

## The Letter to the Philippians

### Lesson 7: Paul's Joy In spite of Death and Flesh   Philippians 1:19-26

This lesson is part two of lesson six, as we continue looking at four categories, four examples in Paul's life, where it seemed that everything happening to him should have robbed him of joy, and yet he remained joyful. In the last lesson we looked at Paul's joy despite his imprisonment, and his joy despite those who were discrediting him. In this lesson we will look at two more: Paul's joy in light of the possibility of execution, and Paul's joy in knowing that he may survive and certainly endure more hardships going forward.

#### For The Christian, Death Is Not Death

There is a reality, a sobering reality that sets in when people are faced with death. Many, who spent their lives' as outspoken atheists, have wept and searched and prayed to God on their deathbeds. Death has a way of bringing the totality of our lives (our accomplishments and failures) into focus. Death has a way of shining the true value of all that we have cherished in this life. Many, at the end of it all, look back on what amounted to an empty life, having failed to attain the satisfaction that they chased from their youth, and feel emptiness, even shame. And some, who have cherished and served the Almighty God all of their lives, die with remarkable clarity, confidence, and joy.

We see Paul at a fork in the road of his life at this point in the letter. He very well might die, and he might live. Yet he was not troubled at his uncertain future, because he knew that God was in perfect control. Paul also knew that he wasn't guaranteed safety or health. Christians aren't guaranteed a smooth ride along the way following Christ. In fact, as we read the scriptures and consider the lives of Noah, and Moses, and Joseph, and Daniel, and David, and Job, and Jonah, and dozens more, we recognize that God's servants are not guaranteed easy lives for their service. But regardless of his present circumstances, regardless of his near-future, there were stable, joy-producing truths in Paul's life for him to hold to. Paul remained an adopted child of the King. The gospel remained 'good news', the greatest news for that matter! Paul remained a recipient of sins forgiven in Jesus Christ. Paul would remain his status as a redeemed sinner. His life remained secured in Jesus' hand (John 10:28), his life remained secured in the hand of the Father (John 10:29). Paul's life was not his own, (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and he was ready to give glory and praise to God, and to trust Him whatever He may have in store for his future.

So, when we see Paul, ready to die joyfully, or live joyfully, we shouldn't think he's being irrational. As the above paragraph alluded, his joy was rational because of his knowledge. Paul knew God, he knew His word, he understood His sovereignty, he knew the power of prayer, and knew he had the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. And so he can write in verses 18b-19, **“Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.”**

Some of you might be thinking that our interpretation of “deliverance” could be very open ended. Some of you while considering Paul's situation might think that his death would be best for him, and conclude his death to be God's 'deliverance', while some of you might consider his release from prison to be God's 'deliverance'. About which deliverance is he writing? And the answer is that despite his personal preference, he will trust in the Lord's wisdom. This isn't the first time in scripture that we've had an example of this trust in God's sovereign control. Remember Job? He had everything stripped of him. His friends were accusing him of some great sin (sounds like the detractors with Paul huh?). And yet Job had a trust in God's sovereignty. He wasn't sure why these things were happening to him. He wasn't

aware of what was transpiring before the throne of God as Satan was seeking permission to afflict him. Job had no answers as for his past, his present, or his future. He had no reason to believe that God was going to restore him in this life. And yet in Job chapter 13, listen to his statement of faith in 15-16. Job's joy, his rock-solid hope was in God, and no circumstance could shake the eternal realities of knowing God, and being His child.

Remember Daniel? Our brother Richard has been reading this book to us on Sunday evenings during our scripture meditation. Daniel was brought under Babylonian captivity at a young age. He found the favour of King Nebuchadnezzar after God reveal the King's dream to him so he could interpret it. Daniel is promoted to ruler over all Babylon and is made chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon (2:48). The King recognized that God was with Daniel, and so he figured that as long as God was with Daniel, if Daniel had the most power in the land, Nebuchadnezzar could use Daniel as a puppet for his own advantage. Nebuchadnezzar had a lofty perception of himself, he even had a statue of himself made and ordered that all in the land worship it. Of course, Daniel and his companions refused, and the King threatened them with a cruel death in a fiery furnace if they did not bow to him. Daniel didn't know what was going to happen to him if he refused the King at this point, he might die, or God might intervene in a myriad of different ways. But the one thing that Daniel did know what that God was in control, and so he trusted in Him. Listen to his answer to the King in 3:16-17.

I brought up those two examples because I wanted you to see where the hope of these men were. They weren't hoping that God would save them at that time specifically, but they trusted in His eternal care for them. And I think that *eternity* is where Paul's hope is in this text too. There are two basic interpretations concerning Paul's meaning of being delivered. Paul could be referring to his current imprisonment, or he could be referring to his salvation in eternity. I believe he is referring to eternity, but I'll briefly explain the position of both interpretations to bring clarity.

The 'now' interpretation: In verse 19 Paul confidently asserts, "For I know that...this will turn out for my deliverance." Then in verse 25 he says again, "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all..." The argument comes from the repeated "I know", linking 'deliverance' with 'remaining and continuing'.

