

A Fond Farewell

By Don Green

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Bible Verse: Philippians 4:14-23
Preached on: Tuesday, February 23, 2021

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Well, we come tonight to the concluding message of our study on Philippians, and I will remember the time that we spent in Philippians for many reasons for the rest of my life. We started Philippians a very long time ago, given the short length of the book, a very long time ago, and in the middle of that we were interrupted on a couple of different occasions, we were interrupted by the corona virus thing that we're still feeling the effects of, and so the front half of Philippians was before corona virus, the second half was afterwards. The world changed in the middle of preaching this book. Our church has changed quite a bit during the preaching of Philippians, many of you are new to our church within the past couple of years and, you know, certainly since we started preaching Philippians, you're new here and we're so glad that you're here, and that actually prompts my mind. I'm in a reflective mood. I always am when I come to the end of a book that we've preached through, and there's something that I was thinking about that I wanted to say. It's a great, great blessing in a church like ours to have so many people that have been here for the long term, and many of you are still charter members, you know, going back 6-7 years and even before that when we first started the church, and your presence in the church is absolutely vital and foundational to everything that we are, and the stability that you bring to our ministry and to the body of Christ is priceless and cannot be replicated and could not be reproduced in any other way. And so I'm grateful for you.

At the same time, I want to, those of you that are newer, I want you to know that your presence is of a, while it may be of a different time length, the contribution and what you mean to the body of Truth Community Church is equally important in a different kind of way, because we are, especially on Sunday mornings, we are being flooded with people that are really hungry for God's word and so many of you are like that and you travel a long way to be with us, and it's inconvenient, and you left behind friends to be with us here at Truth Community Church because you love the word of God. And the freshness of what you bring in the animated spirit that you have for God's word, keeps us from getting stale and keeps us from getting, you know, stagnant. And there's this stability and there is also this freshness that is a really really special thing, and all of this kind of congealing and coming together, multiple streams going into a river, occurring over the course of our preaching of the book of Philippians. It's a wonderful thing to see. These are the best days yet for Truth Community Church and I'm glad that you're here to share in them.

On a personal note, I really shouldn't go into this, but I just want to say it for my sake. The book of Philippians is something that I'm going to remember for the rest of my ministry if my mind and my cognition hold out, I'll remember it until the day that I die. My preaching has changed as a result of going through the book of Philippians. There were times where I was very discouraged in the midst of bringing you the word of God in those first couple of chapters, and it gave me an opportunity to kind of step back and assess the way that I preach, and what I preach, and how I do it, and the preparation that I do, and the writings of a long dead man from Westminster Seminary, R. B. Kuiper, was just very very precious to me and during this time, and I'll just remember that and kind of the recalibration of ministry that is fresh in my mind, and I know what I'm talking about even if it's not all that evident to you. This has been a momentous book in so many ways and what's happened over the past two years in the world, in the church, in my own heart, has just been remarkable.

So it's with a lot of reflection that we come to our final text in Philippians tonight. I invite you to turn to Philippians 4. We're going to read verses 14 through 23. Philippians 4:14-23. As the Apostle Paul is doing a bit of reflecting of his own as he comes to the end of this letter, it's comforting to me to see the apostle reflecting and looking back even as he's finishing this letter to Philippians when that's what's kind of on my own heart right now. Philippians 4, beginning in verse 14, Paul says this, he says,

14 Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. 15 You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; 16 for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. 17 Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. 18 But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. 19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen. 21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

In times past, I might have tried to take two or three messages to go through a text like this, but not tonight. This is part of the change that Philippians has wrought in me, and we're just going to kind of treat this in an overview fashion and glean some important things from it without being unnecessarily tedious in the process.

