing his sincere thanks over their partnership. With that said, Paul now continues by explaining that this “set back” was in actuality God's way of furthering the Gospel. Good was manifesting from a bad situation.

Philippians 1:12-14, “But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

When Paul transitions by mentioning “the things which happened to me”, there is no doubt he was referring to the events that led up to his ultimate arrest and transport to Rome. Leading Rome to be where he now finds himself incarcerated awaiting trial before Caesar Nero. In the original language this phrase would be better translated as “the things which have dominated me.”

If you study the life of Paul you will notice this man was a planner. Paul rarely did something without first considering the ramifications. He was a calculated and measured man. Paul acted with intention and with the larger goal in mind. However, since his arrest in Jerusalem, things have spun way out of his control. Paul's present circumstance had come to dominate his life and there was nothing he could do about it. Have you ever felt this way? All things considered, when many would say his life was out of control, Paul continued to look for God's larger purpose.

He says most incredibly that these things “have actually turned out for the furtherance of the Gospel.” While on the surface it would have been easy to see his imprisonment as a set back to God’s work through his life, Paul is wanting the Philippians to know how God was actually using these things to further the Gospel. Paul had come to peace with his circumstances because he was willing to believe God’s providential hand was at work!

In the Greek this word “furtherance” is really interesting. You see, the word “furtherance” was a military term that described the act of cutting down a forest in order to make a pathway for an invading army. It was a deliberate clearing of the way for a specific purpose.

And to what purpose does Paul attribute the things that had happened to him? He writes they occurred for “the furtherance of the Gospel.” Paul is literally saying that his present trial had been God’s way of clearing a path for the Gospel to be proclaimed in a most radical way.

First, Paul writes, “It has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ.” This phrase “whole palace guard” is actually a reference to the Praetorium. It would appear, aside from his influence impacting the men in charge, the very men tasked with guarding the Apostle Paul had not only come to see his innocence, but had become followers of Jesus through his witness.

A four-man detail of Roman soldiers were rotating on Paul every six hours throughout the day. Though a prisoner of Rome, it was actually Paul who held a captive audience.

Secondly, Paul says, “And most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.” The word translated “confident” would be better presented into English as “persuaded or moved to action”.

Though in his chains Paul has no doubt been removed from the larger game, his absence had left a vacuum in the church that was now being filled by others. Because Paul was unable to

travel, plant churches, preach the Gospel, teach the people, etc. his “chains” persuaded others to now be “much more bold to speak the word without fear.” In a divine sense the removal of one preacher had fostered a void many were now filling.

Back in Acts 16 there was no question it had been God’s will that Paul be freed from the Philippian Jail; but still, the aged Apostle wants these Philippians to know that his continued incarceration in Rome was equally God’s will for his life. God’s hand was still on him and he was experiencing God’s blessings regardless. God was using his imprisonment! The blessings of God were still manifesting through his life even in less than ideal circumstances.

I have found that one of the greatest hinderances to our joy in times of trial boils down to a failure to accept God’s providence. We can wrestle with pain. We can be filled with disappointment — even doubt. But at some point we must surrender these real emotions to the much larger reality that God remains in control even when our lives turn to chaos.

Please understand... Paul was able to have joy not only because he remained others-centered and refused to forget his true identity, but his joy manifested in the fact he was willing to see how this season was also part of God’s larger plan for his life.

Philippians 1:15-18, “Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.”

Elaborating on those who were filling the void left by his absence, Paul admits that two different kinds of preachers had come out of the woodwork. First, there were those who “preach Christ... from goodwill (kindly intent)... out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the

defense of the Gospel.” Paul is saying that this first group had been motivated by a deep love and admiration for Paul and his ministry, and the desire to see it continue.

However, there were also those who “preached Christ from envy (prompted by envy) and strife (contention) from selfish ambition, not sincerely (without a sincerity), supposing to add affliction to Paul’s chains.” Sadly, there was a second group who had seen Paul’s incarceration as an opportunity to increase their own status and standing at his expense.

What is most amazing is that while Paul knew the motivations of this second group were skewed and warped, he still “rejoiced” knowing that at least “Christ” was being “preached”. Whether their motivation for preaching was a love for Paul or an animosity towards him, if Jesus was being proclaimed, Paul didn’t care about their personal insults in the slightest.

One thing should be qualified... There are many who point to this passage as evidence churches should refrain from criticizing other churches because “at least the Gospel is being proclaimed!” While I understand the negative impact a circular firing-squad has to the cause of Christ, don’t miss what Paul is actually doing in this particular passage.

Though it’s clear Paul made a decision to rejoice because at least “Christ” was being “preached” by both groups, the truth is that he does this after calling out and documenting the twisted motivations of some. Paul was glad Christ was preached, but he also wanted the Philippians to know some of these preachers were motivated by “envy, strife, from selfish ambition, not sincerely, even desiring to add to Paul’s affliction.” That’s heavy!

Philippians 1:19-21, “For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

“For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance...” Paul was confident in Jesus and sure in his conviction that he would be delivered from his Roman chains. Not only had “the Spirit” enabled him to be sure, but it also had been “through their prayers” that his faith had increased.

Paul clarifies how he defined deliverance... He would be delivered “whether by life or by death.” Though the Philippians were praying for deliverance from his trial, Paul’s confidence was that the Lord would be faithful to see him through his trial. Whether he stood trial, was acquitted, and then set free by Nero or whether he stood trial, was convicted, and immediately executed, Paul knew his deliverance was certain in either scenario.

Keep in mind that for Paul “deliverance” was not nearly as important as how he handled himself in the process of being delivered. He writes, “According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed.” It would appear Paul’s greater concern was not being delivered, but acting in a way that would dishonor Jesus.

Instead, he writes that his sole desire was to maintain a “boldness” (fearless confidence) that no matter what happened “Christ would be magnified” (esteemed highly). Getting out of his trial was not nearly as pressing to Paul as demonstrating Christ in his trial! Sadly, our prayers end up “Lord, get me out” when they should be “Lord, help me through!”

Paul then explains to the Philippians the essence of this perspective... He writes, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain!” In the Greek this sentence is incredibly brilliant. This phrase presents a simple formula by which anyone can evaluate their own philosophy. You see Paul is challenging the essence of what you live for with the reality of death.

In the original sentence structure the word “gain” spoke of having more of the very thing you were living for. Paul’s literally writing, “To live is Christ, and to die is more of Christ!” Honestly, it’s one of the most profound philosophical statements in all of the Pauline Epistles, because the formula can be used to test almost every life pursuit!

What Paul is saying is that living for Jesus made the most sense to him because death would only yield more of Jesus — the very thing he was living for. “To live is Christ” and “to die is” was to receive more of “Christ.” Consider the implication of this formula on your own life.

Does the pursuit of money or wealth make sense for one’s life when death robs you of these very things? Can you say, “To live is money, and to die is more money?” What about fame, power, family, education, etc. If only King Solomon had been given this simple formula, he would have never needed to engage in a quest to find meaning “under the sun!”

You see the ramifications of this statement are radical in almost every way. Not only does this verse provide an eternal purpose to my temporal existence, but it completely reconstitutes the essence of death. According to Paul, death isn’t the end. Death doesn’t rob you of life. Instead all death does is either grant you more of the thing your life pursued or it strips that very thing away. I mean seriously... How do you kill a man like Paul?

Philippians 1:22-26, “But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.”

After making it clear death was of no concern, Paul continues by explaining that life wasn’t all that bad either. He says, “If I live on... this will mean fruit from my labor.” Paul is being real. “If I die, I’m with Jesus. If I live on, I get to see God’s continue work! It’s all good either way!”

Aside from this Paul also sees “remaining in the flesh” as being better or “more needful” for the Philippians as opposed to “departing” to “be with Christ, which was far better” for Paul personally. Note: Not only does this word “desire” speak of a craving for or a deep longing, but this word “depart” means “to strike the tent.” The truth: Paul wanted to die!

Now before you find this offensive keep in mind that Paul had good reason. In 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 Paul wrote that in addition to the false-accusations, slander, gossip, and constant opposition he was “in beatings more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked (ends up being 4 times); a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils (in danger) of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness — besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.” Finishing the race sounded promising to Paul!

In the end, Paul concedes that he was “hard-pressed between the two” — the continued struggle of life and the immediate reward of death. This word “hard-pressed” can be translated as “in a strait” describing the moment a ship is forced into a narrow channel. Paul’s grand struggle was what he wanted verses what he knew the Philippians needed!

“Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.” Though Paul had nothing to fear and longed to be in the presence of Jesus, the Apostle remained others-focused. In spite of all of these things, Paul saw a greater purposes remaining alive for these Philippians.

Philippians 1:27-30, “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in

Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me."

"Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ..." This word "conduct" is fascinating. The King James Version translates this Greek word as "conversation", but that too falls short of what Paul is actually saying. In the original, the word we find can be translated as "politic" and spoke of a manner of life consistent with one's citizenship. In our case, life is to be lived consistent with the Gospel and in line with what it means to be a citizen of heaven.

Paul then implores that the way they lived "be worthy of the gospel." Once again this word "worthy" meant to be weighed on a scale and found to be of equal value. Please don't misunderstand Paul's point, he's not encouraging these Philippians to have their conduct equal the worth of Jesus' sacrifice (how would that even be possible?). Instead, Paul is saying their worth demonstrated by Jesus' sacrifice should influence their conduct.

It's not abnormal to hear people's fundamental hang up concerning Jesus sound something like, "But Zach I'm not worthy of God's grace or His forgiveness!" While I understand the sentiment, the reality is this is a lie from deepest parts of hell! The truth is that God, knowing literally everything about you, determined you were still worth the very life of His Son. In some regard it's insulting to God to question your worthiness when He's already determined it.

Always remember grace may be free for the believer, but it wasn't cheap. The extension of God's grace to you required the complete spilling of Christ's blood. God's grace for you cost Jesus everything! Paul's exhortation was for this incredible value to influence their conduct.

See, this thought manifests from Paul saying, "That you stand fast in one spirit." Paul wants these Philippians to persevere or persist. He's calling them to be unified in purpose and calling "In one spirit!" And that "with one mind" they "strive together for the faith of the Gospel" or literally "they labor forward at the same time with one another."

Paul wants these Philippians motivated by grace, to be unified in spirit as well as mission. Here's why this unity was so important... So that they would "not be in any way terrified by their adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation from God." It would appear, in the city of Philippi, a persecution of the church was growing.

You see Paul exhorts them to be unified and to "strive together for the faith" so that they would not be "terrified" by the opposition, but would remain strong and brave in the face of the opposition. The truth is that the greatest tool we have to endure is one another. I think it's so sad when someone in trial allows disunity to end up robbing them of fellowship with their Christian family. May we seek to "stand fast" and "strive together" knowing this.

"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me." This word "it has been granted" literally means to be given favor. Paul is actually saying it is an honor "not only to believe" in Jesus, but "to suffer for His sake!"

While it would be easy to be taken aback by this statement, don't forget Paul is not saying this from an insulated ivory tower. He writes, "Having the same conflict you saw in me and now here is in me." Paul was able to find joy in his trial because he recognized there was something uniquely special about "suffering for His sake" — A point he wants these Philippian believers, not to mention you and I, as well to understand.

Let me close with a story. During my years at Bible College, I had the privilege of meeting many wonderful men and women, but none were more memorable than Jon and his fiancé Erin. As High School sweethearts, they both came to Bible College dedicating their lives to the service of Jesus.

I knew Jon because we both worked on the landscaping crew and his Wisconsin accent paired with a red mullet made him an unforgettable figure. Following College we lost touch,

but I knew he and Erin returned home to Wisconsin, where they started a family and a life together.

Fast-forward many years to a beautiful spring evening, May 3, 2015. Around 7:30pm Jon Stoffel with his wife Erin and their three young children (Olivia age 11, Ezra age 7, and Selah age 5) were enjoying a quite stroll across the Trestle Trail Bridge in Menasha, Wisconsin.

The sun was setting on the horizon, the night was calm, the wind strong, the air crisp when out of the blue a 27 year old man by the name of Sergio del Toro, who just had a fight with his girlfriend, approached the Stoffel's and indiscriminately opened fire their direction.

Jon, Erin, and their 11 year old daughter, Olivia were immediately struck. In the moments that followed, Erin suffered two additional gunshot wounds (one to her abdomen, hand, and leg) she proceeded to help the younger two children to safety. From her report of the incident Jon's final words, as his daughter Olivia lay dying in his arms, were directed to the gunman. He said, "May God forgive you." Sergio then proceeded to take his own life.

While Erin, after a grueling 21 days in the hospital, would ultimately survive her wounds, tragically, both Jon (age 33) and their beautiful, 5th grade daughter Olivia died before the paramedics were able to arrive. Though Erin, Ezra, and Selah have struggled moving forward, they no doubt take solace knowing that right now Jon and Olivia are with Jesus.

In light of the horrific events that unfolded at the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs and knowing I'd have to address this statement, "for to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake", my thoughts have turned towards Erin. In grappling with my own struggles about this very verse, knowing she had experienced the unimaginable, I went to her Facebook page looking for perspective. Can grace really sustain you in such hardship? Well, I came across this post.

Erin begins by quoting Elisabeth Elliot, “God will see to it that we are in circumstances best designed by His sovereign love to give us opportunities to bear fruit for Him.” Before writing, “Hard one to swallow sometimes when you’re in thick of it, going through the fire, feeling like you’re drowning in life’s circumstances. There were days upon days that I felt all I had was a heart’s cry and was just trying to keep doing the next thing. Yet He promises to carry you through... His promises are true. Allow Him to shine through your brokenness. Even through the deep pain you may be experiencing, you will experience the most amazing closeness because hopefully it will draw you nearer to Him. You’re not alone. God be glorified.” Honestly, you would be hard pressed to find a better commentary of Philippians 1:12-30!

Friend, though I know pain, I don’t know suffering, nor do I know persecution. I don’t know what it’s like to be sitting in a cell in Rome awaiting an uncertain fate. I don’t know what it’s like to be Erin Stoffel and have your spouse and first-born little girl taken from you through an act of random evil. I don’t know what the surviving members of that quaint Texan church are presently experiencing, and honestly I pray none of us will ever know.

And yet, I’m greatly encouraged that those who do — men like Paul and a beautiful saint like Erin — who boldly testify to the blessing of grace that does emerge when we suffer “on behalf of Christ.” I don’t expect you to take my word for it, but please be challenged by their perspective. I wrote Erin this week and this was her reply, “It’s still hard to imagine that it happened, but God has a great purpose. He’s brought many to Him through it.”

Philippians 2:1-11

Paul closes out Philippians chapter 1 encouraging these believers to “stand fast in one spirit” and “with one mind” to “strive together for the faith!” Because Paul knew there was likely a persecution of Christians brewing on the horizon (Philippians 1:29, “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake”), he knew how critically important it was that this church stand unified in purpose and mission.

