

**“DO I  
REALLY UNDERSTAND  
THE GOSPEL?”**

from the book  
of

**Philippians**

### **A few things to note before launching in:**

- ◆ The comments in italics below the scriptures are an attempt to capture the meaning of each scripture and provide a running commentary in more contemporary terms.
- ◆ There are summaries on most pages to bring out the message of the book as clearly and concisely as possible.
- ◆ The scriptures are all taken from the Revised English Bible translation, to add a slightly different flavour.

The church at Philippi was a joy for Paul because the gospel & its progress meant as much to them as it did to him:

**Philippians 1:3** - “I thank my God every time I think of you; (4) whenever I pray for you all, my prayers are always joyful, (5) because of the part you have taken in the work of the gospel from the first day until now. (6) Of this I am confident, that he who started the good work in you will bring it to completion by the day of Christ Jesus”

✓ *Paul deeply appreciated the church at Philippi for their constant support in the work of the gospel. God had clearly been at work in them from the moment they first got involved, so Paul had no doubts that God would complete in them what he'd started (which he explains as his letter progresses) -*

**Philippians 1:7** - “It is only natural that I should feel like this about you all, because I have great affection for you, knowing that, both while I am kept in prison and when I am called on to defend the truth of the gospel, you all share in this privilege of mine”

✓ *Paul also deeply loved these people personally for their enthusiastic support for him. To Paul it was a huge privilege to be put in prison because of the gospel, or to be out there defending it in the streets, but what a boost it was having an entire church behind him who felt the same way he did -*

**Philippians 1:8** - “God knows how I long for you all with the deep yearning of Christ Jesus himself. (9) And this is my prayer, that your love may grow ever richer in knowledge and insight of every kind, (10) enabling you to learn by experience what things really matter. Then on the day of Christ you will be flawless and without blame, (11) yielding the full harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God”

✓ *Paul's great wish for them was the same as Jesus Christ's - that their love for God & his plan through Christ would grow ever richer as they understood & experienced that plan unfolding in their own lives. To Paul, what really mattered in this human life of ours is experiencing God gradually filling us with ALL of Christ's mind & heart so that one day, when Christ returns, we can stand before him absolutely faultless. It was a RICHNESS in that experience, therefore, that Paul prayed for, that the Philippian church would grow to really understand & love ALL that God had made possible for them through Jesus Christ -*

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| <p>Paul loved what God was doing in the church at Philippi. They clearly understood the gospel &amp; enthusiastically supported Paul in preaching it. Paul knew, therefore, that God would continue to enrich their understanding &amp; their experience of what was theirs through Christ.</p> |
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**CHECKPOINT No.1** - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

1) My love for God is growing ever richer as:

a) I see what he's up to - he's got his sights on the day of Christ's coming & he's making sure we're ready for it by bringing about a "full harvest of righteousness" in our lives.

b) I see him at work doing exactly that in MY life - giving me the confidence that he will complete in me what he started.

2) My desire to see others understand what God is up to through Jesus Christ is growing, too - *which is exactly how Paul felt because* -

To Paul, spreading the news of God's plan was all that mattered:

**Philippians 1:12** - "My friends, I want you to understand that the progress of the gospel has actually been helped by what has happened to me. (13) It has become common knowledge throughout the imperial guard, and indeed among the public at large, that my imprisonment is in Christ's cause; (14) and my being in prison has given most of our fellow-Christians confidence to speak the word of God fearlessly and with extraordinary courage"

✓ *Paul discovered to his delight that being in prison didn't stop the gospel progressing. Word soon spread to the prison guards & to many others that Christ was the reason he'd been imprisoned, but it was the impact on many of his fellow Christians that was so heartening. When they too realized that the gospel would spread no matter what happened to them personally, it was just what they needed to get THEM out there & preach up a storm, as well -*

**Philippians 1:15** - "Some, it is true, proclaim Christ in a jealous and quarrelsome spirit, but some do it in goodwill. (16) These are moved by love, knowing that it is to defend the gospel that I am where I am; (17) the others are moved by selfish ambition and present Christ from mixed motives, meaning to cause me distress as I lie in prison. (18) What does it matter? One way or another, whether sincerely or not, Christ is proclaimed; and for that I rejoice"

✓ *Some preached to support Paul, but others preached to compete against him. Paul wasn't the least bit offended or upset, though, by those who tried to lift themselves up by putting him down. They could be jealous, mean-spirited & ambitious in their motives, but if they were preaching the message about Christ loud & clear, Paul was happy! -*

