



# PHILIPPIANS

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## **Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.** Philippians 1:24

Paul has been expressing in writing his struggle between his desire to depart this life and be with Christ, and that of continuing on in this life in order to bear fruit for the gospel. It is as if his mental struggle will actually be determined by the words he writes. And in reality, this is the case. He is writing under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and so one can see the duality of how Scripture comes about in his conflict. There is the carnal man who is thinking out his thoughts as a carnal man, unsure about what lies ahead, and revealing his own thoughts and desires. And then there is the inspired prophet of God who is being led, as if a ship directed by the wind through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The man's thoughts remain his, and they are expressed clearly, and yet the Holy Spirit's will is what takes precedence in order to bring us God's word. Paul is not the only one where this is seen. Rather, throughout the Bible, we see exactly this occurring, time and time again. Even a cursory read through Isaiah, Daniel, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, or any of the other prophetic writings will show this to be the case. Because it is also true with Paul, he now writes the words of this verse, "Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you."

He had no idea which option to choose, but the Holy Spirit did. He wrote what he knew in his inner being because of the Spirit's prompting. Despite the conflict, he yielded to the Spirit – "Nevertheless." In so yielding, the oracle came through – he would "remain in the flesh." This was what God had determined, and this is what would come to pass. He would not go to be with the Lord at this time, but rather he would remain in his earthly body. And the reason is that it was "more needful for" those he ministered to at Philippi and elsewhere.

This need was certainly 1) to ensure that all of the word of God which was to come from his pen would, in fact, come. And, 2) to ensure that those he had brought to Christ would be prepared for the time when he was no longer with them. This is seen, for example, in the words he spoke to those of the Ephesian church in Acts 20 –

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” Acts 20:28-31

For these, and whatever other reasons, Paul was inspired to write the words of this verse. It should not be considered unusual that the Spirit impelled him in this way. As noted above, this type of dual working between the man and the Spirit is found throughout Scripture. If there was ever a conflict or misunderstanding between the two, the Spirit would prevail. Jeremiah shows us a marvelous example of this –

““O Lord, You induced me, and I was persuaded;  
You are stronger than I, and have prevailed.  
I am in derision daily;  
Everyone mocks me.  
8 For when I spoke, I cried out;  
I shouted, “Violence and plunder!”  
Because the word of the Lord was made to me  
A reproach and a derision daily.  
9 Then I said, “I will not make mention of Him,  
Nor speak anymore in His name.”  
But His word was in my heart like a burning fire  
Shut up in my bones;  
I was weary of holding it back,  
And I could not.””” Jeremiah 20:7-9

Jeremiah strived against the word of the Lord, and the Spirit of God prevailed in the struggle. Paul was unsure of what would happen in his future, but the Spirit settled the matter with the word which he uttered and which was confirmed by the issue of ink from the pen held in the scribe’s hand.

Life application: We don't know the future, but God does. Let us not worry about what lies ahead, but rather let us trust that His plan will unfold exactly as it should. God's plan cannot be thwarted. As it is a good plan, let it come and have no fear as it does.

**And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, Philipians 1:25**

As noted in the previous verse, there is a hint of the overriding of the Spirit in Paul's words. He may not be speaking as if he is fully aware of the matter in his human nature, and yet his words are being directed by the Spirit. This is evidenced by the fact that they are included in the pages of the Bible. There are other times where Paul spoke of the future as if he was certain of a matter, and yet his words were proven incorrect. This occurs when the narrative is speaking about what he is saying, and it is intended to show that he and the other apostles and prophets were not fully aware of the future in their humanity. And yet, when writing or prophesying, they were guided by the Spirit. It is an amazing thing to see unfold in Scripture!

In this feeling of surety which is both lacking in his humanity, and yet prophetic because of the prompting of the Spirit, he states, "And being confident of this..." In these words, he yields himself to the prompting which is from the Spirit. Again, this must be the case as the words are now included in Scripture. And yet, other scholars disagree and state that he is simply voicing a confidence which is one of continued uncertainty. Because of this, the next words have to be somewhat manipulated. He says, "I know that I shall remain and continue with you all."