The reality is that Christianity is not designed to be a “Jesus and Me verse the world” kind of proposition. Keep in mind, that while Jesus may have saved you from the sin of this world, He left you in this world of sin. Not only that, but until Jesus finally calls you home, the Scriptures are clear that you’ve been given a mission to accomplish.

In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus said, “Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...” And while this task is admittedly daunting and if we’re honest a bit intimidating, before ascending to heaven, Jesus left us with an encouraging promise... He says, “And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The question then begs: If the Bible tells us that Jesus is physically at the “right hand of the Father” (Acts 2:33), where He presently acts as both your “High Priest” (Hebrews 4:14-15), Mediator” (1 Timothy 2:5), and “Advocate” (1 John 2:1)... If Jesus left earth promising to “prepare a place for you” (John 14:2-3) before His return, then how is He “with you always”?

Though few speak of this, the reality is that Jesus, while this morning in heaven, is still “with you” in three very distinct and different ways. First, there is the personal existence of

Jesus' presence in your life through the written Word of God. Aside from the testimony of John 1 explaining that the "word became flesh", most notably in Revelation 19:13, Jesus' literal name as He returns to earth in power is presented as simply "The Word of God."

This is why in Hebrews 4:12 we are told, "The word of God is living and powerful." And then in 1 Peter 1:23 that "the word of God lives and abides forever!" Jesus is known by His Word. Side note: This is why the best thing I can do as your pastor is faithfully teach God's Word.

Secondly, there is the internal existence of Jesus' presence in your life through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In both Romans 8, 1 Peter chapter 1, as well as Philippians 1:19, the Holy Spirit is simply referred to as the "Spirit of Jesus Christ." Upon salvation the very person and nature of Jesus takes up residency within your heart through the Spirit of the Living God.

In Ezekiel 36:27 the Lord promises, "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them." In Romans 8:9 Paul mixes no words when he writes, "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His."

And finally, there is the external existence of Jesus' presence in your life through the church. Most interestingly, in 1 Corinthians 12 as well as Ephesians 4 this community of believers is described as being the "body of Christ." What this means is that Jesus is presently "with you" in that His Spirit indwells the people around you. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:27, "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually."

The implications of this incredible reality is that our interactions with one another should be motivated by and seen as being representative of Jesus' activity in our midst. It's why on the occasional Sunday we sing the actual Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi — that Jesus would literally "Make of me Your hands and feet to the people around me!"

So back to the question... How is Jesus “with you always?” Personally, His presence manifests through His Word. Internally, the presence of Jesus manifests through His Spirit. Externally, His presence manifests in your life through other believers.

This is why Christian fellowship is so essential to Christian effectiveness and why the enemy wants nothing more than to remove you from such interactions. Jesus’ presence in my life manifests through my interactions with you. To not have you, would put me in serious risk. The greatest danger I face as a believer is when I grow distant with my church family!

Have you ever noticed that in the midst of struggle, your natural inclination is to pull away from relational connections? Seriously, you detach from friends, take a break from church. You separate. Please know this is the absolutely worst thing you can do!

Friend, because there is a real enemy in this world who is seeking to “like a thief steal, kill, and destroy” (John 10:10) your life — an “adversary walking about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8), it’s only logical that there is safety in numbers.

Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 4:4-12, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

This family we have in Christ exists to provide strength in the midst of crippling weakness, renewed power when we are completely tapped out, resolve when we are ready to quit, fresh hope in overwhelming depression, faith when we are filled with doubt, a peaceful presence in the middle of a terrible storm, rejuvenating joy when we are overcome by debilitating sorrow...

What we need in these moments is a shining light when our path is filled with darkness, hands to lift up arms that can no longer endure, encouragement to press forward when we can go no farther, a kind word that turns away wrath, unconditional love in place of hate, a listening

ear instead of council, the demonstration of grace when all we have is judgment, friends willing to join us in the foxhole when we are taking fire from the surrounding enemy...

Whether it be a more systematic religious persecution that arises, a trial specific to you, or a personal season of tribulation, it's a truth that in these times of suffering you need more than anything else, the presence of Jesus made real in your life through both the internal dwelling of His Spirit, His Word, and the external manifestation of His presence through your Church!

You see, it's for this reason Paul knew that a growing disunity within the church leading to the division of Christians was the chief tactic of the enemy. There was no way these Philippians would be able to withstand if they didn't stand unified — the same is true for Calvary³¹⁶.

Philippians 2:1-2, "Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."

Let's break down the particulars of these verses before we set them in context of the flow of Paul's larger point. He begins, "If there is any consolation in Christ" or literally "have you ever been consoled by Jesus." As it pertains to this word "consolation" the word "paraklesis" possessed the idea of making strong. It's a "consolation" that manifests an inner resolve.

Paul continues, "If there is any comfort of love..." In the Greek this word "comfort" is a noun that describes the encouragement yielded from the "love" or "agapē" of God. It's as though Paul is asking these Philippians if they'd ever been encouraged by God's unconditional love.

"If there is any fellowship of the Spirit..." Once again this word "fellowship" is the word "koinōnia" which would be better translated as "partnership." In this series of rhetorical questions Paul is asking these Philippians if they'd been influenced by the Holy Spirit?

“If there is any affection and mercy...” The KJV translates this word “affection” as “bowels” which was the seat of a person’s core desires. The word “mercy” would be better read as “compassion.” Paul’s asking if these things had yielded a heart to demonstrate compassion.

The implication of these questions was to hammer home the truth that Christ should be manifesting through their lives in such a way. The overwhelming answer should have been, “Yes! Obviously, we’ve experienced strength yielded by Jesus, His love, the Spirit. No doubt our passion is compassion.” This reality is why Paul then writes, “Fulfill my joy by now being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”

Though Paul is not saying there is no room for a difference of opinion within a Church body or that in some way we need to be monolithic in all beliefs and best-practices, the Apostle is making it clear that “having the same love” should be more than enough to unify believers because this one truth transcends anything else that might yield divisions.

We can disagree about eschatology. We can wrestle over the best way to handle the church finances. We can battle it out over the color of the bathroom walls. But in the end, since we have the cross in common — His grace and love, how can we divide over such trite matters. It’s almost as though Paul’s exhortation for unity is to keep the main thing the one main thing.

Since unity is the desired goal and the logical manifestation of Jesus’ love demonstrated to each of us, Paul now continues in verses 3-4 by explaining how we maintain this unity.

Philippians 2:3-4, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

First and foremost, Paul issues this challenging statement, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit...” This Greek word Paul uses for “selfish ambition” is interesting for

it means electioneering. It was a political term describing a partisan action whereby a person deliberately courts distinctions for the purposes of putting oneself forward.

Aside from this, in the old King James Version, this word “conceit” is translated as vainglory. The word described a groundless and empty pride. The idea behind the word is thinking too much of oneself or having an erroneous estimation of one’s standing and importance.

Please understand, the greatest foe to unity within a church community is selfishness, for it’s impossible to be other-focused if you’re me-centered. You see, in order for unity to be achieved and maintained everyone in a church must resist acting in a selfish manner. Paul is clear, “let nothing be done” through these kind of motivations. We all must resist the exaltation of oneself and we must always keep an appropriate view of self in mind.

In contrast to “selfish ambition and conceit”, Paul then encourages the motivations for their actions to be a “lowliness of mind.” In the Greek this phrase implies “having a correct opinion of one’s self” or “a deep sense of one’s moral littleness.” In our modern vernacular you could translate this word as “humility.” It’s not that one is belittling to self. The idea is that you have an accurate understanding that apart from the grace of Jesus, you’re really nothing at all.

It’s only when you have such a perspective, that you will finally be able to “esteem others better than yourself” by “looking out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” Note: Paul is not saying you can’t look out for your “own interests”. The word “also” simply means you should “look out for the interests of others” equal to that of your own.

In essence, what Paul is encouraging these Philippians to do for the high purposes of maintaining unity within the church so that they could endure the suffering that was sure to arrive, was the simple rejection of self-consumption for the purpose of esteeming others. You see a church will be unified if everyone in the congregation is looked up to and no one is looked down upon. If I prefer you, and you in turn prefer me, we can stand unified!

Philippians 2:5, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...”

In order to hammer home his point, Paul now presents Jesus as the ultimate example of such a humble and others-centered attitude. What’s interesting about the next several verses is that it would appear Paul begins with the application before delivering the message. In a way Paul reverses the natural order of things. He says, “Let this mind (the mind of Jesus) be in you”, before then proceeding to explain the mind of Christ in the verses to follow!

Honestly, verses 5-11 of Philippians 2 are some of the most theologically profound verses in all of Scripture. In actuality, Greek scholars, which I am not, say these verses in the original language are so poetic they may have even been a hymn sung by the early church.

In describing the “mind of Christ” Paul is going to recap Jesus’ journey from heaven — to earth — to Calvary — then back again to heaven. His point is that the example established by Jesus should be the motivation for our “lowliness of mind” — our basis for Christian unity!

Philippians 2:6, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God...”

In case you are unaware it should be pointed out that Jesus existed before the incarnation, the moment he was born in Bethlehem of the virgin Mary. As the second member of the Holy Trinity Jesus has always existed. In actuality, this was a reality Jesus Himself affirmed on numerous occasions. For example, in John 8:56-59 Jesus said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.’ Then the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.’ Then they took up stones to throw at Him...”

In this amazing passage Paul begins by saying that Jesus has always existed “in the form of God...” In the Greek this word “form” literally referred to the “external appearance.” The word

implies that Jesus, before coming to earth, fully expressed in his person, the very being of God. This means that anytime in the Old Testament when God revealed Himself in an external way it was the pre-incarnate Jesus! God has a form and that form is Jesus!

Even in such a glorified state, Paul says that Jesus “did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.” What Paul means is that while Jesus had always existed as the physical manifestation of God, He didn’t see this state as something to cling to! What will be implied is that Jesus viewed the salvation of you and I to be more important than His Godly position.

Philippians 2:7, “But Jesus made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men...”

Recognizing the predicament, sinful man found himself in, which was the eternally separated from God and damned to remain in such a state, it was Jesus, who while being “equal with God,” made the decision to do something drastic. Paul writes that Jesus willingly “made Himself of no reputation” by stooping down from glory in order to come to earth “in the likeness of men.”

Before we leave this particular thought, consider how dramatic and radical this really is. The Almighty God of the universe, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, the Alpha and Omega, chose to become a human being. Jesus willingly cloaked Himself with human flesh. He deliberately joined the very creation marred by sin therefore subjecting Himself to its chaos!

Why did Jesus decided to do such a thing? Paul says that Jesus came “in the likeness of men” so that He might be able to “take the form of a bondservant.” Once again the word “form” indicates Jesus (who was “in the form of God”) decided to present Himself to humanity as the ultimate external personification of what it means to be a servant.

If coming as a man wasn't humbling enough for God, Jesus came to earth to specifically serve humanity, not to be served by humanity! Please realize it was for this purpose that Jesus came to this earth. He was on a mission. He came to save man from his sins!

As it pertains to the radical nature of what Paul is articulating, there are two important aspects to his statement you need to keep in mind. First, this humbling of Himself was not something Jesus could be told or commanded to do. It wasn't an act He was forced into. Jesus, as God, made the decision to dawn humanity to His deity of His own volition.

Which leads to the second point, it's important we don't read more into Paul's words he's saying. The text is clear that in the act of "making Himself of no reputation", Jesus "took the form of a bondservant..." This means in coming to earth as a man, Jesus did not lay aside any of His Godly attributes. As a man Jesus was not any less God than He was before.

The only difference between the Jesus who'd always been and the incarnate Christ was the addition of His humanity to His divinity. Known doctrinally as the Hypostatic Union the Bible is clear that the incarnate Jesus was 100% God and 100% man. While the addition of humanity was an act of pure selflessness for Jesus, Paul continues with...

Philippians 2:8, "And being found in appearance as a man, Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."

How absolutely remarkable this verse really is? Jesus was "found in appearance as a man", indicating He was way more than most understood Him to be. Aside from this, not only did Jesus take on human flesh and live among us, but He "humbled Himself to the point of death!" Then Paul adds, "Even the death of the cross!" In light of who Jesus really was, His willingness to be subjected to the humiliation of a Roman crucifixion was truly shocking.

In Hebrews 12:2 we're told we should be "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." And what was the "joy" that caused Jesus to "endure the cross"? Friend, it was the thought that through His sacrifice and death you and I now have a way to be saved. We're told in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

You see Paul's point; if we're struggling to "esteem the needs of others" we should consider what Jesus did for us! "Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus."

Jesus' crucifixion was the ultimate act of humility and selflessness. The ultimate act of others-centeredness! Though in the Garden, Jesus would even pray three times for the cup to pass, Paul is clear that Jesus "became obedient" to the will of His Father. It was a difficult decision Jesus made, but one He was willing to submit Himself under because He loved us!

Philippians 2:9-11, "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Notice that while it was Jesus who chose to "humble Himself" it was God the Father who, in the end, "Highly exalted Him!" This phrase translated "highly exalted" means to be "exalted beyond measure" or to the highest possible level. Here's the lesson: There is no need to be concerned with "selfish ambition" when in "lowliness of mind" God will look out for you!

How incredible that we're told in His exaltation, Jesus has been given "the name which is above every name!" Though I could spend 30 minutes unpacking this, if you don't believe the name of Jesus possesses power, consider it's the only one used by even the pagans in vain.

Paul then adds, “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow!” First, “of those in heaven” speaking of the segment of humanity who died in faith and are presently in heaven. Secondly, “of those on earth” speaking of those who were presently alive. And finally, “of those under the earth” speaking of those who died in rejection of the revelation of God.

Paul says of the multitude of all humanity that in addition to “every knee bowing” ultimately “every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” The interesting implications of this section of Scripture is that in the end of the age everyone will not only face Jesus, submit to Him, but “will confess” who Jesus really is! In a sense everyone will end up a believer. With that said, for some they’ll face Jesus as their Savior, while others will face Him as judge.

Furthermore, what’s also astounding about Paul’s description of Jesus’ exaltation is that He ultimately returned to heaven with more than he originally left with. Not only is Jesus’ humanity now forever added to His deity (in the book of Revelation John describes Jesus as still bearing the scars of the cross), but He returned to glory also possessing the identity of “Christ” (Christos meaning anointed one) and “Lord” (kyrios — he to whom a person belongs).

In the end, and to Paul’s point, what resulted from the humility and others-centeredness of Jesus? Paul concludes these things ended up being “to the glory of God the Father.” Because Jesus humbled Himself and preferred others, God was glorified in the process.

Earlier in the study I said the greatest foe to unity within a church community is selfishness for it’s impossible to be other-focused if you’re me-centered. While that’s true, sadly it’s an others-focus that can be the very thing that get’s us into trouble.

One of the main reasons divisions often arise from a disunity among believers is that while we understand our individual calling, most often our focus ends up being on one another. Not only do we excuse our own self-centeredness, but we love to point out the lack of selflessness within others. This is what makes Paul approach in this passage so brilliant.