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| <p>To Paul's delight, it didn't matter what happened to him personally or what people said about him, because the gospel would still spread!<br/>When many of his fellow-Christians also began to realize that nothing stopped the gospel, it gave them enormous courage to spread it, too.</p> |
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**CHECKPOINT No.2** - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:  
1) Like Paul, I find myself becoming quite fearless - because nothing stops the gospel spreading. To be thrown in prison can actually help it spread!  
2) Like Paul, I'm not put off by other Christians preaching the message for wrong motives, so long as the underlying truth about Christ is getting out there - *because* -

To Paul, it was getting the truth out about Christ's greatness that mattered most:

**Philippians 1:18** - "Yes, and I shall go on rejoicing; (19) for I know well that the issue will be my deliverance, because you are praying for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ is given me for support. (20) It is my confident hope that nothing will daunt me or prevent me from speaking boldly; and that now as always Christ will display his greatness in me, whether the verdict be life or death"

✓ *Prison didn't knock the stuffing out of Paul, because he knew the church was praying for his release & Jesus would keep him encouraged in the meanwhile. Release or no release, he had the full support of the church & Jesus Christ, which was all he needed to keep on speaking out boldly with courage & confidence, even if it meant losing his life in the process. So long as the brilliance of Christ shone through him & his preaching, that's all that mattered -*

**Philippians 1:21** - "For to me life is Christ, and death is gain. (22) If I am to go on living in the body there is fruitful work for me to do. Which then am I to choose? I cannot tell. (23) I am pulled two ways: my own desire is to depart and be with Christ - that is better by far; (24) but for your sake the greater need is for me to remain in the body. (25) This convinces me: I am sure I shall remain, and stand by you all to ensure your progress and joy in the faith, (26) so that on my account you may have even more cause for pride in Christ Jesus - through seeing me restored for you"

✓ *Paul also knew the impact on the church if he was released. If he died, it was to his own gain, because he'd be with his beloved Jesus, but to be restored back to the church alive & well would be a great help to them. It would give their confidence in Christ a boost, & it would also enable Paul to keep the church aimed in the right direction so they could experience for themselves the JOY that comes from trusting Christ. Paul was sure, then, that he'd be released, not for his sake, but for theirs. To him, Christ was his life, but so was the church! -*

All Paul wanted was to reveal the greatness of Christ to people. He would, therefore, continue to speak out boldly about Christ, even if it meant losing his life. On the other hand, he knew he could do more good in the church at that stage of its development if he was alive, so he was confident he would be released - for their sakes, not his own.

**CHECKPOINT No.3** - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:  
It matters not if I live or die, because:

- a) If I die for speaking out boldly, I'll be with Christ, & -
  - b) If I'm alive, Christ can use whatever circumstances I'm going through to encourage, embolden or bring joy to the lives of others.
- So, live or die, I cannot lose! - *which is good to know because -*

There will be opposition:

**Philippians 1:27** - "Whatever happens, let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether or not I come and see you for myself I may hear that you are standing firm, united in spirit and in mind, side by side in the struggle to advance the gospel faith, (28) meeting your opponents without so much as a tremor"

✓ *There will be resistance to the gospel, but a Christian knows that "live or die, he cannot lose," so keep pressing on to get the message out there. How? -*

- 1) *By our OWN CONDUCT being "worthy of the gospel," & -*
- 2) *By WORKING TOGETHER in harmony of mind & purpose in the church, & -*
- 3) *By FACING OPPOSITION WITH COURAGE - knowing that none of our opponents' antics can stop the gospel advancing -*

**Philippians 1:28** (continued) - "This is a sure sign to them that destruction is in store for them and salvation for you, a sign from God himself; (29) for you have been granted the privilege not only of believing in Christ but also of suffering for him. (30) Your conflict is the same as mine; once you saw me in it, and now you hear I am in it still"

✓ *To get the gospel out in this world is a struggle & it will involve suffering. To Paul, though, suffering for Christ was a privilege because Christ had given HIM the enormous privilege of understanding the gospel & believing it. It pleased Paul immensely, then, that Christ could USE the problems that his opponents were causing him as a way of furthering the gospel among the general public AND for stirring up his fellow Christians, as well. Suffering, therefore, was not upsetting to Paul; it was a privilege AND an opportunity - as an opener of doors to the public & as a service to Christ & the church. Everything that happened to him turned into some sort of gain for the gospel - a sure sign from God himself that WE are the ULTIMATE WINNERS, not those who oppose us -*

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| <p>Strange as it may seem, there are people who don't want to hear the gospel &amp; they will do whatever they can to oppose it. But God turns their resistance &amp; our suffering into gain, so press on with courage &amp; assurance that Christ, the church &amp; the gospel all win in the end.</p> |
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**CHECKPOINT No.4** - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:  
I can face opposition to the gospel "without so much as a tremor" because:  
a) It's a privilege to suffer for Christ, knowing what Christ has done for me.  
b) It's a struggle but opposition has a way of spreading the gospel - a sure sign from God that it's we who win in the end, not those who oppose us.