We saw last time, the last time that we were in Philippians which goes back a couple of weeks, just the way the pulpit fell, we saw that Paul found strength in Christ and he found contentment in all things because of his union with Christ. Look back at verse 11 with me, he said,

11 Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

And as you look at the context there in verses 11 and 12 as he's talking about "whatever circumstances I'm in, whether it's humble circumstance or prosperous circumstances, whether I'm hungry or whether I'm filled," it gives us a sense that in all of life, Paul has found the secret to Christian self-sufficiency. Not in a proud, arrogant, boastful way or an unloving way, but Paul has found the secret that allows him to draw inner contentment no matter what the external circumstances of life may be so that whether he has an abundance or whether he's in poverty, whether his friends are with him or his friends are opposed to him, there is this steady, consistent contentment that he finds by being in Christ and belonging to Christ that transcends every circumstance, that is the consistent factor in all of life so that when he says, "I can do all things," he's saying, "I can face all circumstances through Christ who strengthens me."

We made the point that this is a much abused verse, often taken out of context. This is not a promise that you can do whatever you set your mind to as long as you quote this verse. That's ridiculous. None of us are going to be President of the United States, none of us are likely to be Olympian gold medalists or anything like that and it's just not true that we can do absolutely anything and everything. And so that's not what this verse is talking about, about earthly self-fulfillment and self-accomplishment, rather it's talking about, "I am satisfied. I am satisfied no matter what life brings to me because I draw my strength from Christ and that gives me a sense of independence from what is happening around me, and gives me freedom to take whatever life brings with a spirit of contentment." That's what he means when he says, "I can all things through Him who strengthens me." He is drawing his contentment and his strength from an external source, an invisible source in Christ, not from what's happening in the life around him. So that is the context as he comes into verse 14 and what closes out the epistle for us.

I'm going to break this message into two sections here tonight where he speaks, first of all, about their gift, the gift that they had sent to him, and then we see in the final section, we see about the greetings, about the greetings that he gives to them as he writes and closes out the letter.

One of the things and I'll just kind of jump ahead to remind you of these things, it's easy to lose sight and to forget that the New Testament epistles and this letter to Philippians, these were rooted in real relationships in the context of a local church. There were real people that were receiving this letter from Paul, and there were real brothers and sisters in Christ who had met his need, and he knew them, he knew them by face and he spoke with them as those that he knew and that he cared about. And as he wrote from this Roman prison, he sends greetings from real people. Look there at the end of verse 21, "The

brethren who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household."

This book, this letter is not, this is not an abstract theological discourse that he's writing. He's not writing a term paper here. And it's sad, in some ways, the way that people are trained for ministry, it's often reduced to term papers and things like that divorced from the reality of relationships within the local church. That's not healthy and it causes men to approach Scripture and spiritual things in an academic disinterested way that is totally foreign to the context and the spirit of a letter like this that is premised on the reality of relationships within the local body of Christ. So Paul as he writes this, is writing to people that he knew, that he loved, and he has a genuine pastoral affection for them, and that flavors everything that he says here in this closing section.

So let's look, first of all, about their gift. Let's look at his closing comments about their gift and what he says is this, what he's saying in this section of Scripture is, he's saying he was grateful for their gift. He was grateful for their gift but he was never dependent upon it. His well-being and his satisfaction in life were independent of whether they gave a gift to him or not. So look at verse 14. He's established his self-sufficiency and, again, we mean that in a godly way, not in an arrogant, isolating way, but he finds his satisfaction in Christ. He has his sufficiency in Christ and because of that, there was a sense in which he could have done without the gift because he was satisfied already in Christ, but he needs to go on and explain in love on a horizontal plane that he was not dismissing what they had done. No, not at all. That was not his point at all. So he says in verse 14,

14 Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction.

And so he says, "While I am self-sufficient, let me add and clarify that what you have done is a good thing by sending the gift that you sent to me. You have shared with me in my affliction." What he's doing here is he's clarifying his intent of what he is saying so that he's not misunderstood. It's not that their gift was unnecessary, they had responded to a very real need that he had, and for that Paul was grateful. He was grateful for the need, he just wants them to understand that his gratitude extends far beyond the financial gift. It wasn't just that now he had a new resource at his disposal, the gift was symbolized, the gift represented a spiritual reality that is tied into that relational aspect of life in the local church that I was alluding to earlier. What their gift had done was this, it showed that they loved him enough to share in his affliction with them. They were partners in the gospel and they were partners in affliction. There is a spiritual ongoing dynamic to their relationship that far transcends the financial gift that they had sent.