You see the key to rejecting a me-centeredness and the motivation for preferring others is to keep your eyes fixated on Jesus alone! Did Jesus ever once allow what those around Him were doing to distract Him from His purpose and calling? No! Never!

This is why Paul presents Jesus' example of true selflessness and humility directly following the individual challenge to "let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus!" The only way we can ever yield a Jesus Culture within a church whereby the presence of Jesus is manifesting through the lives of the believers who make up that church is for the example of Jesus and not those around us to be our primary motivator.

In closing I must ask... What would a church look like if everyone was more concerned with the needs of everyone else than their own self interests? Even better than that... What would a church look like if everyone died to self and allowed Jesus to manifest from their lives? The truth is that we do need each other, but if we're honest, what we really need most is Jesus manifesting in our lives through the interactions we have with one another.

Philippians 2:12-30

Philippians 2:12-13, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

“Therefore, my beloved...” In light of this glorious example established by Jesus Christ, One who completely submitted to the will of His Father in order to prefer you and I, the Apostle Paul now tenderly applies His exhortation saying “My beloved” or literally “the recipients of my agapē”, as you consider these things, as you have always done, “always obeyed” whether I was in your presence or not, may you “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling!”

Right from the beginning it should be pointed out that this statement, “work out your own salvation”, has been taken to mean many things it does not. Tragically, this verse has been contorted and distorted to make the argument that your works play a role in your salvation. I must be clear — your works have played and never will play such an important role!

First off, it’s important when seeking to understand what Paul is actually saying that you keep in mind who he is writing this to — Paul is writing to believers, not unbelievers. The intended audience was Christians who had already experienced a saving faith based on Jesus’ work! As a matter of fact, this “working out” was something Paul affirms was already happening.

Additionally, Paul has already said in Philippians 1:6 that he was “confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Right from the jump please dispel the idea their eternal security was in some way at risk.

Secondly, Paul is clear they were to “work out” not “work for” their salvation. And note, this distinction is not semantics. This wasn’t an exhortation to do something to gain salvation. Salvation by its very definition must be given and received and can never be attained.

In Ephesians 2:8-9 Paul was unequivocal to this point writing, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Paul is not contradicting himself. Instead, it appears he is describing a result their salvation should have been manifesting in and through their lives.

In the Greek the word translated into English as “work out” is “kă-ter-gă-zo-mī” which can mean many things: preform, bring about, fashion, commit, produce, yield, or to do that from which something results. If you do a word study of “katergazomai” you’ll find many examples of this word being translated in all kinds of different ways. Here’s a few examples:

Romans 1:27, “Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing (“katergazomai”) what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.” Romans 5:3-4, “We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces (“katergazomai”) perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

James 1:2-3, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces (“katergazomai”) patience.” 2 Corinthians 4:17, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us (“katergazomai”) a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” 2 Corinthians 7:10, “Godly sorrow produces (“katergazomai”) repentance leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces (“katergazomai”) death.”

It would seem the fundamental idea behind this word “katergazomai” is that something already existing within a person naturally works it’s way out of that person! Whether it be a homosexual lust manifesting in a “shameful” act, a “trial”, “tribulation”, or “light affliction”

producing “perseverance”, “patience”, or an “eternal weight of glory”, or for that matter a “sorrow” which yields “repentance” or “death” — this “working out” is really nothing more than a natural manifestation of what’s already within the individual.

In a more modern way, you would say Paul is encouraging these Philippian believers to “live out” their “own salvation.” He’s telling them to allow the work within to work its way out from their lives. You see works are not the cause of salvation. They are the effects of one’s salvation.

For example, service (whether it be ushering, watching babies, singing on the worship team, donating your time at the food bank, coming to the church to help with a building project) or for that matter generosity shouldn’t be seen as a way to earn your salvation — things you do for God to earn points with Him. Instead, these type of external works should manifest from all that God has done for you — the fact Jesus saved you! Works are not a bad thing depending on the motivation... Are they a means to an end or the end of the means.

Which makes sense, for Paul then writes, “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” One of the problems when we talk about salvation as a work of God is that we don’t fully understand what’s all involved in the process. The fact is the Bible presents salvation as being a past tense event — we have been saved, a yet still future event — we will be saved, and a continuing process — we are being saved.

Past Tense: Titus 3:4-7, “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy Jesus saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Future Event: Romans 5:8-10, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His

blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

Continuing Process: 1 Corinthians 1:18, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” 2 Corinthians 2:14-15, “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.”

The reason this Biblical understanding of the three-fold work of salvation is important (past, future, and present) is that it clarifies what many confuse. First, if you’ve been saved how can you not be saved — unless for some crazy reason you decide to reject that original work of Jesus which others would then argue is simply evidence you were never saved to begin with. By the way, that’s about as far into those weeds as I’m going to go now.

Beyond this and more specific to our study, is that if the work of salvation is a continuing process, then salvation becomes just as relevant to the present as it was to the past or will be in the future. Understand, the same incredible work of Jesus on the cross, the same amazing grace that redeemed you though you were lost, the same unconditional love that justified you and gave you a home for all eternity... Is presently at work in your life today!

Notice what work God is presently doing. “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” Don’t miss the most obvious... This is a work God specifically does “in you.” The continuing work of salvation is a work that transforms your life occurs within the seat of your desires your spirit. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God has imparted you with a new nature — the internal nature of Jesus Himself.

Galatians 5:19-25, “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath,

selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

As you see and understand more and more control to the influence of His Spirit as opposed to your flesh (this is what Paul means when he encourages us to "walk in the Spirit") the results are radical. Over time God slowly transforms both your "will" and your actions, this being what you "do!" You see, as your desires change so do your behaviors! In the end, what Paul is saying is that since God is working in you, your job is to decide to let that work flow out of you.

This is why the very implications of this phrase "work out your own salvation" indicate the manifestation of God's work in you should be seen by those around you! The evidence of salvation should yield a progressing and constant change in how you live.

Before we continue, please don't overlook the very personal nature of what Paul says. He's clear you "work out your own salvation." Knowing the legalistic tendencies that arise amongst Christians, Paul is specific for a reason. Everyone has the responsibility to determine how God's work manifests from their own lives. It's not your job to dictate this to anyone else.

Now, I say all of this with maybe one exception. Paul continues in the next few verses by giving us an example of what "working out your own salvation" should actually look like before closing out the chapter by presenting two practical examples we can examine.

Philippians 2:14-16, "Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and

perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain."

Paul gets very practical on how God's work in us should manifest from us... First, he says, "Do all things without complaining and disputing!" While on the surface the challenge to resist "complaining" seems daunting, it's a much larger challenge than the translation affords. In the Greek the word actually describes "a secret displeasure not openly avowed."

Not only should we as Christians "do all things" without "disputing" or arguing (note: Paul adds no caveat or limitation to what scenario this applies to. It can apply to church life, service, taking out the garbage, your job, the HOA, etc.), but that we should also guard our hearts. Paul's challenge focuses just as much on your attitude as it does your actions.

Here's why this is so rad: If you can resist such an attitude and behavior in all that you do, the reputation that results will effectively represent Christ Jesus "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation!" Seriously, the radical nature of a person who adopts such an approach to life is so other-worldly one must conclude he or she is not of this world!

Now before you find this to be an impossible mandate, don't forget Paul says, "That you may become!" Not only does the ability to "do all things without complaining and disputing" only occur as a natural manifestation from God's work in your life, but this reference again points back to these results also being the natural manifestation of God's work — not yours!

I didn't catch this until one of the final readings through my study, but Paul is brilliant in transitioning to this exhortation. Though in some regards we have the ability to manage our actions, it's only a work of God that can yield an internal effect transforming one's attitude.

Follow Paul's logic here. The natural results of the progressing work of salvation is to yield a person who now has a reputation of being "blameless" (free from guilt), "harmless" (unmixed or pure), and known to be a "child of God without fault" (one that is unblamable). It's such a

person that then naturally “shines as a light in the world”, or literally they’re seen as an illuminator “holding fast the word of life!” God’s work in me manifests in a witness through me!

One of the things that amazes me about Paul’s approach in this passage is that while he affirms they were living “in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation”, his focus isn’t to rail against or highlight the crookedness or various perversions within this world. Instead, Paul simply exhorts believers to be examples in such a world of a better way.

One of the other things that blows my mind about this passage is how sincere and so very personal Paul wanted such a Godly reputation to be found in these Philippians. This wasn’t a suggestion or a flippant desire. In actuality, he was willing to place the success and effectiveness of his entire ministry on God’s work manifesting in such a way. He writes, “May I rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain!”

Philippians 2:17-18, “Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.”

“If I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad!” What Paul is saying is that if his death was necessary for such a work of God to be accomplished in and through these Philippians, then he was not only willing, but took joy in this reality. A point he continues by saying these Philippians should “rejoice” in as well!

Philippians 2:19-24, “But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in

the gospel. Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly."

Paul's own death was something he had come to peace with and the knowledge that God could use his death to further the Gospel yielded incredible joy for him. Though he had been honest about his present circumstance, on two occasions he writes, "But I trust in the Lord..."

Paul knew his earthly life may end in Rome. That said, he was still making arrangements as if the Lord would instead bring about his unlikely release. Not only does he communicate to these Philippians his intention to send Timothy to Philippi, but Paul is clear he was also making plans to come himself. He writes, "That I myself shall also come shortly."

It's not an accident the letter shifts from describing the reputation Paul desired would manifest through God's work in these Philippians, to this man Timothy and later Epaphroditus. Sure, from a practical sense Paul intended to send Timothy to Philippi in order to retrieve word as to their "state" and he'd already sent Epaphroditus to courier this letter, but in mentioning them Paul was presenting them both as an example of this Godly reputation.

Paul begins by describing Timothy as being "like-minded" or literally one equal in soul. The first mention we have of Timothy is in Acts 16:1-2, when we are told that during Paul's second missionary journey through the region of Galatia "he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek." Though we don't know much about Timothy's conversion, since "he was well spoken of by the brethren" Paul recruits him to join his ministry team.

If you study Timothy's life, not only does he become Paul's most trusted friend, but he ends up being seen by the Apostle as "a beloved Son." There is no question that Paul had a fondness and a deep love for Timothy. Notice the incredible compliments Paul pays him.

First, while Paul was deeply suspect of who he'd send to Philippi stating that most "seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus" — not so with Timothy. Because of his other-centeredness and Christ-focus mentality, Paul was confident Timothy would "sincerely care" for the "state" of these Philippians. This man loved Jesus and loved those Jesus loved.

Additionally, Paul says, "But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel." Because Timothy had been with Paul during both of his stops in Philippi, he was able to point to his "proven character" and faithful "service." This church knew of Timothy's internal "character" because his outward actions had "proved" it.

Philippians 2:25-30, "Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me."

In addition to Timothy (who Paul planned to send to Philippi) the Apostle closes the chapter presenting another example of a man who emulates the very things he was discussing. As we noted in our introduction, it had been Epaphroditus who had been sent to Rome from Philippi with their financial support. In actuality, this very letter was entrusted to Epaphroditus by Paul, which is why he tells them to "receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness."

What's worthy of note is that while in Rome Epaphroditus became so ill "he was sick almost unto death." Not only was Paul worried he might die, but word of his condition had reached Philippi. Paul writes that Epaphroditus "longed for them and was distressed because they had

heard he was sick.” It seems that while Paul would have preferred for him to stay it had become more important to send him home to alleviate any worry they may have had.

Aside from the interesting backstory, notice the glowing and ringing endorsement Paul gives Epaphroditus. He begins by calling him his “brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier...” Then Paul affirms that Epaphroditus had not only fulfilled his mission by being their “messenger,” but had practically “ministered to Paul’s needs” while in Rome. This is what Paul means when he says he “supplied what was lacking in their service towards me.”

As a matter of fact Paul even tells them to “hold such a man in esteem” going so far as to say in his service “for the work of Christ Epaphroditus came close to death, not regarding his life.” One scholar I read observed that this statement “not regarding his life” was actually a particular Greek phrase associated with gamblers. What Paul was saying is that for the sake of Christ, Epaphroditus had been willing to risk it all — he bet the house willing to lose it all!

Please don’t overlook a subtle, but inescapable point. Epaphroditus was a Godly man, faithfully serving Jesus, who became so sick he almost died. Note: this statement that “God had mercy on him” indicates his was not a miraculous healing! The reason I bring this up is to dispel a common heresy that sickness exists because of a lack of one’s faith. Epaphroditus survived because of God’s mercy, not his faith or deservingness.

In closing, there is no doubt that, like these Philippians, we also live in a “crooked and perverse generation.” Sadly, our cultural norms have redefined what is false into what is truth. It’s taken the lie and made it into a new gospel. Aside from rejecting what is Godly, we now live in a world challenging what is simply natural. What has always been seen as perverted has been normalized by the majority. What has always been fringe, has become mainstream.

Today, and I speak specifically of America, the fear of society at large is not the creeping influences of an amoral secularism, but instead the traditional influences of Christian ethics. The truth is that the most dangerous beliefs in our world is a Biblical understanding of marriage as

well as the simple belief that biology is the chief determining factor of one's gender identity. We've gone from "one nation under God" to "one nation offended by God!"

It's in facing such a generation that what our crooked world needs most is a unified church that possesses a Godly reputation. You see our focus should not be on condemning the world or calling out its perversions. Instead, our individual focus should be on allowing God to "work out our salvation" so that we can each better emulate Jesus.

Honestly, I've found that most understand this world's brokenness on a personal level... People experience emptiness and long for something more! And it's with this in mind that what people need more than anything isn't a Christian telling them what they already know, but to see in us a life that dramatically contrasts it — that we "hold fast the word of life!"

May we hear the exhortation of Paul to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" knowing that "it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure!"

Philippians 3:1

Have you ever heard the term Christianese? If you haven't, Christianese is the unique language Christians use and understand, but one that is completely lost on everybody else.

Here are a few examples: washed in the blood of the Lamb, fruit of the Spirit, born again, guard your heart, armor-bearer, quiet time, baby Christian, fire insurance, hedge of protection, missional, old man, ask Jesus into your heart, unequally yoked, stumbling block, love on people, or my personal favorite — I'm on fire.

Aside from these phrases, it's also true most of the vernacular used in church is foreign to the majority of our culture. It's only on rare occasions that words like justification, sanctification, propitiation, redemption, or atonement are used in every day conversations.

Sure, you might be able to chop this up to the length and religious connotations of these particular words, but there is one word rarely used that will totally surprise you — joy!

While most every person possesses a deep longing to be happy, the very notion of there existing an inner joy that transcends an emotional experience is a foreign concept. Seriously, you will find yourself hard-pressed to even hear the word joy used in daily speech.

As a matter of fact, there is data to prove my point. Since the early 1800's, the disappearance of the word joy from our common English lexicon has been gradual, but weirdly steady.

Have you heard of the Google Books Ngram Viewer? Because Google has now digitalized over 15 million manuscripts dating back hundreds of years, social scientists have created an algorithm that allows you to trace the frequency of a words usage in literature through time.