### **SUMMARY SO FAR** -

1) Paul could see that God had started something wonderful in the church at Philippi. It showed in their desire to share in the work of the gospel & in their support for Paul personally while he was in prison.

2) With that kind of dedication, Paul knew God was very much involved in their lives. That being the case, Paul knew what journey they were on, where God was leading them & what the guaranteed end result would be. One day Christ would return & God would have them ready with a full harvest of righteousness. In the meantime, their love for God would grow ever richer as their insight into the greatness of Jesus Christ grew.

3) They were gaining courage, too. When they could see that Paul's imprisonment didn't stop the gospel spreading, they began to speak openly about Christ - some admittedly for motives of personal gain, but to Paul it didn't matter, so long as the message about Christ got out there. Nothing would stop him speaking out boldly, either - his heartfelt hope being that Christ would always shine through him, even if it meant being killed for it. He also hoped it wouldn't come to that & that he'd be let out of prison to give the church a boost & enable him to keep on nurturing their trust in Christ so they could stand firm against opposition, not only in their own personal conduct but arm in arm together, too.

4) To not be afraid was a sure sign to Paul that God was with them & not with the opposition. And if they suffered, it was a privilege anyway, because of what Christ had done for them. It gave Paul great pleasure, meanwhile, to watch their courage & their pride in Christ grow as they saw for themselves that nothing could stop the gospel, & nothing could stop Paul, either. There he was, soldiering on as usual, completely unafraid, & so were they! It was all very encouraging.

*Paul could now turn his attention back to Chapter 1:6 & WHAT, exactly, God was "BRINGING TO COMPLETION" in them -*

What a church looks like that takes Christ & his attitude to heart:

**Philippians 2:1** - “If then our common life in Christ yields anything to stir the hearts, any consolation of love, any participation in the Spirit, any warmth of affection or compassion, (2) fill up my cup of happiness by thinking and feeling alike, with the same love for one another and a common attitude of mind. (3) Leave no room for selfish ambition and vanity, but humbly reckon others better than yourselves. (4) Look to each other’s interests and not merely to your own”

✓ *Paul knew the difference now between a “life in Christ” & a typical selfish life, having lived both lives himself. A life in Christ is full of heart-stirring encouragement, comforting love, inspiration by the Spirit, warm affection & sympathy. It pleased Paul immensely, then, to see the church pick up on that life by really CARING for each other, VALUING each other’s abilities & concerns & getting along together, allowing NO ROOM for personal ambition, elevating one’s own image, ignoring each other, feeling superior or being interested only in themselves. But look at what CHRIST HIMSELF was like -*

**Philippians 2:5** - “Take to heart among yourselves what you find in Christ Jesus: (6) ‘He was in the form of God; yet he laid no claim to equality with God, (7) but made himself nothing, assuming the form of a slave. Bearing the human likeness, (8) sharing the human lot, he humbled himself, and was obedient, even to the point of death, death on a cross. (9) Therefore God raised him to the heights and bestowed on him the name above all names, (10) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow - in heaven, on earth, and in the depths - (11) and every tongue acclaim, “Jesus Christ is Lord,” to the glory of God the Father.’”

✓ *There’s our example, it’s Jesus Christ. He was in the very form of God, as great as great can be, but he GAVE UP his greatness for our sakes. He came to us as a nobody, a mere servant, sharing our human form & weakness, in humble obedience to GOD’s purpose for him, of dying for us. And THIS is the point we pick up on as Christians. It was Christ’s attitude of humility & service that made him truly great in God’s eyes. THIS is what God raised him to the highest heights for, which WE now “take to heart” by living his attitude among ourselves. The church, then, is where Christ’s greatness can be “displayed (1:20)” at its best, which is why Paul’s “cup of happiness” was full (2) when the church showed the SAME humble submission to God’s will in service to others that Christ had -*

“Life in Christ” creates a lovely church. It’s full of affection & caring for each other, but that’s not surprising seeing what Christ was like. He gave up everything to humbly obey God’s purpose in service to us, a point we take to heart as Christians - especially seeing how God raised Jesus to the highest heights for his humility & service.