Look back at chapter 1, verse 5, here. Chapter 1, verse 5, he's thanking God for them, "in view," chapter 1, verse 5, "in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now." And so they had been with him over a period of a decade, loving him and being involved with his ministry. And so he goes on and says and he reminds them of the context as he gives them this reflection on the history of their relationship. He says in verse 15,

15 You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; 16 for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.

He says, "Your current gift is a reminder of the long history that we have had together," and he says, "that's sweet to me, that is precious to me." And he uses the terms that he's using here, they are accounting terms that are used here, this matter of giving and receiving. It seems like perhaps Paul kept records of the financial support that he received, and what he's saying is, "Philippians, you supported me in my needs. You have an impressive track record of faithfulness to me and to my ministry and I am grateful for the partnership that we have shared together in the ministry of the gospel."

So even though they hadn't been able to supply him for a long period of time, they had revived their interest and had opportunity once again to serve him, and now he is giving thanks to them. And that brings me to a point where I want to pause for just a moment and say something about spiritual service, spiritual gifts in the church. You know, a lot of people get hung up on trying to identify exactly what their gift is and what they, you know, and what they think their service is and how do I find my gift, and people used to survey, maybe they still do, I don't pay attention to these trends in the church, but, you know, people used to take surveys and fill out multiple choice questionnaires to try to identify the gift and, beloved, I just want to tell you that's all a waste of time and it's a really bad approach to life in the local body because the whole mindset there is let me figure out what I have and focusing on, you know, on taking all of these tests and things to figure out what's in you. It doesn't have to be that way and at Truth Community Church it's not like that and I'm really grateful because you are not like this.

Spiritual service in the church does not have to be complex and it is not complex and it should not be complex. It's as simple as this, it's as simple as this and I've said this I think in the FOF class in months gone by. If you want to exercise spiritual giftedness in the church, here's what you do. There are six words here. You can write them down if you want but I think they're going to be pretty easy to remember. This is what it boils down to: see a need, meet a need. If you see a need and you have the capacity to do it, meet the need. And if you practice that on an ongoing basis, it's going to become obvious how God has gifted you as you come to opportunities and you find joy in serving in a particular way, or as people respond to the way that you serve them and help them and you see that it's having a positive impact. Beloved, it occurs in the context not of a questionnaire but in the context of real people with real needs and you have the opportunity to meet them, and this is a far more beautiful way for people to exercise love and giftedness in the context of a local body than trying to find things in the same way as if you were applying for a job at a secular corporation that wants to give you a personality test. This is ridiculous and that is not the way that it is done.

And I want to say this because I feel very strongly about this and I want to encourage some of you that need to hear this word of appreciation from me even on behalf of the elders. There are a lot of people in our church, and one of them is sitting right here just to

my right, who don't hold any particular office in the church, that aren't assigned to any particular responsibility, but consistently what you find them doing as you watch what's happening is that they find somebody that's alone or lonely and they're going and they're being with them and they're talking to them and greeting with them and sitting with them and all of that, and just out of the love that is embedded in their heart by the Holy Spirit, they exercise that love without anybody telling them what to do, without having a title to do it, it's just out of this spirit of love that animates true Christianity in the context of a local church. And that is just profoundly valuable and it is profoundly important and I would take one man or woman like that over 5,000 that come waving a paper questionnaire to me and telling me how they're gifted.