What makes Ngram Viewer so revolutionary is that the site acts as a kind of cultural seismograph measuring the trends of society following words. The graph it yields looks almost identical to that of an earthquake (tremor, rise, peak, fall, aftershock, etc). As a dear friend of mine recently observed, "Language is culture!" The two are specifically intertwined.

For example: The word "internet" was never used until it popped onto the scene at the very end of the 1970's, was rarely used up to 1990, and has since taken off to dominate culture. The word "atomic" understandably hit a peak in the 1960's and has since tapered off.

Use of the word "millennials" was also nonexistent until its first use in 1996, the frequency of which has obviously become more common. The word "google" entered our lexicon in 1998. The word "microbrew" ends up being introduced in 1990 before a quick rise over the next decade.

Here are just three more words I found interesting as it relates to the radical changes taking place in our current culture... The word "porn" explodes onto the scene in the 1970's and then takes off from there. Additionally, the phrase "gay marriage" as well as the word "transgender" don't exist until the 1990's before taking a dramatic jump in only 20 years.

Out of curiosity, I wanted to see how the word "joy" has been used since 1800. You will notice from it's peak during the 1830's the word joy has experienced a steady decline through 2000. As mentioned, the word joy is literally no longer as popular as it once was. Note: You can directly attribute the peak in the 1830's to the second Great Awakening.

Though the decline has been real, an unexpected shift has recently taken place. If you expand the search of "joy" from 1800 to 2008 you'll notice a sharp uptick occurs. A better view of the spike is shown specifically focusing on 2000 to 2008. It's actually quite a dramatic uptick.

So why the renewed interest in joy? My theory follows. I'm convinced a culture that has afforded almost every license for people to pursue individual happiness, has in turn left that

society completely empty. Though we've bought into the idea happiness is the ultimate pursuit of man, many have discovered that once it's achieved, misery only ensues.

I can't speak to bygone eras, but I can speak of today's culture... The more I rub shoulders with secular people, the more evident it is how deeply dissatisfied and miserable they are. Honestly, if you strip away the superficial, many today are lonely and utterly depressed.

For proof of this reality look no further than the astounding increase in antidepressant drug use. A new report cited in an August 15, 2017 article in Time of the National Center for Health Statistics shows that from 2011 through 2014 close to 13% (1 in 6) of Americans 12 years and older said they took an antidepressant in the last month. That number is up from 11% in 2005 and has increase two-fold from the 6.8% recorded in 1999.

Why is this? Not to get overly philosophical, but I'm of the opinion that evidence suggests a culture whereby all things are presented as true, ends up being a society whereby nothing is true and life is perceived as meaningless.

You see the obvious progressive challenge of traditional norms over the last 60 years, the pop-cultural exhortation to just do whatever you believe will feel good, coupled with the normalization and indoctrination of the theory of man's biological evolution has fostered a new generation grappling with the very questions of meaning and purpose in life.

Here's the reality: If you examine the trends of history, you will discover anytime a society exchanges absolutes for relative truths there ends up being one of three results:

(1) Either people become nihilistic and give up hope, which yields an apathy ultimately ensuing in chaos, (2) People double down and grow narcissistic whereby self-consumption trumps the greater good, or (3) People engage in a renewed quest for meaning.

While there is no question we see elements of the first two across our society (recent pop-culture has demonstrated an interesting love-affair with nihilism, and in 2016 the Selfie-Generation elected a reality TV star as President), I'm convinced people are longing for

something more and we could be at the precipice of a Spiritual Awakening. I mean it can't be an accident that for the first time in 150 years the word joy is making a resurgence!

One more word analysis to further validate this particular point... If you search the phrase "Holy Spirit" from 1800-2008 you will not only notice the peak also being during the Great Awakening of the 1830's, but you will also see an interesting upswing in recent years. I really do believe the trends of the last few decades have created the framework within our society that just might result in a powerful move of God's Spirit in America!

Joy... Joy is such an interesting thing because it's so very hard to define, yet it's so clearly seen. What is joy? I know it when I see it, but still what is it? Is joy just extreme happiness or does it transcend the emotional? And if this is the case, how do I get joy?

In an earlier study in our series through Philippians I told you the story of Erin Stoffel. Take just a second and recount the shooting death of her husband Jon and daughter Olivia. Well, I had the privilege of interviewing Erin for the Outlaw Radio Show and she told me a part of the tale I hadn't heard before.

Apparently, in order for Erin to attend the funeral and because of the severity of her own gunshot wounds, her doctors decided it was best to take her by ambulance and wheelchair her to the front row. Well, to everyone's shock and dismay, as they were playing Jon and Olivia's favorite worship songs, Erin ends up rising up out of her chair and with raised hands and through incredible sobs proceeds to worship Jesus for His continued goodness.

What is joy? Once again it's hard to define, but easy to identify. Let me tell you what joy looks like. Joy is what motivates a grieving woman, who's experienced such an incredible tragedy as the loss of her husband and daughter, who herself is in immense pain, and who has no idea what her future looks like to passionately, stand and worship God! That is joy!

To the world joy is a mystery. A reaction like Erin's is unexplainable. But maybe that's the point. Joy is supposed to be otherworldly, to be radical. Joy is designed to transcend what is normal and natural. When we see joy manifest, we all understand it to be something that bubbles forth from the depths of a well much deeper than the physical.

You see joy, especially in the midst of grief and pain, intends to show out as the visible evidence of much larger spiritual realities. Which explains why in writing to the Philippians the Apostle Paul places such an emphasis on joy and our ability as Christians to rejoice regardless of whatever trial or trying circumstance we might be presently facing.

There is no doubt Paul knew from personal experience the powerful testimony his joy and ability to rejoice in the midst of his Roman imprisonment was yielding. Like Erin, people could witness Paul's joy, and in light of his suffering, they wanted to know how this response was even possible. Friend, they'll do the same when they see your joy as well!

In studying Philippians chapter 3, commentator David Guzik made this provocative and in so many ways challenging observation about joy. He said, "It's a duty for the Christian to exude joy. A chronic lack of joy is simply a poor witness." At first, I'll admit I was a bit taken back by this statement; however, the more I considered his point, the more I've come to agree.

It's interesting, but Satan really only peddles nothing more than knock-offs — cheap imitations of the originals. The Bible says we'll be known by our love, so the world presents it's own version at a cheaper price. The Bible says in Christ we'll have a peace that would surpass even our own understanding, so the world promises a imitation at a discount.

Ironically, though the world offers knock-off versions of our love and peace, there really is no substitute for this thing we call joy. The world will do everything it can to facilitate happiness, but it offers nothing but pills aimed at numbing pain when life takes an unexpected turn.

Friend, here's the grand challenge of this morning's study: If the world will know the Christian by your love one for another, the world will see Jesus when joy manifests from your life regardless of whatever circumstance you come to face. Our joy is our greatest witness because the world has no alternative!

As we transition into chapter 3 I want to begin by unpacking why joy is such a profound indicator of God's work in our lives by examining how we come to possess this radical type of joy known as God's grace manifesting through the Indwelling of His Spirit, before discussing the greatest deterrent to our Christian joy — legalism.

Philippians 3:1a, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord."

While the word "finally" in our English context would seem to indicate Paul is going to begin winding down his letter to the Philippians (which he clearly isn't for you'll notice he's only half way through), in the Greek, this word simply means "at last". The idea is that Paul reiterates for the final time, the core message of the previous two chapters.

What message is that? "My brethren, rejoice in the Lord!" In the Greek this word "rejoice" is "chairō" which means "to be glad" or "to be well". In a very practical sense we'd define "rejoicing" as the act of demonstrating joy. Because the word is a verb in the active tense, Paul is not making a suggestion, but instead issuing a directive. "My brethren, rejoice!"

Sure, you may find it difficult to be glad in light of the present situation you're facing. It may be a challenge for you to be glad in lieu of your current circumstance. That said, neither the situations or circumstances you face should be able to deter the gladness you can at least find "in the Lord!" Understand, a relationship with Jesus is the basis for joy!

What's interesting about the word "chairō" is that it's very similar to the Greek word "charis" which we translate as "grace". In actuality, in addition to "unmerited favor", Strong's

defines “charis” or grace as simply “that which affords joy”. Aside from joy being based in a relationship with Jesus, joy is fundamentally designed to manifest in your life as you continually experience the grace of God — the fact He loves you because of Jesus.

In actuality, this is why I decided to title our series through Paul's letter to the Philippians, “Enjoying Grace.” God’s grace not only changes everything, but because grace yields joy, it subsequently changes the way we experience everything.

Let me elaborate, it is absolutely possible to possess joy regardless of environment, because of the eternal and unchanging reality that you’ve been extended the grace of God. This is why Paul says to “rejoice in the Lord.” The very reality of Jesus and the sacrifice He made on Calvary to pay for your sins, so that you might be saved should be more than enough for you to rejoice — to allow joy to exude from your life.

You see God’s amazing grace establishes a much deeper and unwavering basis for joy and your rejoicing. The present life afforded to you by Jesus should place all earthly trial, struggle, difficult situation, or trying circumstance into a proper context. In fact, it was such a context that enabled Paul to joyfully declare earlier, “To live is Christ, and to die is gain!” No temporal hardship had the power to rob Paul of his eternal perspective and joy!

Let me add a caveat to all of this... note Paul isn’t commanding you to “be happy!”. While it’s true joy can yield happiness, the reality is that this thing we refer to as joy, transcends the emotional by springing forth from the spiritual.

While we obviously understand joy to be a state of being (to be glad) as opposed to an emotion (feeling glad) or an action (doing gladness), we should ask where does joy originate? Is joy something that magically occurs? Is it something similar to an epiphany? Is joy simply a personality trait, a decision of the will, something we choose?

No! I don't believe joy originates in any of these ways. Consider if joy is the manifestation of grace... And grace is a gift given through Jesus by God we're to receive (can't be earned or manufactured)... Then it's only logical that joy must also be a gift imparted by God.

The reality is joy is much more than an emotion because it's a direct manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Let me give you a few examples: Galatians 5:22, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering..." Romans 15:13, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

1 Thessalonians 1:6, "And you became followers... of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit." In Acts 13:52 Luke says of the disciples in Perga following Paul's departure that they "were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."

Scripturally, joy and the Holy Spirit come hand in hand — which subsequently makes joy something completely intrinsic to Christianity and why it's such a powerful witness of the power of God in someone's life. Even Urban Dictionary verifies this reality presenting only two definitions for joy either being the name of a kind woman or a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Before I take this idea any further, I want to explain why it's so dangerous when we allow joy to be relegated to only the emotional plain. If joy, being a "fruit of the Spirit", ends up being nothing more than an emotional happiness, then subsequently the real emotions of sadness, sorrow, or depression end up being seen as evidence of a spiritual problem.

Aside from the fact this convolution will hyper-spiritualize emotions, it shouldn't. Most tragically when this happens, church-life ends up being relegated to the superficial. Instead of people being real and honest about the things they're emotionally dealing with, people put on their happy-go-lucky-Jesus-face out of fear of being perceived as less spiritual.

Let me prove you're guilty of this very approach by asking a simple question... When was the last time someone came up to you at church and asked, "How you doing brother?" and

your response was, “Truthfully man, life stinks right now and I’m pretty depressed about it!” I don’t think I’m going out on a limb when I say you’ve probably never said that.

Now I understand in many ways it’s simply easier to say, “I’m good man” or worse yet, “Bro, I’m blessed” because you don’t want to unload on someone who’s just trying to be friendly. (On a side note... If you don’t want an honest answer, don’t ask someone how they’re doing!) If we’re being forthcoming, one of the other reasons you shy away from full transparency is the fact you don’t want your emotional struggle judged as a spiritual one.

Sadly, it’s this misunderstanding of the fundamental difference between the emotional and the spiritual that creates a climate where it’s safer to be fake than real. Never forget the “fruit of the Spirit is joy”, not emotional merriment! How quickly we forget the Bible says there is a time to weep and mourn — that good people can struggle with depression and that it’s only natural you can wake up on the wrong side of bed or find yourself in a funk.

David was often troubled and in deep despair. Elijah was discouraged and weary. Job suffered incredible loss and found himself paralyzed in his devastation. Moses was gripped with bouts of inadequacy and heartache. Jeremiah struggled with loneliness and insecurity. In actuality, Isaiah 53:3 describes Jesus as “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief!”

Sometime this week do a Bible search for the following words: downcast, brokenhearted, troubled, miserable, despairing, mourning. These words are everywhere. Hopelessness and emotional struggles are all over Scripture and never once are they emblematic of a spiritual problem.

Again, this is what’s amazing about joy transcending the emotional and why it’s important... Even when you’re struggling through such emotions, you can still possess joy! You see, joy isn’t based in the circumstantial or the emotional and instead flows from the Spirit, it is very possible for you to still possess joy and rejoice even when you feel down.

Next time you come to church and someone genuinely asks, “How you doing brother?” the more honest and Biblically sound response would be to say, “Truthfully, I’m tired, worn out, and a bit uncertain by all the things going on right now. Presently, life stinks! Despite everything, I’m still glad! God’s love never fails, I’m filled with His Spirit, and I’m not in the struggle alone.” Since joy comes from God’s grace and His Spirit, nothing can rob you of what He’s given!

In closing, I have one more important application with all of these things in mind... It’s simply inconsistent for a person who’s experienced God’s grace and been filled with the Spirit to be deeply miserable and constantly sour. Which in turn makes for a poor witness

Because joy manifests in your life through a working of God’s Spirit yielded by the grace afforded to you in Jesus, a lack of joy or for that matter being the inability to “rejoice in the Lord” is often an indicator of one of two things: Either you’ve never experienced God’s grace and been filled with His Spirit or you’ve lost sight of His grace and are failing to rely on the Spirit.

If the latter is you and you thirst for more than this world has to offer... If you find yourself trapped in the happiness, misery, happiness cycle thinking there has to be more to life than this... I want you to know there is! God’s grace not only changes everything, but it’s the indwelling of the Spirit of Jesus in your heart that will transform how you experience everything. Why settle for a knock-off when you can have the original for free?

In John 7:37-39 we read that “on the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” Living water from the indwelling Spirit!

If you're a miserable Christian consider, is the incredible grace God has already demonstrated towards you in that "while you were a sinner Christ died" not only to save you from sin, but to fill you with His Spirit not such an amazing enough reality that it shouldn't stir you up from your sorrow, raise you up through your despair, move you out of your pain and grief, and even from your depression to your feet in joy and worship? As Paul so opened Philippians three may I repeat... "Finally, my brethren rejoice in the Lord!"

Philippians 3:1-11

Paul opens chapter three, “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.” Though the use of this word “finally” indicates Paul is about to transition to new material, he wants the reader to know the idea he’s about to unpack is absolutely related to the essence of Christian joy and our ability to rejoice regardless of whatever situations we might find ourselves facing.