**CHECKPOINT No.5** - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I understand what a "life in Christ" looks like. It's all about caring for & valuing each other, as opposed to a life of selfishness & personal ambition.
- 2) I understand that this is the life that Christ himself lived. He gave up everything for our sakes, coming as a servant to share our weakness & die for us.
- 3) I understand this is what makes a person truly great in God's eyes, it's humbly fulfilling his will in service to others, a point we now take to heart - *because* -

God has a wonderful purpose he'd like to complete in us, too:

**Philippians 2:12** - "So you too, my friends, must be obedient, as always; even more, now that I am absent, than when I was with you. You must work out your own salvation in fear and trembling; (13) for it is God who works in you, inspiring both the will and the deed, for his own chosen purpose"

✓ *The Philippians had always been tuned into God's purpose (1:5), the fruits of which were obvious in their care for Paul, for each other & for the progress of the gospel. Paul hoped, then, that in his absence they'd tune in even more to God's great purpose ("salvation") for them, in deep awe & eager anticipation ("fear & trembling") knowing it was GOD HIMSELF who was at work in them, providing them with both the desire & ability to do his will, so that his purpose could & would be completed in them (1:6). Just as Christ had willingly obeyed God's purpose for him (2:8), so now could they -*

**Philippians 2:14** - "Do everything without grumbling or argument. (15) Show yourselves innocent and above reproach, faultless children of God in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in a dark world (16) and proffer the word of life. Then you will be my pride on the day of Christ, proof that I did not run my race in vain or labour in vain. (17) But if my lifeblood is to be poured out to complete the sacrifice and offering up of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. (18) You too must rejoice and share your joy with me"

✓ *Do EVERYTHING without arguing or grumbling?! Yes, because God's purpose for his children is to provide a wonderful contrast of humility & service in a brutally self-centred world. We are a living picture of the salvation God is completing in us. And this, to Paul, was what made his life worth living, it was seeing the church enthusiastically tuned in to God's purpose for them - a source of joy for ALL of them - AND pride in a job well done on the "day of Christ," too! -*

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| <p>God wants us to provide a sharp contrast in a brutally self-centred world of what "life in Christ" is like, which we can do because it's GOD who's giving us both the desire &amp; ability to do it. And in doing it, that's where our joy comes from.</p> |
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**CHECKPOINT No.6** - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I understand God's purpose for us, his children - it's to provide a living picture of the vivid contrast between Christ's attitude & the horrible attitudes of the world.
- 2) I understand God also provides us with both the desire & the ability to fulfill that purpose as we stay tuned to him in devotion, enthusiasm & faith.
- 3) I understand this is where our joy comes from, & our pride in a job well done on the day of Christ's return - *all of which we see illustrated in the lives of -*

Timothy & Epaphroditus:

**Philippians 2:19** - "I hope, in the Lord Jesus, to send Timothy to you soon; it will cheer me up to have news of you. (20) I have no one else here like him, who has a genuine concern for your affairs; (21) they are all bent on their own interests, not on those of Christ Jesus. (22) But Timothy's record is known to you: you know that he has been at my side in the service of the gospel like a son working under his father. (23) So he is the one I mean to send as soon as I see how things go with me; (24) and I am confident, in the Lord, that I shall be coming myself before long"

✓ *Timothy was a classic example of the type of person Paul was talking about, who put Christ's interests before his own. He shone a bright light when it came to displaying CHRIST's heart & attitude of service & submission to God's will. He'd been a great help to Paul & the church; his record of service was well-known -*

**Philippians 2:25** - "I have decided I must also send our brother Epaphroditus, my fellow-worker and comrade, whom you commissioned to attend to my needs. (26) He has been missing you all, and was upset because you heard he was ill. (27) Indeed he was dangerously ill, but God was merciful to him; and not only to him but to me, to spare me one sorrow on top of another. (28) For this reason I am all the more eager to send him and give you the happiness of seeing him again; that will relieve my anxiety as well. (29) Welcome him then in the fellowship of the Lord with wholehearted delight. You should honour people like him; (30) in Christ's cause he came near to death, risking his life to render me the service you could not give. (3:1) And now, my friends, I wish you joy in the Lord"

✓ *Epaphroditus was another shining example of putting God's interests before his own - overly so, perhaps, because he nearly died in the process. But it seems God himself kept him alive, for Paul's sake & to encourage the church -*

Timothy & Epaphroditus were living illustrations of what Paul was talking about. They shone a bright light in their humble, dedicated service to the church. They were well-known for their service, & the people loved them dearly. They were a source of great joy, & in Paul's mind worthy of great honour & respect, too.