And we've had, you know, and I'm getting way off track here but it's the last time I'm in Philippians so who cares. If you want a refund for the admission price, you can see the usher on the way out. And in times past, it doesn't happen so much, it hasn't happened for quite a long time, actually at the start of Truth Community Church this happened constantly and my wife Nancy and I were reflecting on this just a couple of weeks ago. When we started the church, when we started Truth Community Church and we were meeting 30 miles down the road in a different facility, something very obvious happens when a new church is formed, it attracts people that are interested for whatever reason, but what invariably happens and I'm being far too candid here for my own good but none of the people that I have in mind are anywhere near our church and they're certainly not in this room, so I can speak this way and make it plain. We're talking about spiritual service and the spirit of love that animates the body of Christ. One of the things that we had to sift through, and I recognize it more in retrospect than I did at the time, is the number of people that came when we were first getting started who had their own agenda about what they wanted out of the church, people who wanted positions of leadership, people who wanted to start ministries that, of course, they would be the ones in charge of, people that had doctrinal agendas and things like that, and looking to leverage the early infancy of a new church to their own advantage. And I'm telling you, that was and that is the reality that often takes place when a new work is getting started, people see it as a means to advance their own agenda. And the number of people that put loaded books in my hands saying, "Here, you need to read this. It's my gift to you. It's my gift to you because I'm trying to redirect the future of this fellowship."

Well, the whole point that I'm making here and belaboring with such bloated verbiage here, is this, is that people were coming not because they were eager to serve others in love in the body, they were coming because they wanted to accomplish something that they had a pre-existing agenda for, and that is not the spirit of love and that is not the spirit in which a New Testament church should be done. And it was just pervasive and I look back and it was a remarkable grace of God that he protected us from that in the early years of our body. You know, I'll go to my grave being profoundly grateful to God for that. If the people with the agenda had gotten their hands on the steering wheel, Truth Community Church probably wouldn't be here today, and it certainly wouldn't look anything like the lovely place it is with all of you here to share in it together. Because when a church is being driven by people with an agenda of self rather than an agenda of

love for the sake of others in the name of Christ, you go in completely different directions and I don't think that would be a good thing and so that's why I want to belabor the point.

Here in the book of Philippians, you see Paul being self-sufficient and not looking for anything from anybody, you have a group of believers in the local church at Philippi who are selflessly giving for his benefit without expecting anything in return, and that, beloved, is the spirit in which a local church thrives because that is the spirit of Christ, that is the spirit of the Christ described in Philippians 2 who humbled himself by becoming obedient even to the point of death, even death on a cross. And it is that spirit of Christ that gives rise to the admonitions of doing nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind regarding one another as more important than yourselves. You see, this is really really crucial. This is at the very core of what a church is about. And what we see, having seen the principles in chapters 2 and chapters 3, we now see the practical outworking of it here in chapter 4.

So what Paul is expressing here when he says this, when he says there in verse 16, "even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs." Look at verse 17,

17 Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.

What Paul is saying is this, he says, "You did so well to send that gift to me." It was an expression of love and what he's saying is that, "It's not that I wanted the gift and it's not that I'm rejoicing over the gift per se, not the gift in itself. Instead, what I'm rejoicing in is the fact that you are going to reap spiritual reward from your selfless gift to me. I am seeking the fruit of your eternal reward." He says, "You are storing up rewards in heaven and that's what I'm rejoicing about, that's why I'm so joyful over your gift, not because it improves my material circumstance but it improves your spiritual reward from the Lord Himself."

So he summarizes his reaction to them in a final word of commendation here in verse 18. He says,

18 But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

When he says "I have an abundance," he's saying, "Please don't send anymore. You don't need to send anymore. I have everything that I need and far more so don't feel the responsibility to send even more to me. All of my needs have been met. You do not need to strain anymore, you don't need to send anyone else. I have all I need and so much more beside." Do you see the richness of this? Do you see the selflessness on both sides? That's what I want you to see. In some ways, this is the climax for us as we study this book as a local body. Paul selflessly says, "You don't need to provide anything more to me." That's after they had selflessly sent a generous gift for his benefit. There's just selflessness all the way around. They were putting Paul ahead of themselves and he is putting them

ahead of himself just like Christ put us ahead of himself when he came down from heaven and lived among men, went to the cross and offered his life as an atoning sacrifice for sinners just like you and me.