Because joy manifests through a working of God’s Spirit yielded by the grace afforded to you in Jesus, it’s then only logical that the greatest deterrent to joy would be anything that either directly or indirectly undercuts the power of grace or your dependency on the Holy Spirit. This is why in the remainder of chapter three, Paul will deal specifically with legalism.

Philippians 3:1-2, “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!”

Though Paul has spent the last two chapters discussing the joy we have in Jesus independent of our present circumstances, the substance and tone of the letter clearly takes a dramatic and rather drastic turn. Paul goes from the admonishment to “rejoice in the Lord” to the stark warning to “beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!”

Admittedly, this is such a bizarre shift in theme, because it would appear to happen without any context. Though it’s likely these Philippians knew exactly what Paul was discussing because they had already heard him preach this message before. Notice the transition: Paul writes, “For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.”

This word “tedious” means “slothful or lazy” and the word “safe” can be translated as “firm or certain”. In a sense, Paul is saying that while some may have seen his repeating of content in print he’d already delivered in person as being lazy, he was confident these Philippian believers wouldn’t mind because they rightly understood why the subject was so important.

In the first-century church something absolutely revolutionary was taking place at the time. The Gospel of Jesus was bridging a racial chasm between Jews and Gentiles. For the first time these two groups were joining together in the worship of God. It was incredible, a true working of God’s grace, and only made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit.

While Christianity began in Jewish-only communities, within 30 years the church had become predominately Gentile thanks in part to the missionary endeavors of Paul traveling throughout the Roman Empire. Case in point, since Philippi was a Roman colony, this church was largely made up of Gentiles possessing a very minimal Jewish presence.

Sadly, such a radical dynamic did come with its fair share of issues. Most notably was the insistence of some of the Hebrew brethren (known as Judaizers) that these Gentile believers had to adhere to certain Jewish customs, specifically circumcision, to be Christian.

While its true circumcision is not exactly the same hot button issue it was in the first-century church, please know the same legalistic tendency is still very prevalent today. As a matter of fact, because the topic of circumcision as it relates to legalism isn’t really all that relevant in our 21st-century context, I want to expand your understanding using two simple sentences.

Instead of the Gospel which preaches “Grace.” you will always know you’re being peddled some form of legalism and therefore a false-gospel when you hear someone say, “Grace, and do these things” or “Grace, but don’t do these things.”

As it pertains to the Judaizers in Paul's day, they were being legalistic by preaching "Grace, and be circumcised" or for that matter "Grace, but don't eat pork." In today's Christianity you'll instead hear legalism all the same, "Grace, and tithing" or "Grace, but don't drink beer."

What makes legalism such an affront to the Gospel is that in each dynamic the power of grace and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit becomes minimized by placing an undo emphasis on the things you do or refrain from doing for God in either your salvation or continued sanctification. Subsequently, such an approach attacks the basis of joy!

Though Paul, Peter, and the other Apostles completely rejected the "Grace, And" and "Grace, But" Gospel distortions being promoted and preached by legalists, who were ruling in the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, that salvation and sanctification manifests from God's grace found through faith in Jesus alone, like the legalist today, these Judaizers refused to relent.

In actuality, the Apostle Paul will spend more time in his Epistles combatting these particular heresies than virtually any other concept. The Judaizers were a constant thorn in Paul's side. As such, it would appear he'd already instructed this Philippian church to be on the look out.

Paul begins by saying, "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation." In the Greek this word translated "beware" means so much more than simply perceiving or possessing discernment — the idea also implies an inherent and active cautiousness.

For example, if you were to come across a sign as you entered someone's property that read, "Beware of boobytraps!", not only would this heighten your sense of awareness, but it would also alert you to a very tangible and likely hazard. My point is you don't tell someone to "beware" of something that doesn't present a real and present danger.

Since Paul knew legalism fundamentally undermined God's grace and the importance of your dependency on His Spirit — all the while robbing you of your ability to possess joy, he

commands that we all be on guard for those who'd preach such things. For if the Gospel is "Grace, And" or "Grace, But" our ability to possess joy is severely effected because it places an undo emphasis on your performance and particular involvement.

First, Paul calls these legalists "dogs." In the first-century using the term "dog" had a much different connotation than it does today. Dogs were not domesticated and far from cute and cuddly. Instead, dogs were societal nuisances or pests. Like in the third world today dogs ran around town in packs. They were trouble-makers and tended to be quarrelsome.

In using this term Paul is describing the fundamental character and nature of these legalists the Philippian believers were to beware of. How true that legalists end up running with other legalists, tend to be argumentative, and generally love to stir up trouble wherever they go?

Paul continues by defining their activity by calling them "evil workers." Literally, he's saying their works were "evil" or of a bad nature. Though on the surface what these men were doing may have appeared to be noble and Godly, it was the motivation behind their works that Paul calls evil. What a provocative thought? If you're engaged in a work hoping to either earn or maintain God's favor not only are you failing, but that work is considered by God to be evil!

Finally, Paul hones in his warning by saying, "Beware of the mutilation!" Though it's lost in the translation, in the Greek, Paul is employing a bit of a play on words that mind you, would have been seen as utterly offensive to these Judaizers. While these men took pride in the fact they were circumcised, Paul refers to the act as literally a "hacking off!"

Seeing circumcision as a physical work in their flesh aimed at pleasing God, in using this word "mutilation" Paul is calling the work itself a grotesque and unsightly perversion. "Beware of dogs, beware of evil works, beware of those who want to hack it off!" Paul's words!

Philippians 3:3, "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh..."

In a better translation from Greek into English, you can actually hear Paul's intentional slight. He says, "Beware of the concision for we are the circumcision." Understandably this phrase "we are the circumcision" is kind of bizarre. From the larger flow of the text, keep in mind Paul is seeking to contrast what results when we seek to please God in our flesh vs. what occurs when we become pleasing to God through an internal work of the Holy Spirit.

Let me attempt to explain what Paul's getting at using an example (and please note I'm not trying to be funny or make light of a serious psychological issues): Bruce Jenner genuinely believes himself to be a woman so much so that he has grown out his hair, taken hormone treatments, had plastic surgery to give himself breasts, gone under the knife to create more feminine facial structures, changed his legal name to Caitlin and gender classification, dresses like a woman, and has exchanged male anatomy for female anatomy...

And, if I may be bold enough to say it, the truth is that none of these behavioral or physical modifications have changed the reality that Caitlin's internal constitution is still male. Acting like a woman, changing your personal pronoun, and mutilating yourself so that you now possess the female anatomy does not change the fact you still possess a Y chromosome and therefore will always be genetically and biologically male.

Sadly, if you research Gender Dysphoria and Transgenderism you'll find study after study that demonstrate how reassignment surgeries not only fail to effectively alleviate the underlying psychological issue, but in the end create much more severe problems.

My point to all of this is as follows: behavioral or physical modifications can never change a person's internal constitution. It simply defies what is natural. You can get down on all fours and act like a dog, but that will never make you a dog, any more than sleeping in a garage makes you a car, or only consuming an exclusive diet of cookies makes you the Cookie Monster!

This is the point Paul is making in this comparison between the mutilation and circumcision. People who focus on their works in the attempts of changing their internal constitution to please God end up creating a pseudo-moralism God finds perverse. The application is acting like Jesus is not how a person become Christ-like!

You see legalism demands things to do or refrain from doing in the flesh in order to be more like Christ; Sadly, the approach is about as successful as Bruce becoming a woman. Sure, on the surface there is a persona of Godliness in the same way that Caitlin physically looks like lady, but the more time you spend around a legalist the more off putting things become.

As Steven Tyler of Aerosmith so sang in their hit song "Dude", "So never judge a book by its cover, Or who you gonna love by your lover, Love put me wise to her love in disguise, She had the body of a Venus, Lord, imagine my surprise... Dude looks like a lady!"

The truth is that seeking to become like Christ by acting like Christ (or what I like to call the WWJD heresy) ends up being why so many legalistic Christians ultimately present a contoured, warped, mutilated version of what Jesus is actually like! Sadly, Jesus is often misrepresented by the people trying their best to be like Him!

Real behavioral modification can only take place when a natural change first occurs within a person's constitution. This is why in order to be Godly you must first undergo a genuine, internal transformation of your constitution. Physical circumcision plays zero role in the process. Biblically, we call this work of God regeneration, rebirth, or to be born again which occurs when Jesus indwells your life through His Spirit!

Think about it. If Bruce Jenner had been given the option to have his core, internal genetics changed from male to female so that his physical transformation would happen naturally and without all the grueling surgeries, you can believe he'd jumped at the opportunity. How sad it is when legalists cut themselves (they cut this out and that off) all in the attempts to make themselves into the very thing Jesus wants to make them naturally through His Spirit!

While the Judaizers were seeking to please God through physical circumcision, all that was yielded was a mutilation. In contrast, by saying “we are the circumcision” Paul is instead pointing to an internal work of the Spirit — one that allows us to “worship God” and “rejoice in Christ Jesus” eliminating any need to possess a “confidence in the flesh!”

Philippians 3:4-7, “Though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.”

For those that had fallen into the trap of basing their standing with God on their works thereby having a “confidence in the flesh”, Paul simply points out that if anyone could have had “confidence” in their ability to please God through works he was a prime candidate.

As it pertains to his list of qualifications, notice Paul begins by emphasizing four characteristics he possessed by birth (things that would have been impossible for any Gentile):

(1) In accordance to Leviticus 12:3 Paul had been “circumcised the eighth day.” What he means is that he possessed the correct spiritual heritage!

(2) Paul says he was “of the stock of Israel” — meaning that in addition to possessing a spiritual heritage, as a direct descended of Abraham, he also held a particular birthright.

(3) He says he was “of the tribe of Benjamin.” Unlike so many of the other tribes who rebelled against God, the descendants of Benjamin had aligned themselves with the faithful tribe of Judah. In actuality, the city of Jerusalem was within Benjamin’s original borders.

(4) Paul sums it up by saying he was a “Hebrew of the Hebrews.” In the first-century, a rift had occurred within Jewish society. Those who had adopted Greek culture were known as Hellenistic Jews while those who had retained their cultural identity were called Hebraic Jews.

Aside from possessing the right heritage, birthright, credentials, and purity, Paul continues by listing three things he'd personally achieved. The first being as it pertained to the "law" Paul says he was "a Pharisee." In that culture the Pharisees were an elite religious sect of Judaism dedicated to keeping the law — even in the smallest of details. They were religiously fundamental.

Secondly, Paul says that as it pertained to his religious "zeal" he "persecuted the church." Though it's a bit interesting that Paul would hail this as a badge of honor in writing to a church, the point he's making is that in his former days he was not just an intellectual proponent of Judaism, he was a zealot. He was so dedicated he was willing to do whatever was required.

Lastly, In regards to his "righteousness" as determined by one's obedience to the Law, in much the same way as the Rich Young Ruler who came to Jesus, Paul claims he was absolutely "blameless." If anyone could claim righteousness through the Law it would have been Paul.

In light of all of these things, Paul continues, "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ." What he's saying is that all of these things that many would have perceived to have been an asset, Paul had come to see them as a liability. It was the things his flesh found confidence in that had kept him from Christ for so many years.

Philippians 3:8, "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ..."

If you're simply reading through the chapter verses 7 and 8 seem oddly repetitive, if not down right redundant. But, if you look more closely you'll discover something amazing in the way Paul is articulating his point. In verse 7, as Paul is coming off of this incredible list citing his religious pedigree and achievements, he says, "These I have counted loss for Christ."

Notice this statement is in the past tense. There was a singular instance in Paul's past where an accounting occurred. A moment in his life when Paul was forced to examine his religious works in light of the person of Jesus. As a matter of fact, we know it was on the Road to Damascus that Paul decided to reject his self-rightness, "count" these things to be "loss", humble himself, and accept the work Jesus did on his behalf.

While verse 8 does repeat a similar idea, notice it's in the present tense. Some 30 years after his original conversion, Paul was not only still making this decision to reject his sufficiency for that of Christ Jesus, but even in light of the fact his original choice had resulted in the "loss of all things", he regretted not the decision in the slightest.

What "things" had Paul lost when he made the decision to follow Jesus? He lost his moral standing. He lost his identity in Judaism. He lost his status in the religious community. He lost his power and influence. He likely lost his family and friends. He lost his job and source of income. He lost his home. Arriving in Damascus, Paul had literally lost everything.

In spite of all that was lost, because of the life he'd received in Jesus, Paul was not only at peace with his decision, but he was willing to make it again and again! As a matter of fact, in light of all that Jesus afforded him, Paul "counted" his former religious works and life to be "as rubbish."

In the context of Jesus and all that Paul "gained" when he finally surrendered, all of these things that so dominated the former life (his pedigree, religious works and achievements) Paul concluded to be "skybalon" or literally "the excrement of animals." The KJV actually translates "rubbish" as "dung." They were utterly worthless and to Paul detestable.

Philippians 3:8-11, "That I might gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His

resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

Paul is telling these Philippians to "beware" of those who'd peddle legalism, because he knew such an outlook would rob a person of the joy they could find in a new life provided only by Jesus and nothing else. Keep in mind the larger implications of what Paul's saying... Your position before God is either found in your ability to be good enough or it's found in Jesus!

Paul was willing to reject his ability, his moralism, his religious works for the opportunity to "gain Christ" in two fundamental ways. First, Paul wanted to "gain Christ" in that he could "be found in Him..." Paul rightly understood that his right-standing before God was not found in his ability to obey the law, but in his identification with Jesus.

His works mattered not. His ability to be good enough didn't matter either. Paul had come to see that his right-position before God was only possible "through faith in Christ!" Paul realized that if he rejected his work by placing his full confidence in the work of Jesus, the righteousness of Christ would therefore be attributed to his account. You see when God looked down and viewed Paul, he'd see Jesus, therefore making him completely righteous.

Friend, if the basis of your righteousness is what you do for God — you're a legalist. If you have boughten into the lie that the Gospel is "grace, and" the things you do for God... Or "grace, but" the sacrifices you make to demonstrate your worthiness.

You need to know God sees these things as "evil", a mutilated version of a work He wants to accomplish in your heart, and as Paul concludes, absolutely rubbish! Whether you realize it or not, you have departed from grace and the power of the Spirit by placing your confidence in yourself! In all likelihood since this is the case your life is also void of joy as well.

However, if your righteousness is based in what Jesus has done for you, and not your works, but His, if you've counted all as loss and placed your confidence in the Spirit's ability to

transform you from the inside out, not only do you understand the Gospel of Grace, but there is absolutely no reason your life isn't filled with unspeakable joy!

But Paul doesn't stop there. He continues to say he wanted to "gain Christ" in that he "may know Him!" There is a fundamental difference between knowing about someone and knowing someone. What changed Paul's life was not knowing more about Jesus, instead it was the moment he experienced God's grace through a relationship with Jesus Christ!

Think about it... How does a person receive God's grace? They enter into a relationship with Jesus. How does a person grow in God's grace? Their relationship with Jesus naturally deepens. How is a person transformed by God's grace? Their relationship with Jesus naturally changes their internal desires and therefore impacts their behaviors.