**CHECKPOINT No. 7** - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if: I see in Timothy & Epaphroditus exactly what Paul was getting at - in how both men took to heart the humble attitude of Jesus Christ & gave themselves in service to Paul & the church. And what a huge source of joy they became for Paul - & to the church, too - *unlike* -

The opposition:

**Philippians 3:1** (continued) - "To repeat what I have written to you before is not trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. (2) Be on your guard against those dogs, those who do nothing but harm and who insist on mutilation - 'circumcision' I will not call it; (3) we are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, whose pride is in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the physical"

✓ *Timothy & Epaphroditus were a joy to be around, but there were others who were a pain. They strutted around in their pride because they'd been circumcised - as if that was the most important quality of a Christian! But "greatness" in THEIR minds had nothing to do with humility & service, or the heart & mind of Jesus Christ, or being inspired by the Spirit. To them, you were a cut above everyone else if you were circumcised. So, instead of serving the church, like Timothy & Epaphroditus were, these Jews were harassing people into getting circumcised, as the sign of one's holiness. Well, Paul was having none of it. He accused them of "mutilating" people & he called them "dogs." Dogs to Jews were low-life scavengers, & they used the term to describe their utter contempt for Gentiles. So they knew what Paul meant when he used "dogs" to describe them!* -

**Philippians 3:4** - "It is not that I am myself without grounds for such confidence. If anyone makes claims of that kind, I can make a stronger case for myself: (5) circumcised on my eighth day, Israelite by race, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born and bred; in my practice of the law a Pharisee, (6) in zeal for religion a persecutor of the church, by the law's standard of righteousness without fault. (7) But all such assets I have written off because of Christ"

✓ *If anyone had a right to boast in the physical or be proud in what he'd accomplished physically, Paul had. He could outstrip them all as far as ancestry, law-keeping & religious zeal. But it wasn't those things that made a person great. Greatness was Jesus Christ, & all else paled into insignificance compared to his heart & mind, his humility & service, & what the Spirit of God produced in him* -

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| <p>A clear contrast can be seen between Christ's heart &amp; mind in Timothy &amp; Epaphroditus, &amp; the boastful, demanding attitude of the Jews who thought greatness was all about being circumcised. Paul could boast as a Jew, too, but none of what he was, or did, compared to Jesus Christ.</p> |
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**CHECKPOINT No.8** - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if: I can see in the Jews of Paul's day, the absolute OPPOSITE to the humble, service-oriented attitude that Timothy & Epaphroditus had. The Jews thought that being a Jew, keeping the law & being circumcised made a person holy. Paul, however, was ALSO a Jew, but his ancestry & law-keeping amounted to NOTHING in his mind when he saw what TRUE greatness was in Jesus Christ -  
- to the point that -

There was nothing more important in Paul's life than Christ:

**Philippians 3:8** - "More than that, I count everything sheer loss, far outweighed by the gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I did in fact forfeit everything. I count it so much rubbish, for the sake of gaining Christ (9) and finding myself in union with him, with no righteousness of my own based on the law, nothing but the righteousness which comes from faith in Christ, given by God in response to faith. (10) "

✓ *To know Christ, gain Christ, be in union with Christ, & experience Christ moulding him into his own likeness were the all-consuming goals of Paul's life. Why? Because he could see so clearly now, in the demanding, pompous attitudes of those who believed greatness was based on their own abilities, what his own attitude had been like. When he compared how proud he'd been to the staggering humility of God humbling himself in Jesus Christ, the contrast hit him like a ton of bricks. Here Jesus Christ had GIVEN UP his greatness to serve, while Paul had used the law & his ancestry to ELEVATE his greatness - & he'd served no one! He'd been the absolute opposite to great! How, then, could he continue being the way he was when faced with Christ's example? From now on, therefore -*

**Philippians 3:10** - "My one desire is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and to share his sufferings in growing conformity with his death, (11) in hope of somehow attaining the resurrection from the dead"

✓ *Paul now knew what God's will was; he could see it in the heart & mind of Jesus Christ. Paul's one great wish, then, was for the living Christ to create in him the same beautiful attitude of humility CHRIST had, so that he too could give up his life in service to others just like Christ did - remembering, of course, that when it comes to being resurrected, THIS is what God resurrected CHRIST & raised HIM to the highest heights for; it was for his humility & service -*

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| <p>Paul could see so clearly, by the contrast between his life &amp; Christ's, how driven he'd been by selfish ambition, &amp; it made him sick! His one desire, therefore, was to experience Christ creating his attitude in him, in hope that he too, then, would be resurrected like Christ was.</p> |
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**CHECKPOINT No.9** - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I understand, like Paul, that there is nothing more important in this life of ours than Jesus Christ & taking on his beautiful attitude of humility & service.
- 2) I understand that only Christ can create that attitude in me, there is nothing within me naturally, or any “righteousness of my own” that can create it.
- 3) I understand that this is where my hope of being resurrected rests, on being “conformed” to Christ, able to give up my life in service to others just like he did, through his power in me - so -