This is what Christianity is like, beloved. This is the spirit of it all in the context of a local church. It's not about selfishly pursuing your own agenda like the guy who came with practically, not a literal written list but he had a list in his mind of everything that was going to happen at Truth Community Church as soon as he got wedged into what we were doing. No. No. No. And it's not because the ideas aren't good, it's because the whole spirit is wrong of coming into a local body with your own agenda. That's not the point. And in like manner, some of you having come from churches that are full of rules and, you know, legalistic requirements of what you want to do and it just instantly sucks the life out of you when you start falling into that mindset, do this, don't do that, and the spirit of selfless love and giving and sacrifice are absent from it as long as there's external compliance with the social culture of a church, then everything's okay. Pfft. That's what I think about that. That's a Greek term, by the way, pfft. I mean, I feel these things pretty deeply, that's why I respond this way, you know, as we come to the end of the book. You know, the agendas and the legalism and the external things will suck a church dry and you're just left with the withered shell of the orange peel with no juice inside it to give you nutrients and refreshment from it. And it's because we don't want that to happen here, that I belabor the point as we bring this book to a close.

So Paul in his selflessness, look at it there again in verse 18, he crowns his expression of self-sufficiency and gratitude with this expressive affirmation of what they had done on his behalf. He says, "I have received what you sent from Epaphroditus. It was a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice. It was well-pleasing to God." He is using the language of Old Testament sacrifice to affirm them. Their gift to Paul was a sacrifice that had pleased God himself. It was in keeping with the spirit of the Christ that he had been speaking about in chapters 2 and 3 so much so, picture yourself in the Philippian sandals and you're receiving this letter and you dug deep into your own pocket in order to contribute to that gift of Paul, and collectively we had sent this gift to our beloved apostle, and now in response we get this letter from Paul saying, "You've been like this for a decade with me. More than once you've sent gifts to my need. I am so grateful to you. You are partners in my ministry." And it's here in verse 18 in the climax, it's as if he is saying to them, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. You've done well. You've pleased Christ with what you have done. I'm on the beneficiary end of that and this is just a culmination of a lifetime of love that you have given to me and that we've shared together." It's kind of sweet, isn't it? And you see something of the essence of real Christianity, real body life in the midst of it.

And let me just add one other word of distinction, one other word of distinction here. This is totally foreign to the whole spirit that the church exists as an entertainment center for people who come in and crank up the music and turn down the lights and get the strobes going and all of that. None of that has anything, that's so foreign to what we're reading here. It's so foreign to it and it's so foreign to so many of the other things that, you know, you and I have seen in church life over the course of our lifetimes.

And so what we want to do here as we're wrapping up this book of Philippians is see this essence of love in the midst of it, appreciate it and aim our hearts and aim the thoughts and intentions of our body after this. And one of the things that enables this to happen is that, you know, we come together and we stay together. You know, we stay when things get hard and we persevere through it together. We don't leave at the first time that someone insults us or someone distracts us in a service, or someone does something else that is contrary to what we want. There's a deeper, more abiding commitment that transcends things like that and we don't lightly leave the blessing of what has been given to us here. It's not because we have to stay, it's because we want to stay, and we want to stay for the sake of Christ and we want to stay for the sake of each other, and to have this sense that, you know, I'm here for you and hopefully you're here for me, not personally me but the way that we think about and consider each other. And you know, there are things that happen as a result of long-term commitment that cannot happen when people and congregations jump from church to church and, you know, never set down roots in any one place.

Well, that makes me really excited about what lies ahead for a church like this where people like you have manifested a desire, "You know, I'm going to set my roots here and I'm going to stay. I'm going to be here." You know, and the time will come, I'm being far too personal and reflective here but, you know, whatever. You know, the time will come, we haven't had much of this yet in Truth Community Church because of the dynamic of our younger demographic, but the time will come when we're laying, we start laying each other to rest, you know, and we say goodbye as we pass from life into our eternal reward, and those times and I know this from experience from my prior ministry, those times are profoundly sweet when you've been with people for a long long period of time.