Paul experienced God's grace in a way that gave him the opportunity to possess a relationship with Jesus that the law never afforded. It was this relationship, not his works or worthiness that ultimately freed him from his former life, liberated him from the guilt of his past mistakes, and had now filled his life with meaning and purpose.

Philippians 3:12-14

As we've noted because joy manifests through a working of God's Spirit in your heart yielded by the grace afforded to you in Jesus, it's then only logical that the greatest deterrent to joy would be anything that either directly or indirectly undercuts the power of grace or your dependency on the Holy Spirit. As famed evangelist Billy Sunday once said, "If you have no joy there's a leak in your Christianity!"

Let's begin with verse 7, **"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."**

If there could have ever been a man who'd dare stand before God on the basis of his own righteousness, in his former life under the law, the Apostle Paul would have been the prime candidate. And yet, in this appeal to reject legalism, Paul is letting us know that he had come to see this former identity based in his goodness, works, merit — ability to obey the law as not only being worthless, but total "rubbish" in comparison to the position he found in Jesus.

Paul is clear he'd counted all of these things loss the moment he met Jesus, but that this accounting was something Paul was continually doing. In verse 8 he adds, "Yet indeed I also count all things loss..."

From Paul's perspective, he simply couldn't understand the appeal of legalism in light of Grace. I mean who cares what I do in context to what He's done? Who cares about the sacrifices I make when the shadow of His sacrifice is so encompassing? Who cares about my ability when you take the time to consider His sufficiency? Why should we care at all about self when the only important thing in this life is knowing Jesus?

Now I don't want to go off on a tangent, but the idea Paul is discussing is of such importance it does necessitate that I expound upon the idea of "knowing Jesus" and the critical nature of our "faith in Him" for just a few minutes.

The Bible says faith (or what we'll define as one's total confidence) in the power of God's grace as demonstrated through Jesus' death on the cross (and not works based in the law) is the only mechanism by which a person is justified before God.

This is what Paul means when he says to these Philippians, "That I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith."

And while many of us might understand this truth on at least a conceptual level, most struggle with the practicalities of how this exactly works. Knowing how is important for understanding the practicalities of how grace justifies you before God is paramount if you're to understand the practicalities of how grace transforms your life from sin into Godliness.

Sadly, Christians have developed this notion that salvation is a work Jesus did apart from your involvement (which is true) and that the only role you play is acceptance by faith (which is false)! Let me explain...

Most mainstream views of salvation end up being relegated to something like this... "I prayed the prayer of salvation accepting the fact that Jesus died on the cross to atone for my sin so that I can receive His imparted righteousness and be declared justified before God."

And while that sounds nice, it's no wonder people then have a hard time determining what follows this prayer! Since salvation is seen as something you have (given and received) most wonder what to do next. This easily leads to a "Grace, And" or "Grace, But" distortion.

Understand, there is a fundamental reality that makes these legalistic distortions baseless. Every aspect of salvation (forgiveness, atonement, justification, and righteousness) occurs via a relational association with Jesus and is not a golden ticket you simply receive!

Salvation demands an intertwining and fusing together of your life and Jesus' through faith! It's what Paul's getting at in this passage. Salvation is not some mysterious thing you have or possess rather it's something you experience.

For example, does God accept Jesus' atonement for your sin? Answer: Because you died with Jesus on the cross! Paul made this point abundantly clear in Galatians 2:20 writing, "I have been crucified with Christ!" To this point Paul adds in Romans 6:5-6, "If we have been united together in the likeness of His death... knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."

I want you to also consider, How does God declare you righteous and justified before Him? Answer: Because you died with Christ, you're now dead and Christ lives in you! Since atonement occurred when you died with Jesus, a new life was yielded in His resurrection. You were resurrected to life in Jesus' resurrection, therefore meaning when God looks at you He no longer sees you, but instead sees Jesus and His righteousness in you!

This is the amazing point Paul is articulating when he writes in verses 10-11, "**That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.**"

When God evaluates your life and mine the Bible says He sees me just-as-if-I'd never sinned for one reason and one reason alone... God sees Jesus living in me! Paul continues this point in Galatians 2:20, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in Jesus, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Now admittedly the idea of Jesus living in me seems weird. For a bit of clarity let me read Romans 8:9-11, "You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." The indwelling of the person of Jesus occurs through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The essential reality is that every single aspect and process involved in your saving and sanctifying demands a relational association with Jesus. This is why the Bible uses a similar set of phrases to describe the Christian... You are "in Him" or "in Christ Jesus". Positionally, you identify with Jesus. Practically, His Spirit is inside of you.

Aside from the fact you'll find this phraseology used four times in Philippians chapter three alone, for a perfect example of this look no further than Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Friend, salvation is not a voucher program provided by Jesus you receive in faith, but is instead a new reality brought forth through a relational association initiated by Jesus that you continue in by faith! Your salvation (forgiveness, atonement, justification, and declared righteousness) only occurs if you're found by God living "in Christ Jesus!"

Let me attempt to illustrate this idea... What if I went to the hottest club in Atlanta on the most happening night of the year and tried to get in when the weekend before I'd partied with a

group of friends, got hammered, tried to fight a security guard, and threw up all over the DJ's turntables. Seriously, there's no chance they're going to let me in! I've blown it!

Let's say a stretch limo pulls up to the front door and I get out with my close pal Christopher Bridges, AKA Ludacris, who also just so happens to own the club. As you can imagine since I'm with Luda, not only am I able to avoid the line, but security lets me in without asking any questions, escorts me to the VIP, and gives me an unlimited tab.

Here's the difference... Since I'm rolling with Ludacris not only are my past transgressions immediately forgiven and my slate wiped clean, but his reputation and privilege are afforded to me as well. If I'm found to be with Luda everything else takes care of itself!

Now keep in mind this unmerited favor I'm enjoying has absolutely nothing to do with who I am nor was there anything I did to earn it (in fact I clearly don't deserve it). Instead, the favor I'm enjoying has everything to do with who I have a relational association with!

Think about it (and this is what many don't understand about salvation)... Having an Uber drop me off by the front door of the club, approaching security and telling them they have to let me in because I'm with Ludacris when I'm not with Luda isn't going to gain me access!

Furthermore, explaining that Luda and I are tight because I hang around a lot of people who know him, give money, and am a member of the fan club Ludanation, faithfully attend his concerts every Sunday and Wednesday, and know all the words to Ludaverse will also prove pointless as none of these things are evidence of a personal relationship. I can even demand security to call Luda, but all he's going to say upon hearing my name is "I don't know him!"

This is why the Gospel of "Grace." is amazing. It declares all you need to be forgiven, your sins atoned for, justified before God, and declared righteous is an active relationship with Jesus. Because salvation is not something you have, but instead Someone you know, the very thought of "what do I do now" reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of salvation.

Sure salvation is something you've been given by Jesus that must be received in faith, but what have you actually been given? A Savior! You're saved through God's grace in that you've been given a relationship with Jesus to be enjoyed and continue in!

"What do I do now" which is the fundamental lie of legalism is replaced with a Savior I now get to know! It's with this understanding of the importance of our relationship with Jesus we come to see why Paul is so adamant we "beware of" the intrusions of legalistic thinking.

Philippians 3:12, "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me."

Let's unpack what Paul is saying working backwards. First, what does Paul mean when he mentions "that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me"? Initially, it's interesting that Paul affirms it was Jesus who had initially "laid hold" of him.

In the Greek the word we translate as "lay hold of" is rather strong. The idea is "to seize" or "take possession of". In a modern context, Paul would be referring to what happens when a defensive end breaks through the offensive line and tackles a quarterback.

Understand, Paul is telling us that on the Road to Damascus Jesus personally stepped out of heaven and tackled him! Jesus was not sitting back passively waiting for Paul to come and "lay hold of" Him. Instead, Jesus was the pursuer. He was the initiator.

So why would Jesus tackle Paul? I think there's two reasons that relate to everyone Jesus "lays hold of" — (1) He's that crazy about us! And (2) He has a plan for our lives.

What makes this reality all the more incredible as it pertains to using Paul as an example, is that it highlights God's grace. Jesus was still crazy about Paul even when he was His enemy. Jesus had a plan for his life even though Paul was moving the opposite direction.

How amazing that Jesus literally knows everything about you and is still crazy about you — even when you want nothing to do with Him or the life He wants to provide!

Don't miss this point that while Jesus was undoubtedly the initiator of Paul's relationship with Christ, in this verse Paul also affirms one other key component. Though Jesus initially tackled Paul, Paul still had to make the decision to stop fighting and fully surrender.

While there is absolutely no question Jesus initiated the "laying hold of" because He loved Paul and had a plan for his life, it was still necessary for Paul to reciprocate the same action by choosing to "laying hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of him."

This leads to another question: What was Jesus' plan for Paul's life or "that for which Christ laid hold of him"? Following his conversion, Luke records in Acts 9:15-16 that "the Lord said" of Paul, "He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel." From a practical sense, we do understand Jesus "laid hold of" Paul because He wanted to use him to be a "vessel to bear" witness of "His name."

And yet... Relegating Jesus' plan for Paul's life to a list of things he would do, misses the point entirely. Jesus' grabbed hold of Saul of Tarsus, not because He needed the right man to take the Gospel to the Gentiles (as if God's work is dependent upon any man). Jesus grabbed hold of Saul because He wanted to transform him into Paul. The work Paul would end up doing was absolutely secondary to the man Jesus wanted to make him into!

Please know (and once again this is what legalism convolutes), Jesus hasn't "laid hold of" you so that He can now use you to accomplish His plan on this earth. Instead, Jesus "lays hold of" you because He loves you and wants to transform who you are!

Jesus doesn't save because He has work to be done. Jesus saves because He wants to see broken lives made whole, dead men brought to life, the lame walk and the blind see, those who were lost — found! You see God's plan for your life is not things for you to accomplish. His plan is to transform you more into the image and likeness of His Son, Jesus.

Friend, while God does have ways He wants to use your life, His ultimate plan is to use this life to make you more like Jesus! Never forget this point, to God your internal transformation supersedes any and all physical accomplishments!

And it's to this point Paul is honest with these Philippians that he had "not attained" or was "already perfected." As it pertained to the core reason Jesus "laid hold of him", Paul admits he still had a long way to go. While righteous before God and justified on the account of Jesus' work, Paul is affirming, from a practical sense, he was personally far from Christ-like.

Paul could admit there were still many areas in his life that needed to become more like Jesus. Which explains why he was "pressing on" by "laying hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of him." Paul was not pursuing his perfection through his works, but was instead grabbing hold of the Savior who was changing him. Paul continues by now explaining the particulars of how he was "pressing on..."

Philippians 3:13-14, "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

In order to avoid any confusion, what was Paul "pressing towards"? Well, in context, it was the very thing Jesus had "laid hold of him!" Paul says his ultimate "goal" was this "prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." You see the whole point to Paul's life was pursuing the very purpose for which Jesus had originally "laid hold of him."

And note, as we just discussed, this was not things for Paul to do for Jesus, religious works to be done, sacrifices to be made, or accomplishments to be totaled. Instead, the "goal" was an internal transformation yielded through the "prize" — a relational association. The "call of God" Paul had received wasn't through his works, but "in" a relationship with "Christ Jesus."

Notice the key to Paul's pressing onward and towards Jesus... He writes, "Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead." The tense used indicates this was a constant and continually "forgetting" and "reaching forward."

One of the interesting aspects of this famous verse is how incomplete our application of it ends up being. Most refer to "forgetting those things which are behind" as the exhortation to let go of the former life of sin and all the condemnation that's often stirred by their memory.

And trust me I get it... It's hard to walk in victory if you're still living in defeat, to run with endurance when your feet remain in shackles. No doubt it was only in this process of "forgetting" and "reaching forward" that Paul was able to write... Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

While this is true, I'm not sure a former life of sin is what Paul's referring to! Don't forget this exhortation to "forget those things which are behind" comes in the context of a greater discussion concerning legalism and how it undermines our joy.

I'm convinced there is a greater deterrent to your pursuit of Christ and the transformation that results than mere guilt over the sin of your past. From personal experience and massive failures, I have discovered anytime you take pride in the spiritual victories of the past or for that matter how far you've presently come (how much you've grown or the person you've become), you've in turn set yourself up for a fall.

While it's true you're not who you once were (and that's absolutely a good thing), it's paramount you're continually "pressing on" and "reaching forward" never allowing yourself to grow content with who you presently are! If you aren't like Jesus you haven't arrived.

This is what makes legalism so dangerous. It fosters pride in what you've accomplished and places an undo emphasis on what you're presently doing! "Grace, And" and "Grace, But" Gospel distortions enable a person to have a sense of pride in their accomplishments.

By looking back at former victories or around at what you're presently doing for God, legalism presents a moral structure whereby it's easy to be lulled into a false belief you're doing well. If like Paul, your focus is only "forward" looking to Jesus with the "goal" being Christ-likeness, how could you ever possibly conclude you're doing well?

In light of the fact Paul knew he had "not already attained" or was "already perfected" Because he knew there were so many areas in his life that still needed to be transformed by Jesus, Paul is about as honest as he can be with these Philippians.

"Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended" (literally there is a lot about all of this I'm still learning myself), "but one thing I do" know in my pursuit of "laying hold of" the very life Jesus "laid hold of" me (becoming this person Jesus wants to make me)...

I have to make a choice daily to "forget those things which are behind" me (whether they be my past sins or for that matter my former victories) and instead place my sole focus not in things to do or forgo doing for God — which will never yield the life Jesus wants for me, but into the simple act of "reaching forward" and "pressing towards the goal" — this internal transformation which I know can only be yielded through the "prize" of this heavenly "call of God" — my relational association with Jesus.

In closing, "Grace, and do these things" or "Grace, but don't do these things" approaches to spiritual development (legalism) not only fail and are viewed by God as "rubbish", but they're dangerous because they rob a person of joy by adding unnecessary expectations and conditions to a relationship with Jesus made possible by grace and one that is intentionally dependent on only one work — the work Jesus accomplished on the cross.

Whether today you're a believer or not the fact remains the same, Jesus is grabbing hold of you because He loves you and wants to transform your life! Like Paul, Jesus doesn't care what you've done or where you're going. He doesn't even care if you're pursuing Him or not. Jesus is the initiator! So the question begs — will you grab hold of him?

May you “rejoice” or for that matter discover “joy” in the knowledge that your standing before God as well as the process by which you grow in Godliness is found in a relationship you have with Jesus and not your performance! How amazing! You don't have to earn God's favor nor are you required to maintain some standard in order to keep it. In grace and through Jesus you've been set free to simply enjoy the favor of God and be changed by it!

Philippians 3:15-21

Philippians 3:15, “Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.”

In verse 15 Paul is transitioning from his warning to guard against legalistic thinking by constantly “forgetting those things which are behind” in order to “reach forward”, to Jesus and a work only yielded through a relationship with Him. He writes, “Therefore” (in light of the things he’s just discussed) if you “are mature” (if you desire completeness) “have this mind.”