Keep struggling on, never giving up, keeping the prize at the end in sight:

**Philippians 3:12** - “It is not that I have already achieved this. I have not yet reached perfection, but I press on, hoping to take hold of that for which Christ once took hold of me. (13) My friends, I do not claim to have hold of it yet. What I do say is this: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what lies ahead, (14) I press towards the finishing line, to win the heavenly prize to which God has called me in Christ Jesus”

✓ *Paul knew both the prize & the process. The prize was a life of eternity after conforming to Christ in this life now. This is what Christ had “got a hold” of Paul for, it was to put him on the same road that he himself had trod, of a life of humility & service, so that one day Paul could share eternity with him. But, Paul discovered, a life like Christ’s doesn’t just suddenly happen, it’s a process of constant learning & struggle. But at least he knew the process, so it was really just a matter of pressing on, putting the mistakes of the past behind him & always, always, always keeping the end, the “heavenly prize,” in sight -*

**Philippians 3:15** - “We who are mature should keep to this way of thinking. If on any point you think differently, this also God will make plain to you. (16) Only let our conduct be consistent with what we have already attained”

✓ *After a while we become old hands at the process. We know we’re on an incredible journey to eternity as God creates in us a “full harvest of righteousness (1:9-11).” This is the salvation Christ “got a hold” of us for, that we can now work out in our lives by “fear & trembling” - knowing the lofty goal God has in mind for us but ALSO knowing that it’s GOD who started this process going in the first place for us & that HE will complete it - so keep pressing on with the sure knowledge that if at any time we’re straying off track, he’s bound to let us know! -*

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| <p>Christ took a hold of us to put us on the road to eternity by the same route he took, of living a life now of humility &amp; service. It’s a lofty goal that takes a lifetime of learning &amp; struggle, but God started this process for us &amp; he will complete it, so keep pressing on.</p> |
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**CHECKPOINT No.10** - "Do I *really* understand the Gospel?" - "**YES I DO**" if:

- 1) I understand the **PRIZE** that awaits Christians - it's a life of eternity, a "heavenly prize," like the prize Christ received at the end of his earthly life.
- 2) I understand the **PROCESS** by which I receive that prize - it's a life now of service & humility, just like Christ lived when he was here.
- 3) I understand the "**PRESS ON**" approach, always pressing on to perfection, knowing God will correct me if I'm straying off course - & *always* -

Keeping in mind both the prize & the process:

**Philippians 3:17** - "Join together, my friends, in following my example. You had us for a model; imitate those whose way of life conforms to it. (18) As I have often told you, and now tell you with tears, there are many whose way of life makes them enemies of the cross of Christ. (19) They are heading for destruction, they make appetite their god, they take pride in what should bring shame; their minds are set on earthly things"

✓ *It was to Paul that God made clear both the prize & the process for us Gentiles, & Paul who set a cracking example we can follow, too. Others in Paul's day, however, did not set a good example, being totally self-centred & focused on earthly prizes, like elevating their standing in the church. To Paul they were "enemies" because their attitude was blinding people to the cross. How? The cross pictured the astounding humility of Christ as the perfect example of the life that leads to eternity, but their attitude was the exact opposite. No wonder Paul said they were headed for destruction, because as Christians this was the worst thing they could do, leading people away from eternity instead of towards it -*

**Philippians 3:20** - "We, by contrast, are citizens of heaven, and from heaven we expect our deliverer to come, the Lord Jesus Christ. (21) He will transfigure our humble bodies, and give them a form like that of his own glorious body, by that power which enables him to make all things subject to himself. **(4:1)** This, my dear friends, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, this is what it means to stand firm in the Lord"

✓ *As citizens of heaven we know, one day, that the all-powerful Jesus will return to deliver us from this weak body of ours & give us a glorious body just like his. This is what enables us to keep going & keep living the life of heaven, it's knowing the prize & knowing the process -*

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| <p>As "citizens of heaven" we live the life of heaven now, pictured by the cross, of humility &amp; service. The prize at the end of such a life is the same prize Jesus got, a glorious body without weakness, with Jesus himself making sure we receive it. So trust him all the way.</p> |
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**CHECKPOINT No.11** - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I understand that some people are “enemies of the Cross,” who in their selfish pursuit for earthly prizes take people’s minds off the way to eternity.
- 2) I understand by contrast that we, as “citizens of heaven,” follow the cracking example of Paul who gave his life in service to Christ & the church.
- 3) I understand that if we stand firm in our trust in Christ to help us live as he did, he will personally deliver us from this body & give us the same kind of glorious body he has.