Albert Barnes states, "The word "know," however, ... is not to be pressed as denoting absolute necessity - for it appears from Philipians 1:27 and Philipians 2:17, that there was some ground for doubt whether he would live - but is to be taken in a popular sense, as denoting good courage, and an earnest hope that he would be permitted to live and visit them." This is a possible explanation of Paul's words, but it does not coincide with the conflict which he was struggling with. It was suddenly resolved with the words of this verse. Further, if Paul had instead died, the words which he wrote, as part of an epistle of doctrine to the Philipians, would have been proven false. Such would not be the case if it was inspired by the Spirit.

And so, in his confidence, he notes that he will continue with these disciples "for your progress and joy of faith." It was necessary for their continued doctrinal education that he stay. The Spirit had so indicated it, and he came to realize that this was true. And in receiving this, it would strengthen their joy of faith. Faith is something we possess in varying measure. When our faith is weak, our joy in what our faith is directed to is weak. But when our faith is strong, our joy in what it is directed to is also strong.

If we are certain of the outcome of a presidential race, having faith that our candidate will win, we will be joyous in that fact. However, as the odds of probability drop, so will our level of joy in what lies ahead. Paul understood that he had not yet given the full measure of doctrinal knowledge out that would be necessary for full joy and confidence in the work of the Lord. And so, as led by the Spirit, he assured his audience (and thus us!) that he would continue on until that work was complete.

Life application: If the surety of our “joy of faith” is based on our knowledge of the work of Christ, and if that knowledge is only imparted to us in the pages of Scripture, then why on earth would we not want to know this marvelous body of doctrine completely and perfectly? How sad it is that Christians waffle in their faith because they are not well-grounded in the word of that faith! Whose fault is it then when we struggle with life’s uncertainties? Read the word! Study to show yourself approved!

**...that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.** Philippians 1:26

This verse is to be taken together with the previous verse for context –

“And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, 26 that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.”

Paul, led by the prompting of the Spirit, was confident that he would live and not die at this time. This would then result in the rejoicing of those in Philippi “in Jesus Christ.” The rejoicing in Him is the full result of what would occur, but it would also be in Paul’s return to them.

The translation is not literal, but it catches the intent of what is being said. This, unlike that of the KJV, which does not convey the correct meaning. The Greek of the verse says, “..in Jesus Christ in me through my coming again to you.” There is a parallelism in the repetition of the use of “in” by Paul to show that even though the presence of Paul is the immediate cause of their joy, it is a joy which has arisen out of the fact that Christ Jesus lives in him. They would rejoice “in Jesus Christ” for what had come about.

This verse shows us that it is acceptable to rejoice in the accomplishments, or even in the presence, of another. However, that rejoicing needs to be considered in light of the greater rejoicing which comes through Christ who dwells in that person.

In other words, we can rejoice in a great preacher of the gospel. However, it is that Christ is in him that the rejoicing finds its fullest sense. The use of the parallel “in” is thus instructive. In

the end, all rejoicing finds its true home in the Lord. In the case of Paul, the Philippian church would receive its joy when he was released to come to them again, and it would be a rejoicing in him and in Christ Jesus.

Life application: Rejoicing in the Lord is good. Let's do it today!

**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, Philippians 1:27**

Paul has just penned his certainty that he will remain in his earthly body and continue with those at Philippi "for progress and joy of faith." After this, he noted that this rejoicing would abound "in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again." Having said that, he now gives words of exhortation for them to consider.