Paul isn’t mixing words, he’s saying if you, as a Christian, really do desire the life Jesus saved you for this type of mindset is absolutely essential. Only the enthronement of Christ will remove the crown from self and only a full dependency on Jesus will yield true and lasting Godliness. As the prophet Zechariah wrote (4:6) so many years ago describing this blessed life, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.”

As a matter of fact, Paul is so adamant to this point he borders on the sarcastic. This line “if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you” could be read as “if you don’t agree with what I’m saying, give it time and God will testify that I’m correct.” It’s as though Paul is saying, “If I can’t convince you of these things, I’m sure God will.”

Philippians 3:16, “Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.”

One of the themes Paul is going to segue to as he works his way to the close of his letter, is the basis for Christian unity — which is identical to the basis of our individual Christian joy.

The reality of God's grace and the indwelling of His Spirit should not only fill a person with a supernatural joy, but it should create an unbreakable commonality among the brethren.

Paul writes, "To the degree that we have already attained" (or literally wherever you are personally in this process of sanctification by laying hold of Jesus) "let us" and by implication Paul means all of "us walk by the same rule" and "be of the same mind."

Notice Paul's exhortation centers upon three things: A common direction ("let us walk"), based upon a common belief ("the same rule" — the true Gospel of Grace alone), which should motivate a common determination ("be of the same mind" — pursuing Jesus).

If we're all individually pursuing Jesus based upon the amazing nature of His grace alone, "walking" together in unity should be the natural and logical result!

Sadly, so much disunity ends up occurring among Christians or within a church when instead of pursuing Jesus ("walking by the same rule" and "of the same mind") we're each pursuing either our own agendas, or have ended up falling into the trap of legalistic thinking. So often disunity and separation occurs when we become self-consumed or depart from grace.

Philippians 3:17-19, "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame — who set their mind on earthly things."

In these verses Paul does something bold... He specifically sets himself up as an individual these Philippians could emulate because he knew bad examples would fill the void. Note: This is not the only time Paul has done such a thing. Twice in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul encouraged them to "imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1).

Before I continue I want to make two important points. First, the church needs more Christian men and women willing to assume such a mantle. In a culture full of worldly influences jockeying for such a position, the church needs role-models willing to step up and present their lives as an open book for younger believers trying to figure things out.

It's simply a truth that you're healthiest spiritually when you have someone investing into your life, and you're investing into the life of someone else. Everyone needs a mentor and everyone needs to be a mentor. This is what makes church life and subsequently church involvement so important, for it should afford opportunities for both to occur naturally.

Personally, I am so thankful God has placed older men in my life like Larry, Joe, Gary, Andy, and Chad. Men who have taken the time to open up their lives for me to see the good, the bad, and even the ugly — all the while teaching me the power of God's amazing grace and in whom challenge me daily in my pursuit of our Savior Jesus! For them I seek to do the same, it is my sincere prayer that I illustrate these same powerful truths.

In writing to his young disciple Titus (2:1-8) Paul says, "But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things — that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discrete, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you." Find an example and be an example!

But there is a second point I want to make specifically for fathers of sons. Never forget, with the singular exception of Jesus who can trump everything, no other man has the power to

influence your son in his walk with God like you do! A pastor or mentor can make an impact, but it pales in comparison to what a father naturally does. Because God our Father took His name tag and placed it on you, you have an incredible responsibility!

I know this is heavy, but it's a truth. Your son will worship the God you actually worship. Not the God you say you worship, but the one you do! As a matter of fact, sons don't always follow the directives of Dad, but they will always emulate the example you set. If you want your son to grow up and follow Jesus, you need to show him how this is done.

If you want your son to understand the amazing grace of God, you need to demonstrate the power of that grace in your own life. If you want your son to treat his wife like Christ loves his church, it is your responsibility to set the example while he's still living under your roof.

If you tell him attending church and studying the Bible should be a priority but it isn't a priority for you, what do you think he'll do the moment he's given the opportunity to make his own decisions? He'll join you on the couch to watch the race or game instead of coming to church. You'd never say that's your god, but he's witnessed this is the god you worship.

For a moment let me speak personally. I love the Atlanta Braves and if you hang around me you know I am a die hard Dawgs fan. But what you might not know is this has occurred mainly because my Dad is both an avid baseball fan and Georgia supporter...

And while those things are largely trivial, I should also point out that I love Jesus, cherish His bride the church, have given my life to the ministry, want to serve my community, am determined to remain faithful and love my wife Jessica, am willing to make whatever sacrifices necessary for my children, and find character to be of the upmost importance, all because this was largely the example for being a man my Dad emulated for me.

As a Dad with two sons of my own, who watch and copy my every move, I am so deeply thankful my Dad showed me Jesus and didn't just tell me about Him. In watching my Dad,

even in his struggles and failures, I knew his faith was real and that the object of his faith (Jesus) wasn't theoretical. Jesus was alive to him and the implications for me radical.

Yes, we're all free-willed creatures who ultimately have to make our own decisions, but I don't want to be the type of Father who tells my sons to be the type of man I didn't care to be! Instead, I want to be able to say to Quincy and Theo, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ!" You see, as Paul rightly knew, claiming such a role is so important for if I'm not interested in being such an influence for my sons some other man will take my place.

Once again, it would appear that in this section of his letter Paul is simply reiterating in pen a lesson he'd already given in person. In warning the Philippians about these bad influences he writes, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping."

In order to understand who it is that Paul is referring to, look at the last line of this section. Paul describes these people as those "who set their mind on earthly things." Though Paul began this chapter warning against legalistic Christians (those who adopt a "Grace, And" or "Grace, But" mentality to spirituality), it would appear he's now transitioned to a warning against carnal Christians or what I'd define as the "Grace, So" I can do anything perversion.

Sadly, there are people who believe that since you're saved and sanctified by grace, there is now no restrictions on the things you can do. The irony is that while these people do understand the freeing nature of grace (it's true you can do anything as God's favor is provided independent of the individual), tragically they end up distorting grace.

Instead of grace yielding greater holiness and a sanctified life as it's designed to do, grace is seen as a license for whatever goes. Unmerited favor in place of sin, plus Jesus' complete forgiveness concerning sin is viewed as an unrestricted permit to sin!

It's what I like to call the Romans 6:1 mentality... "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound!" While it's true that if you're worried grace can become a license for sin you have a

fundamental misunderstanding of grace, it's equally true that if you see grace as a license to sin you also have an equally distorted and perverted view of grace.

You see, if you truly grasp the True-Gospel of "Grace.", you will understand that being saved and sanctified by grace transforms who you are and therefore what you want to do — for when the heart changes and you enter into a love relationship with Jesus, your desires will naturally and organically transform! You no longer live to please Jesus because you have to. You live to please Jesus because you now want to!

Let me quickly illustrate this point. The quickest way you can tell a single man is in love is that he'll make all the life changes his mom and dad have been harping on him to make for years. Because of love he's now interested in getting a place of his own, a steady job, health insurance. Over night personal hygiene becomes important. He starts showering daily, uses shampoo with conditioner, shaves, even buys deodorant. Love naturally changes him.

Friend, here's the truth: If the basis of your relationship with Jesus is "grace, so" I can do whatever I want, you not only fail to fully understand grace, but do you actually love Jesus? I don't think so. You see Paul would say such an outlook reveals you're actually making a mockery of the death and resurrection of Jesus! To those who take this approach, Paul would simply ask in Romans 6:2, "How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"

Though Paul would fight tooth and nail against the legalistic tendencies of "Grace, And" or "Grace, But", as it pertains to this "Grace, So" warping of grace, Paul simply grieves. He writes, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping..."

In the presence of someone who excuses carnal living under the pretense of God's grace, Paul weeps knowing these people are in actuality "enemies of the cross of Christ... whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame." Paul weeps for such people knowing that this particular outlook so misses the mark, the end result would be their "destruction."

In the Greek this word “destruction” can be translated as perdition. The word is very strong. The idea is a perishing, complete ruining, total waste, or utter destruction. It’s the same word Jesus used in Matthew 7:13 when He said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.”

Friend, never fall into the trap of believing that grace leads a person into sin. But also never fall into the trap of believing grace will excuse the life of sin you’re living.

Philippians 3:20-21, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

What a line! Paul encourages unity on the basis of grace before adding, “For our citizenship is in heaven!” In the context of Philippi being a Roman colony this Philippian church understood the core implications of what Paul was getting at. As a colony of Rome, while located in Greece, the very soil of Philippi was considered Italian. They were located 1,000 miles from the center of the Empire, but they held all the same rights and privileges of Rome.

When Paul says “our citizenship is in heaven” he’s not only saying our home isn’t on this planet and that our ultimate allegiance transcends any particular country, but that we’re governed by a heavenly authority. In Jesus we have been given a heavenly citizenship. A citizenship that completely transcends any nation, color, party, or creed.

Notice Paul uses a present tense. This “citizenship” isn’t something we’re awarded once we leave this earth. Instead, this is a status we’re bestowed the moment we accept Jesus as our “Savior!” Today, you are a citizen — not of this earth — but of heaven! Incredible!

Over the last few years our society has had this national discussion as to what it means to be a Patriotic American. Not only has the issue of what it truly means to be “patriotic” been argued

at noisome, but even what it means to be “America” has become contentious in the context of illegal immigration. Yes, the last couple years has been nasty, politicized, and even polarizing.

And though I want to be clear that I personally appreciate this great country we’ve been given, cherish the freedoms, comforts, and opportunities it has afforded me and my family, recognize its faults but also its uniqueness in the context of world history, and believe the honorable thing is to demonstrate a sincere thankfulness to those who’ve served to ensure this crazy experiment can continue free of tyranny — Christians have missed the point.

Yes, we all presently live in America. Sure, I believe we should participate to some degree in the political structure of this society, because God has afforded us the opportunity to do so. As it pertains to this land and the leaders who’ve been elected by men but ordained by God to govern it, we should pray for them. No doubt you can be active in the square, speak with the voice God has given you, and stand for the Truth that supersedes the laws of mere man.

But we should never forget who we actually are! While I’m an American, may I never forget my citizenship is heaven! Though I have a 30-year mortgage on a house in Monroe, Georgia, my home is in heaven! We all have county commissioners and state representatives, a governor, two senators, congressmen, judges, a Supreme Court, and a President, but may we never ever forget our King sits in heaven where we are all citizens!

In this debate about American Patriotism Christians have lost sight of the fact we’re been called to a Heavenly Patriotism! We are first and foremost “citizens of heaven!” Who cares if you’re a Democrat, Republican, Demican, or Republicrat? Who cares if you watch Fox News or MSNBC? Who cares if you’re a natural born citizen of these United States or an undocumented immigrant seeking a better life? Who cares if the President is a Kenyan named Barack or a secret Russian operative named Trump?

Seriously! I look around at this world going to hell and I take solace in one incredible reality... I'm a citizen of heaven! You see this is what should make Christians and the church not only unique, but dangerous. Not only is the church a colony of heaven as it's made up of the citizenry of heaven, but our ultimate allegiance isn't to party or country, it's to Jesus.

As a citizen of heaven and a colony on earth our focus shouldn't be on these trivial issues that don't really matter in the context of eternity, but rather on two amazing aims... We're to be "eagerly waiting for the Savior, Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" and actively "making disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

The most dangerous force this secular world should be concerned about isn't the illegals jumping a fence to invade a chunk of earth or who's going to arrange the deck-chairs on the Titanic, but a group of foreign citizens seeking to win the world for Christ! China understands the danger of the church which is why there is an incredible persecution ensuing.

Christians in America miss the point when we spend our energies trying to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth as opposed to making lost earthlings citizens of heaven. Once again I'm not advocating apathy, isolationism, or fatalism as it pertains to politics; and yet, how so quickly we forget the fact being the fate of America will be similar to that of the rest of the world. America will be destroyed, so it's a good thing your citizenship and King is in heaven!

As we close we need to look at this passage from a different angle. Paul makes two incredible declarations about Jesus and what He can and will do in your life because of your citizenship. First, as your "Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ will transform your lowly body." As a matter of fact, Paul continues by saying your body will "be conformed to His glorious body."

How incredible it is to consider this "lowly body" or literally in the Greek this vial body that exists in the lowliest state it will ever be on account of sin will one day soon experience a radical

transformation. In the original text there is only one word Paul uses we have translated as both “transformed” and “conformed.” A better reading would be that “Jesus will take our lowly bodies and transform them into the same form of His glorious body.”

Not only does the wording imply our physical bodies will experience a transformation so thorough we’ll literally be reformed using a completely different schematic, but Paul is telling us that our physical state will be similar to what we saw in Jesus’ post-resurrection experience.

Think, the new body Jesus will give you in eternity will still be human and that you’ll be recognizable as you, will be a body comprised of physical matter you can touch but one that can appear and disappear, walk through walls, teleport, fly, but still fill with food, and beyond all of this, be a body that will never die and one in which you will live in forever.

And while that is amazing in and of itself, Paul also says of Jesus that as your Savior He “is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” Though in context Paul is saying that Jesus’ might has no limitations, the word “subdue” meaning “to arrange under, subordinate, put into subjection, or to place under one’s control” possesses a more immediate implication.

In light of everything Paul has been discussing within this chapter,

I find this statement to contain an incredible promise. What Paul is saying is that there is literally nothing Jesus, as your Savior and Lord, does not have the ability to “subdue” or put under His control!

Think about what this actually means... Paul is saying that there is no struggle you could ever face that Jesus isn’t able to overcome... No fear He can’t calm... No insecurity He can’t master... No sin He can’t provide victory over... No wound He can’t heal... No addiction He can’t liberate you from. There is nothing you will face that Jesus isn’t able to conquer!

While legalism ultimately fosters failure, for you can never be good enough, the flesh possesses no power in and of itself, and in your own energies, things so quickly spiral out of

control as I'm sure you know, if you lay hold of Jesus He's more than able to "subdue all things to Himself!" Friend, give up and grab hold of your Savior. He's more than able!

Philippians 4:1-23

Philippians 4:1-4, “Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved. I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”

As we mentioned one of the themes Paul segues to as he works his way to the close of his letter is the basis for Christian unity. Not only should the reality of God’s grace, the indwelling of His Spirit, and our “laying hold of Jesus” fill a person with a supernatural joy, but these things should also foster an unbreakable common bond among the brethren.

The simple fact we all presently possess a “citizenship in heaven” should be more than enough to cause each of us to “stand fast in the Lord” with one another!

Sadly, it appears such a reality had been totally lost on two ladies within this Philippian church who were at odds. Though Paul is vague on the specific source of their contention, in “implored Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind”, he is affirming a problem existed.

It’s clear Paul was grieved by this situation because both “Euodia and Syntyche” had “labored with him in the gospel.” Whether it had been the time Paul originally spent in Philippi (Acts 16) or even possibly his ministry in Thessalonica or Corinth, these two women had “labored” alongside him (strived together with Paul) for the sake of the Gospel!