**SUMMARY SO FAR** -

- 1) What God is “bringing to completion (1:6)” in Christians can be seen clearly in how different the church’s “life in Christ” is to the typical self-centred lifestyle in the world. In the church there’s encouragement, affection, compassion, harmony & valuing each other, not the horrible preoccupation with personal ambitions, image-building, feeling superior & self-interest.
- 2) Our example, of course, is Christ, who gave up his lofty position in heaven to come as a servant in human form and die. For doing that, God lifted him to the highest heights, showing us Christians what God values most, it’s a life of humble submission to his will in service to others. And that’s exactly the kind of life the church at Philippi was living. They cared for Paul, they cared for each other & they willingly risked their lives for the progress of the gospel. Right from the beginning, they’d been tuned into God’s purpose & Christ’s attitude.
- 3) Paul had to leave Philippi, however, so he hopes their awe & excitement for what God was doing in their lives would not only remain but increase over time, as well. They would, therefore, fulfill what God wanted most of his children in this life now, & that was to shine as lights in a dark world, providing a vivid contrast between what happens in a church inspired by Christ’s humility & service and the horrible, selfish attitudes of the world. It would involve sacrifice, yes, but it would also bring joy - & pride at Christ’s return, too.
- 4) Timothy & Epaphroditus both shone that light. In a world full of people bent on their own interests alone, they gave their lives in service to the church. Paul had huge respect & affection for them, as he knew the church did, too. Their record of service was well-known to everyone & they were a delight to have around.

5) There were others in the church, however, who did not shine that light. They were arrogant & pushy about being circumcised, because in their minds law-keeping & circumcision were the gauge of one's greatness & righteousness, not humility & service. Paul had lived that way himself, too, but when he saw the contrast between his attitude & Christ's, he considered all righteousness by keeping the law as total rubbish. Now what he lived for was the resurrected Christ creating his beautiful heart & mind in him, enabling Paul to give up his life in service to others like Jesus did, knowing it was exactly for this attitude that God raised Jesus to the highest heights.

6) This, Paul knew, was what Christ had now "got a hold" of him for - the "salvation" God had called him to. It was to a "heavenly prize," life for eternity by the same route Jesus himself had taken, of a life full of humility & service. Paul also knew that the only way to "work out" that salvation was to trust God to complete it in him, all the way to the finish line. What God had started, God would complete. In the meantime, Paul would make mistakes & drift off track, but he knew God would get him there in the end, so he kept the prize in mind & pressed on.

7) When people focused on earthly prizes instead, like elevating their image in the church, they blinded people to the whole point of Christ dying. The Cross pictured the obedient, humble, serving attitude of Christ as the perfect example of the life that leads to eternity. To some in the church, however, the Cross meant nothing - the result being, they had no idea that the reason Christ gets a hold of us is to make us "citizens of heaven," called by God to live the life of heaven now, pictured by the Cross, of humility & service, so that one day the all-powerful Christ himself will deliver us from our human weakness & give us a glorious body just like his.

8) That's the prize, the salvation God is completing in our lives. And that's what keeps us struggling on, trusting Christ all the way to the end to complete in us what he started & made possible through his sacrifice on the Cross. We can, therefore, "stand firm in the Lord," because he was the one who made the prize possible & he's the one who will see us through to receiving it.

*Paul now turns his attention to encouraging those who are struggling & anxious, reminding everyone that God's help, God's peace & God's strength is just a prayer away. With that in mind, they can concentrate their attention on what Christ has got a hold of them for, to become loving, joy-filled, wonderful people who can survive anything thrown at them - because in everything they come up against CHRIST WILL STRENGTHEN THEM -*

Help is just a prayer away, so keep going:

**Philippians 4:2** - “Euodia and Syntyche, I appeal to you both: agree together in the Lord. (3) Yes, and you too, my loyal comrade, I ask you to help these women, who shared my struggles in the cause of the gospel, with Clement and my other fellow-workers, who are enrolled in the book of life. (4) I wish you joy in the Lord always. Again I say: all joy be yours. (5) Be known to everyone for your consideration of others. The Lord is near; (6) do not be anxious, but in everything make your requests known to God in prayer and petition with thanksgiving. (7) Then the peace of God, which is beyond all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus”

✓ *The Philippian church had its struggles. They knew their names were in the book of life already - a source of great joy always - but friction & disagreements broke out between them, & they got anxious. Paul reminds them, therefore, that God is as close as a prayer away, ready & willing to protect their hearts & thoughts in all their troubles & give them total peace of mind. So let that joy-filled, thankful, humble, loving spirit they had, keep shining a bright light! -*