He begins with "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ." The word he uses for "your conduct" is politeuomai. It specifically means, "to live as a citizen." Most translations make this word to indicate "conduct" or "manner of life," but Paul was probably thinking more on the idea of citizenship itself. Thus, the NLT translates this verse as –

"Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ." NLT

The word is only used elsewhere in Acts 23:1 where Paul was thinking on the same terms. He was a citizen of Rome and had exercised his citizenship as a Roman to make an appeal for his case directly to Caesar. Therefore, he was living his citizenship in Rome, as well as his citizenship in heaven, in order to meet the goals of the gospel. This is certainly what he is thinking now, because he uses a variant of this word again in verse 3:20 where he says, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ..."

In this letter to Philippi, he is writing to a location mostly inhabited by Roman citizens. This is because Philippi was a Roman colony. He had even declared his own Roman citizenship there in Acts 16 –

"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.'" Acts 16:37

Understanding this, we can see that in his words to this group, he was reminding them that even if some of them were Roman citizens, they had a higher citizenship by which they should conduct their lives. He then explains the reason for this – “...so that whether I come and see you or am absent, that you stand fast in one spirit.” There was to be no division among them based on their earthly status.

Those who were citizens of Rome were to be in the same spirit with those who were slaves. The principle passes down to us today. We are to be united without regard to social status, fame, or any other lesser division. Rather, we are to be “in one spirit.” The spirit is the higher connection to God which comes through faith in Christ. A person who is not in Christ is “dead” in his spirit, but through Christ, the spirit is quickened to life and the connection to God is repaired to the state it was originally intended to be. In this spiritual connection, believers are to be united as one.

Further, he notes that they are to be “with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” The word translated as “mind” here is *psuché*. It refers specifically to the “soul.” As the spirit is the higher connection to God, the soul is the human connection to one another. In essence, we could think of Paul’s intent here as – “Let your spiritual connection to God be as one, and let your earthly lives strive together for the faith of the gospel.” There was to be a uniting of their spiritual and earthly efforts for harmony among one another, and for that harmony to be employed in their earthly conduct in order to build one another up in the faith.

Life application: There is nothing wrong with living out our earthly lives as citizens of the country in which we live, as long as we realize that our true citizenship is in heaven. The earthly citizenship should never be conducted without considering the heavenly. And this goes for personal conduct as well as interactions with other believers.

**...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.** Philippians 1:28

Paul just spoke of their need to “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” He now adds to this by saying, “and not in any way terrified by your adversaries.” The word translated as “terrified” is found only here in the Bible. It means to be terrified as if a horse when frightened. It is then a mind of terror and confusion.

We are not to be startled and terrified in such a way when facing our adversaries. For those in Philippi, they had both the Judaizers and the pagans as their enemies. These people came at them in hopes of terrifying them, probably to undermine their faith so that they would then follow them, as a horse is eventually subdued and led away. But he has already told them to

“stand fast” and to be “striving together.” In so doing, they will not be susceptible to being so terrified.

Their ability to not be terrified in this way was to be “to them a proof of perdition.” Their enemies were on the wrong path, and in their inability to shake the resolve of the faithful, it was to demonstrate that fact. This would leave them with two choices:

- 1) They could repent of their ways and turn to the truth of Christ, or
- 2) they could continue down the path to perdition, meaning condemnation and an eternal swim in the Lake of Fire.

And not only was this a proof of their perdition, but it was also a proof of the believer’s state concerning salvation. If one stands fast, there must be something that they are standing fast on. If they were “striving together for the sake of the gospel,” it means that they were aware of the gospel, they understood its meaning and ramifications, and they were able to keep it faithfully.

These two things, the fear of perdition for those opposed to the gospel, and the hope of salvation for those who were saved by the gospel, are tokens “from God.” The one will stand as a witness against the lost when they stand before Him, and the other will stand as a witness for the saved when they come before Him. The gospel is the token of condemnation for some and of salvation for others. It is like the pillar of cloud described by Moses –

“Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night.” Exodus 14:20

Life application: Don’t be led astray by universalist teachings which say that everyone eventually goes to heaven. That is proven false here, and in numerous other verses of Scripture. It is a heretical lie. Stand fast on the gospel which says that only those who come to Christ will be saved.