Aside from this Paul also affirms their “names” were contained “in the Book of Life.” While this is the first mention of this “Book” in Scripture, it will again be mentioned seven times in the book of Revelation. Most notably we’re told in Revelation 20:15 that “anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” It’s a book you want your name in!

Understand... Paul was upset to hear “Euodia and Syntyche” had a falling out because they were both Godly women who loved Jesus, were his dear friends, had been co-laborers with him, and from what we can determine, were influential members of this Philippian church! This situation was so critical to Paul that he decides to make his appeal to them public.

Before we continue I do want to point out that it seems whatever the issue these two women were fighting about didn’t present an obvious right or wrong. I think it’s safe to assume if the contention had been a blatant slight or indiscretion Paul would have been more specific. Since he isn’t — the matter was probably one of personal preference.

I think it’s also important to note that Paul refuses to take sides. In light of all of the things he’s been discussing in this letter, Paul simply “implores them to be of the same mind.” After discussing their heavenly calling, Paul pleads with these ladies to lay aside whatever temporal disagreement they were dealing with in order to “stand fast in the Lord.”

As opposed to taking the bait and appearing to side with one lady or the other, Paul wisely chooses to instead point them both back to their commonality in Jesus! (Note: He goes out of the way to “implore” each woman.) Was the issue really that big that they’d break fellowship with one another and in the process foster disunity within the church community?

Whatever the disagreement, the one good thing about this situation was that neither of these ladies broke fellowship with the larger church community. Because this was the case Paul encourages this unnamed “true companion” along with this man named “Clement” (which we assume were both leaders) to “help these women” come to a point of reconciliation.

Understand, when the issue of contention is a matter of right and wrong the church and her leadership possess a Biblical responsibility to stand for what is true. The Scriptures are clear to this fact. And yet, when the issue is nothing more than matters involving personalities and preferences there is much we can learn about Paul's example.

(1) Resist the urge or natural compulsion to take a side. (2) Knowing what's at stake be willing to "help" in the process of reconciliation. And (3) Move beyond the specific issue fostering division by pointing both parties to the common ground they share in Jesus. Not only does Paul refuse to mention the specifics, he doesn't even try to solve the problem.

If you are a "Euodia" or a "Syntyche", and you're having a fight or disagreement with a brother or sister in the church, please take a step back from the source of contention and ask yourself the simple question: Is the matter worth losing the relationship over? You can work to resolve the situation now — even allowing the church to help mediate, or you can run from it and let Jesus address it once you both get to heaven. The choice is yours.

Once again Paul wraps up this section by encouraging everyone involved to "rejoice in the Lord always." And then to add emphasis he writes, "Again I will say, rejoice!" Famed British preacher Charles Spurgeon correctly said, "Joy in the Lord is the cure for all arguments." It's sad when we allow petty disagreements to rob us of a lasting relationship with one another.

After discussing joy and its relation to our unity, Paul turns the page to one final component of what joy, based in God's grace and the indwelling of the Spirit, should yield in our lives.

Friend, grace yielding joy will always yield an inner peace. In Galatians 5:22 Paul writes, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace." Peace with God offered through the grace of God will naturally produce the peace of God — in addition to this supernatural joy!

Because joy and peace are the twin children of God's love as demonstrated through His grace, the two are specifically intertwined. When there is joy there is peace and when there is peace there resides joy. And because this is the case, it's also true that when our joy comes under

assault our peace is naturally effected and when we struggle with peace our ability to experience joy is subsequently undermined as well.

This is why Paul spends the final pen strokes of this letter exhorting us to five specific attributes knowing they will safeguard our peace and therefore our joy in the Lord! First...

Philippians 4:5, "Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand."

For starters, this word "gentleness" is misleading. As a matter of fact, the KJV translates this word as "moderation", but in Titus 3:2 the same word is written as "peaceable." In Greek the word means "equitable or fair". The idea may be better explained by the attitudes it contrasts.

Instead of striving with man, possessing a prickly demeanor, being difficult to get along with or off-putting, or having an argumentative or quarrelsome spirit, Paul is encouraging believers to possess a yielded-ness — a willingness to relent, submit, and simply get along.

In light of fact "the Lord is at hand" or probably better translated as "the Lord has everything in His hands", Paul is encouraging you to go with the flow. As opposed to being the type of person always pushing the envelop, swimming against the tide, or cutting against the grain, if the matter doesn't challenge one's ethics, morals, or offend one's conscience... Paul is encouraging you to just toll with it! Always know greater peace and deeper joy is found when you're willing to adopt a blessed flexibility. Secondly...

Philippians 4:6-7, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Aside from this blessed flexibility, "gentleness", being essential to safeguarding your peace and joy, Paul also commands that you "be anxious for nothing!" In the Greek this word we have

translated as “anxious” means “to be troubled with cares.” The word describes a person crippled by worry! Literally, Paul is ordering you to stop worrying!

Knowing the difficult nature of this particular directive, Paul continues by adding, “But (or in the place of your worry) in everything... let your requests be made known to God.”

Keep in mind, Paul isn’t saying worry in and of itself is a bad thing or a sign of some type of spiritual problem or lack of faith. Instead, it’s what you do with worry that will ultimately enable peace and joy or yield fear and greater anxiety. Paul says the practical remedy to these cares is to take them to the Lord “by prayer and supplications, with thanksgiving.”

First, Paul’s intention here isn’t to be formulaic. He’s not presenting three individual things (“prayers, supplications” and “thanksgiving”) aimed at addressing three different concerns. Rather, Paul is encouraging you and I to simply communicate our worries to God.

What’s being described is something organic. Note: There is no limitation to the things you can take to the Lord. “In everything by prayer!” The subject of prayer is everything! In 1 Peter 5:7 the aged Apostle says, “Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”

“Well Pastor Zach, I don’t understand how prayer is going to lessen my stress or how taking these things to the Lord is going to relieve my genuine anxiety. I’m honestly worried about my finances, retirement, the stock market, my job security, moronic children, the future, this mole on my back, the tension in the Middle East, the upcoming mid-terms, etc.”

Aside from the fact Paul is saying the Lord actually wants you to bring such cares to Him, I could also say it’s true that bringing such matters to the Lord will remind you of Jesus’ love and that He’s in control of your life. Romans 8:28, “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

Additionally, I could say such a discipline will help you keep in the forefront of your mind the amazing reality that God has promised to take care of all of your needs. In Matthew 6:25-34

Jesus said, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on... If God so clothes the grass of the field... will He not much more clothe you... For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things.”

While I could point to prayer as being a way to remind yourself that God loves you, is in control, and promises to take care of your needs, the interesting reality is that Paul doesn't say any of this! You see the amazing nature of this passage is that it describes a result Paul promises will occur if you'll take your worries to the Lord in prayer.

Look again... Paul writes, “Let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

What Paul is saying is that, in the presence of worry and anxiety, if you choose to take these cares to the Lord in prayer, God promises to do something radical. He will take your anxiety and replace it with “the peace of God!” And note: This is not peace with God or for that matter some type of peace from God, but “the peace of God.” It's the peace God has!

And while this supernatural peace is foreign and otherworldly as it will “surpass” or rise above even your cognitive ability to “understand” it, most notably this peace will also “guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” In the original language this word “guard” was primarily a military term. The implications of what Paul's saying is that God's peace will prevent a hostile invasion of greater worry, anxiety, or doubt creeping in to rob you of joy!

Know greater peace and deeper joy is found when you're first willing to adopt a blessed flexibility, and secondly when you take your anxieties to the Lord in prayer. Thirdly...

Philippians 4:8-9, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -

meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you."

Once again in seeking to address attributes we need to adopt in order to safeguard our peace and therefore our joy, Paul now speaks to the substance of our thoughts. While it's obviously true you don't have any control over things that pop into your head, you absolutely do have the ability to dictate what thoughts you choose to "meditate on!"

In order to safeguard this peace and joy God has afforded through His grace, it's important you spend your time thinking about "things that are true" as opposed to marinating on falsehoods, "things that are noble" (honorable) as opposed to things that are crass, "things that are just" (or righteous) as opposed to things that are wicked.

"Things that are pure" as opposed to what is impure, "things that are lovely" (acceptable) as opposed to things that are filthy, "things that are of a good report" (reputable) as opposed to things that are salacious. Ultimately, Paul sums it up that the things you should "meditate on" must possess "virtue" (moral goodness) and are "praiseworthy" (uplifting).

Always know greater peace and deeper joy is found when you're (first) willing to adopt a blessed flexibility, (secondly) willing to take your anxieties to the Lord in prayer, and thirdly spend your time meditating on things that are good and Godly. Fourth...

Philippians 4:10-19, "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.

Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

As Paul approaches the end of the letter, he accomplishes several things. In a practical sense the verses we just read come across like a thank you note for the financial support he'd received from this Philippian church during his Roman imprisonment.

He writes, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity." And again Paul reiterates, "You have done well that you shared in my distress... Indeed I have all and abound!" Before finally writing, "I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God."

Aside from this present gift, Paul also commends them for their constant and continual generosity. He writes, "You Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities."

And while there is no doubt Paul is wanting to articulate his deep thankfulness for their financial aid, it's also evident he desired to use this opportunity to emphasize two more critical attributes necessary to safeguarding peace and joy — contentment and generosity.

Let's first look at contentment... Paul writes, "I have learned (to learn by use and practice) in whatever state I am, to be content (at peace with what one has). I know how to be abased (to

possess nothing), and I know how to abound (to possess much). Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.”

It really is amazing that Paul opens this section by writing “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.” Even for the Apostle Paul, contentment, regardless of his present circumstance, was something the Holy Spirit had to teach him. Contentment wasn’t natural. It was learned. It wasn’t theoretical. Paul lived it! From personal experience Paul had to learn how “to be content” when he had little as well as when he possessed much. How true that contentment is a basic struggle when you haven’t anything or you have a lot.

Friend, don’t detach Paul from his humanity. Learning anything always involves a process of moving from a lack of understanding to one of knowledge and experience. To this point, there is no question Philippians 4:13 is one of the more famous verses in all of Scripture; and yet, sadly, it’s so often taken completely out of the context for which it was written.

When Paul declares, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” the “all things” refers back to this process of learning “to be content” when he had nothing or when he was experiencing a surplus. Jesus may not give you the strength to lift a car or accomplish some incredible feat, but Paul attests Jesus will give you the strength to be content!

Paul is telling us the strength to be content “in whatever state” you find yourself is only made possible via a specific working of Jesus through the individual. In context the verse should read, “In Jesus’ strength I can be content in whatever state I presently find myself!”

Always know greater peace and deeper joy is found when you’re (first) willing to adopt a blessed flexibility, (second) you’re willing to take your anxieties to the Lord in prayer, (third) you spend your time meditating on things that are good and Godly, (fourth) learn to be content in all things, and finally demonstrate a spirit of generosity.

Don't forget, Paul goes above and beyond to articulate to these Philippians that his thankfulness was not based in the fact his needs had been met through their financial gift, but rather his joy was found in how their generosity would be a blessing to them.

Paul makes several interesting statements in these verses. He writes, "You have done well that you shared in my distress... Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account... God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Jesus."

Not only is Paul clear their generosity meant the work God was doing through Paul's ministry would also be attributed to their account — which most interestingly emphasizes the eternal value of your present generosity (you can't take it with you, but you can send it ahead).

But Paul was confident their "acceptable sacrifice" which was "well pleasing to God" would be met with the Lord's continued provision concerning their needs. You see, the Philippians weren't giving out of their abundance, they were giving in spite of their needs.

In 2 Corinthians 8:1-4 Paul writes, "We make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints."

Though the Philippians were giving from a place of personal want themselves, Paul was confident God had it all covered. He declares, "God shall supply all your needs" and notice from what source — "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus!" Though we may give from our poverty, God's blessings come from a much deeper well. He is able!

Beyond the fact these Philippians demonstrate that generosity is an attitude independent of resources, here's a few lessons you should take away from this... While Godly giving does aim to meet a need the receiver possesses, the truth is that it does way more for the giver!

Yes, the church has bills that need to be met, but you shouldn't give for this reason. You should give because God has called you to be a giver! To a large extent the issue is one of motivation, but I would be remiss if I didn't also say it was also one of obedience.

Friend, you do not need to give because you have to give. There is no law. Nor are you to give because you want something from God. That's actually a really warped way of thinking. You've already been the recipient of the money (it was God's blessing), meaning giving to get more from God or giving with an agenda can actually be classified as greed.

You see God's grace changes the way you should see everything — and giving is a prime example. You should give because you want to not because you have to or want something in return from God. Since you've already been the recipient of a blessing given by God, Godliness should then yield a natural desire to do what God did — give! You don't give to receive more. You received so that you can now give just like Jesus gave!

Understand, such a mentality radically alters the calculus. Instead of the debate being how much of your paycheck you should give away, the onus is now placed on how much you need to keep for yourself. This is why in contrast to the law which mandated a tithe of 10%, the New Testament places zero numerical limitations to your giving.

In 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 Paul wrote, "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work."

Can we be honest for a moment and admit that issues related to money end up being one of the largest deterrents to your joy and peace. For an example, did you know that 57% of divorced couples cite money problems as the primary reason the marriage fell apart?

And yet, this is what generosity intends to place into check. In taking your paycheck and giving a percentage to your church this is what you're doing: You're acknowledging the entire paycheck was given to you by a God who loves you, you're giving a percentage away because that's actually Christlike and the logical reaction to His grace. You're actively trusting that "God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Jesus", and you are telling your money it doesn't have power or authority over you. It's not your master!

Friend, seeing your money as a tool to support the ministry of the Gospel and further the Kingdom redefines its purpose and the act of giving it away reconstitutes your authority over it. The easiest way to remove money's power over your life is to adopt a generous spirit.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-21, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Philippians 4:20-23, "Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

I'll repeat, always know greater peace and deeper joy is found when you're (first) willing to adopt a blessed flexibility, (second) you're willing to take your anxieties to the Lord in prayer, (third) you spend your time meditating on things that are good and Godly, (four) you learn to be content in all things, and finally you make a decision to demonstrate a spirit of generosity.

In closing, Paul ends with the very concept he began with... The amazing grace of God. As I mentioned in our intro study, Paul writes because he wants these believers to know that because

their joy was based in the amazing grace of God and not their present circumstances, they could truly rejoice in whatever situations they found themselves facing.

The vertical peace discovered when one bases their spiritual life on God's grace enables that person unspeakable joy regardless of their horizontal environment.

I've been recently asked, "Zach for the last few years everything you teach always comes back to grace. Do you have anything else?" Well, I must say, if the Christian life begins and ends with the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ", and that it's only because of this grace that we experience the love of God, are filled with an unspeakable joy, and are imparted with a peace that would surpass even our own understanding... What other message is there?

As we've seen in this letter to the Philippians — Paul, writing from a Roman cell unsure if he'd live or face a brutal execution, was at peace because he was presently enjoying grace!