And you know, and let me just say this by way of, you know, by way of an offer of Christ to you that maybe are here and you don't know Christ, maybe you're finding you've been here for a while and you find, do you know what? The spirit of that is utterly foreign to my heart. Well, the whole reason that Christ came was to extend love to unworthy sinners like you, to provide a way for you to be reconciled with God, and that in love and in a selfless sacrifice of himself at the cross, he laid himself down and took the punishment of God for every sinner who would ever believe in him and receive him for eternal life. Is that you? Do you know Christ like that? Have you forsaken self, forsaken the world, repented of sin, and turned and just embraced Christ and all of the loving goodness of grace that he offers and extends to you? "Come to Me, you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. I am the door. He who enters through Me will find heavenly reward. No one comes to the Father except through Me. I am the way, the truth, and the life." Do you know Christ like that because everything that we're talking about of the spirit of love in a local church is an overflow of that prior vertical response to Christ and receiving new life from his hand. There is a supernatural dimension and a supernatural aspect to life in a true local church. It's not explained simply by human means or human calculation or human marketing, God forbid.

Well, having affirmed them like this, Paul gives them a promise there in verse 19. He says this, he says,

19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

It's possible that the gift that they had sent to Paul had been sacrificial and had left them in a position of need themselves out of their abundant love for Paul, that they had given beyond their needs and perhaps now they were left with needs of their own. What Paul is saying to them is, "After a gift like that, let me promise you that God's going to provide for you as well. You need not worry. You can have confidence going forward that just as you met my need, God in His infinite riches and grace will supply your needs as well."

And look at the extent of the provision. Look at the extent of the provision, "my God will supply all your needs," by what standard, according to what standard, "according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." In the infinite resources of God, in the immeasurable grace and goodness by which he deals with his own, out of the fullness of the infinite storehouses of the spiritual grain that he has to feed his people, God is going to supply for you and care for you going forward in a way that can give you rest and confidence and certainty about what the future holds. "God will deal with you abundantly," is what Paul says to them. "You have dealt abundantly with me, God is going to deal abundantly with you." So there is this pervasive, all-encompassing spirit of love and provision and adequacy and sufficiency that is rooted in Christ and that the believers in Christ share together in a way that makes life in the body exceedingly exceedingly sweet.

So he closes with a doxology there in verse 20. He says,

20 Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The doxology flows. The people of God had been faithful to Paul and Paul just redirects that to the glory of God and their faithfulness to Paul is now an expression of the faithfulness of God to his people, the whole idea being that the consistent care of God, the faithful provision of God in every material, spiritual and relational way to his people should just evoke this ongoing sense of gratitude and giving glory to God from believers everywhere. And that's one of the things that, you know, as you have a local church that is rooted and grounded in love, ultimately when this is operating in the realm and in the power of the Holy Spirit there's this collective sense of giving glory to God and reflecting glory back to him. And there's so much gratitude in our hearts as we see the manifestation of his love horizontally that it causes us to look up vertically and give the glory to him and that's what Paul is doing there in verse 20. "God, You get all the glory for this. All of this is to Your praise and honor."

And think with me for a moment, beloved, it couldn't be any other way than the fact that we end up giving all of the glory to God. Where did we get, where did we get the spiritual provisions that we rejoice in when we come together? Is it not from the fact that individually God has worked in our hearts, shed the love of Christ abroad by the power of

the Holy Spirit, and he has changed and transformed us individually? And then he somehow providentially brings us into contact with others that he has done a like work in, and then we find that we have common interests and we share the love of Christ together and relationships start to be rooted and to build and to grow and flourish in result of that. And just the splendor of the kindness and the goodness and the patience and the love that we share with one another when we recognize this is all a gift from God, and so ultimately the thanks goes to him. It's not that we praise each other and let it stop there, Paul gives thanks to the Philippians and then he says ultimately the glory of all of this is to God alone.

So that's about the gift. Let's go to the second section here as we bring this to a close about the greetings. Let's speak about the greetings for just a moment here. So the letter ends with the exchange of several personal greetings there in the last three verses. Paul asks the leaders of the church, he says,

21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus.