**Philippians 4:8** - “And now, my friends, all that is true, all that is noble, all that is just and pure, all that is lovable and attractive, whatever is excellent and admirable - fill your thoughts with these things. (9) Put into practice the lessons I taught you, the tradition I have passed on, all that you heard me say or saw me do; and the peace of God will be with you”

✓ *Keep going back to what Christ had got a hold of them for; it was to mould them into fine, lovable, attractive people - which Paul could see happening -*

**Philippians 4:10** - “It is a great joy to me in the Lord that after so long your care for me has now revived. I know you always cared; it was opportunity you lacked. (11) Not that I am speaking of want, for I have learned to be self-sufficient whatever my circumstances. (12) I know what it is to have nothing, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have been thoroughly initiated into fullness and hunger, plenty and poverty. (13) I am able to face anything through him who gives me strength. (14) All the same, it was kind of you to share the burden of my troubles”

✓ *The Philippian church really cared for Paul - not that he depended on their care because he'd learnt that Christ could take care of him & strengthen him in the worst of circumstances - but he really appreciated their concern -*

When times got tough & the church got anxious & uptight, Paul reminds them (from his own experience) that help, peace, strength & the right frame of heart & mind are all just a prayer away - so he encourages them to remember what he'd taught them, keep being the wonderful people they were & God would be with them always.

**CHECKPOINT No.12** - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if: I understand this new life God has called us to has its stresses & struggles, which can make us anxious & irritable (& cause friction in the church, as well) but Paul had learnt from his own experience that when things got rough, God was just a prayer away, providing him with all the help, strength & peace of mind he needed to carry on serving. It was a great joy to Paul, then, to see the Philippians follow his example, remember what he'd taught them, recover from tough times, grab the opportunity to be of service to him again, & get back to being the fine, upstanding, lovable, caring people they'd always been - *because they would learn from their OWN experience that -*

God is fully able to supply all our needs:

**Philippians 4:15** - "You Philippians are aware that, when I set out from Macedonia in the early days of my mission, yours was the only church to share with me in the giving and receiving; (16) more than once you contributed to my needs, even at Thessalonica. (17) Do not think I set my heart on the gift; all I care for is the interest mounting up in your account. (18) I have been paid in full; I have all I need and more, now that I have received from Epaphroditus what you sent. It is a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. (19) And my God will supply all your needs out of the magnificence of his riches in Christ Jesus. (20) To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever! Amen"

✓ *Philippians ends where it began, with Paul praising the church for their support & care for him. They had more than met his needs. This was hugely heartening to Paul because it had been his prayer that their love would grow ever richer (1:9-11). Paul knew therefore, that just as the church had richly supplied his needs, God would continue to richly supply theirs. It was all happening in the Philippian church exactly as the Father had planned! -*

**Philippians 4:21** - "Give my greetings, in the fellowship of Christ Jesus, to each one of God's people. My colleagues send their greetings to you, (22) and so do all God's people here, particularly those in the emperor's service. (23) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit"

✓ *Paul's last comment is that they're all in fellowship with Christ, so Christ would continue to fill their hearts & minds with all that he is -*

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| <p>The Philippian church had become a group of deeply loving, caring people, supplying all Paul's needs, which God was obviously well-pleased with. Paul knew, therefore, that God would continue to provide the church with everything they needed, too.</p> |
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## CONCLUSION -

1) Christ was clearly at work in the Philippian church because they had his humble, loving spirit. They deeply cared for each other & for Paul, taking care of all his needs & more, which was exactly what Christ had got a hold of them for, to make them into lovely, caring people. It was also what Paul had prayed for, that their love would grow ever richer (1:9-11). Well, it was happening before his very eyes!

2) The church was also struggling, however. They were up against people in their own midst who cared only for themselves, causing friction & disagreements to break out between them. So, Paul reminds them from his own experience that Christ would take care of them, just as Christ had taken care of him when times got tough. All the help, strength & peace of mind they needed to carry on being the wonderful, joy-filled, thankful, caring people they were, was just a prayer away.

3) It was a great joy to Paul, then, to see the Philippians follow his example, remember what he'd taught them, recover from tough times, grab the opportunity to be of service to him again, & get back to being the fine, upstanding, lovable, caring people they'd always been, because he knew that, just as the church had richly supplied his needs, God would continue to richly supply theirs.

4) It was all happening exactly as the Father had planned, that Christ would continue to fill their hearts & minds with all that he is -

*To understand the gospel, then, is to understand what God is up to in the church, which is filling us with the heart & mind of Christ, so that one day he can lift us into eternity with Christ at his coming.*