He says, "I want them all to hear a word of greeting from me." And by the same token, by similar token he say,

The brethren who are with me greet you.

"There are Christians here that are with me, they want you to receive their greeting. They're thinking about you. They're praying for and they send this note of love to you." And he expands it there in verse 22 when he says,

22 All the saints greet you [with an interesting little addition there], especially those of Caesar's household.

The word "every" here shows his particular concern for each individual believer and we know that as he wrote this, Timothy and Epaphroditus were with him, he was going to send Epaphroditus out with the letter that we now have and that we're reading, and there are other faithful Christians that are with him that are included in that general closing greeting as well.

Look back at chapter 1, verse 16. He's speaking of those who are preaching the word of God during the course of his imprisonment and there were some in verse 15, chapter 1, verse 1, that were doing it from ill motives, but he says, "but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel." And so there were unnamed faithful Christians that were included in this closing greeting here in verse 21, "The brethren who are with me greet you."

Then this idea of Caesar's household, this is probably a reference to support staff and people like that that worked and served in Caesar's administration or in his household. Most commentators do not think it's a reference to Caesar's personal family itself, but we

know that some who were close and within Caesar's circle of influence, that they had come to Christ.

Look back again at chapter 1, verse 12, that the imprisonment of Paul had become an occasion for the spread of the gospel so that in chapter 1, verse 12, he says, "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else." In the providence of God, by isolating Paul and stopping him and keeping him in one place, the effect of that was that a circle of influential people had come into contact with the gospel that otherwise never would have heard. Paul was kept in place by God in the providence of God and under house arrest and the result of that was that the circle of people close to Caesar were hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ right there in the first century. It would be as though somebody was confined to the White House and the whole circle of the presidential administration came to hear the gospel as a result of it. Wouldn't that be great?

So Paul was in chains. He was a prisoner. Let me remind you of this. Chapter 1, verse 14 he says, "most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment." Verse 7, "in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me." You see this theme of imprisonment again and again. Paul was in chains – watch this, beloved – Paul was in chains but the gospel was not. Paul was in prison but the gospel had free reign to soar on eagles' wings by the power of the Holy Spirit as God accomplished the work of sending forth the word about his Son without fail. The gospel was spreading even though Paul was confined.

So Paul by this point has said everything that he needed to say. He had spoken to them about the importance of walking in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ after he had updated them about his personal circumstances in the first half of chapter 1. He had called them to unity in the church based on the humility and exaltation of Christ and therefore put away grumbling and disputing. He had spoken to them and warned them against false teachers who premised their message of religion on self-works and self-righteousness. Paul rejected all of that in chapter 3 and said our righteousness is in Christ alone. And he had pointed them to their eternal hope when he said, "Our citizenship is in heaven," Philippians 3:20. And after all of those things, he said all that he needs to say, and with that we have an informed view of the simplicity of his closing words as he summarizes all that we need in the simple language of the final verse 23 there. He says,

23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

He invokes the favor of Christ upon them. "May Christ in His exalted glory, Christ from His throne in heaven, may Christ show favor to you now and forevermore as we look into the future." And when he says that, beloved, he ends the letter exactly where he started it. Look back at chapter 1, verse 2. So often you see this in Paul's letters and other New Testament epistles, it comes back right to where it started, so that in chapter 1, verse 2, he said, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." He ends on that same note of grace as he concludes the letter in its final verse.

Well, Paul has bid them a fond farewell and now we bid the book of Philippians a fond farewell. It has grounded us in humility and in church unity. It's grounded us in the righteousness of Christ, not our own. It has grounded us in prayer, not in anxiety. And so we see with a fresh and final and over-viewing and concluding sense the promise and exhortation of chapter 4, verses 8 and 9, and this is where we'll end our exposition after such a very long time and bow with me in prayer as we make this our concluding remarks on the book. As you think about the things that have been said tonight and the things in the message of the book of Philippians,

8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. 9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Father, may You indeed, You the God of peace, may You be with us now and forevermore as we look to Your gracious hand for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to be with our spirit. Amen.

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