The 'eternal' interpretation: There are two main arguments against the 'now' deliverance. The first reason being that when Paul usually speaks of deliverance, he speaks of eternal deliverance, so it would be unusual if he now meant some sort of temporal deliverance from his trial. Even contextually speaking, looking at the paragraph as a whole, Paul is working toward the point of assuring these believers of finding their joy in their salvation, which is from the Almighty God (1:28). The context of rejoicing in our eternal deliverance is also the theme of letter as a whole. (3:20-21) So, it makes sense that this same eternal deliverance is what Paul is confident in, and therefore rejoices in, despite what his immediate future holds. Hansen writes more eloquently, "*Since the experience of the followers of Christ conforms to the narrative of Christ's vindication through suffering, Paul could be confident that he would ultimately be delivered and vindicated by God, whatever the outcome of his present suffering and trial might be.*"<sup>31</sup>

The second argument against immediate deliverance, is that it significantly reduces Paul's statements referring to death in verses 20-21. If, when Paul wrote verse 20, he was sure that he would be delivered from his trial, than why did he write as if he wasn't? The truth is that Paul wasn't sure of his deliverance from prison in Rome, and he wasn't referring to it in this passage. He knew that he would ultimately be delivered from this life by God.

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<sup>31</sup> Hansen, G. Walter, *The Letter to the Philippians* Eerdmans, 2009 (p. 78)

Now that I hope we have settled the definition of Paul's deliverance, we can move on to the focus of his hope, his Deliverer. Regardless of the plan that God had in store for Paul, his primary concern is the glorification of Jesus Christ, and the advancement of His gospel, so that he says in verse 20, "now as always Christ will be honoured in my body." Paul's concern was to honour Christ at that present moment whatever may come. His hope and joy lay in his permanent deliverance from all sin to be with Christ forever. And the accomplishment of it all came through the prayers of the believers, with the supply of the Spirit of Christ.

Drawing your attention back to verse 19, I want to address the accomplishment of Paul's deliverance through prayer. I believe that the ESV, if not carefully interpreted, can be read in such a way that it seems as though the prayers of believers are doing much of the work, while the Spirit of Christ is helping, or topping them up. The KJV uses the word "supply" in place of "help", giving what I believe to be a clearer interpretation. Paul is rejoicing in his deliverance, and he is confident in it, knowing that God is supplying it, with the prayers of the saints. Paul links our prayers, with God's work. John Calvin gives a good explanation of the relationship between the two,

*"Let us not suppose, that because he [Paul] joins these two things in one connection, they are consequently alike. The statement must, therefore, be explained in this manner—"I know that all this will turn out to my advantage, through the administration of the Spirit, you also helping by prayer,"—so that the supply of the Spirit is the efficient cause, while prayer is a subordinate help."*<sup>32</sup>

Our prayers to God for each other have an important role in His eternal plan. God has designed our prayers to be used to accomplish His divine purposes. But we should be careful never to place an emphasis on the person alone, since our prayers hold no sway before the throne of God apart from His supplying power. As a matter of putting the cart before the horse, we should always remember that it is never our prayerful efforts who knock on the doors of Heaven looking for help, rather, the Ruler of Heaven is He who breaks down the door of our heart, teaches us to pray, and supplies all are needs.

God is gracious to us, and He has allowed us the privilege of praying to Him. And while His help is never dependent upon, or limited to our prayers, we also shouldn't presume that God is actively and positively working for those saints whose prayers are absent. There is a value to praying, both privately and corporately. Calvinists have been mocked throughout the centuries as being a non-praying sect of Christianity. Calvinists are viewed as people who place such a high view on the power and sovereignty of God—who know that His will is always done—that they figure prayer cannot change His plan. Nothing could be further from the truth. Perhaps an entire lesson series on prayer would be good at this time, but we'll leave that for another day. My point is that there is a call from God for us to pray for one another, and God has chosen to use those prayers to effectually answer them.

Verse 19, Paul is telling the Philippians that he depends on their prayers. In 1:4 Paul told them how much he prayed for them, and now in 19, he's expressing to them his joy in the Lord's deliverance, brought about by God's supply through their prayers for him. There is something more to be said as to what the Spirit is supplying. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. God used the Philippians prayers and responded by sending the Spirit of Christ to be with Paul. Imagine yourself in a terrifying situation where you can feel intensity and anxiety, now imagine that Christ is right beside you and for you. Your attitude changes when the Lord of all creation commands the waves and wind to cease, doesn't it? The reality of the presence of Jesus Christ dissolves all fear and anxiety. This was the reality of Paul, this is the reality of every Christian. Paul knew that Christ was with him in prison, he knew that Christ would be with him at

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<sup>32</sup> Calvin, John, *Calvin's Commentaries Volume XXI: Philippians* Baker, Reprint 2009 (p. 40)

the trial, and whether or not he was executed, Christ would still be with him. This is why Paul says in verse 21, “For me to live is Christ,” because if he survived prison, his life would go on in the presence and power of Christ. Paul then said, “and to die is gain”, because to die would be to shed sin and be with Christ bodily, forever. Whether he was freed, or executed, he would have been delivered at the hand of God, and so he rejoiced.

### I Will Not Be At All Ashamed

Paul begins verse 20 by expressing his “eager expectation and hope that [he] will not be at all ashamed”. Paul had full confidence that the prayers of the saints would be answered by the constantly needed indwelling Spirit of Christ. And Paul knew that this would result in Christ being honored in his body, whether he lived or died. But what does Paul mean when he says that he won’t be ashamed? The reason I bring this up is so that you understand more of the richness of this verse. We have a different definition of the word ‘ashamed’ in our culture today. If I came to church this morning with all the right intentions, but wearing a dress, you would laugh or worse and I’d feel shame. There are foolish things that we do that can bring shame upon us. But that’s not what he means. He’s not talking about looking foolish in front of others for his faith in God. He’s talking about something different. The biblical definition of shame, is placing your trust in someone who cannot keep up his end. But God wants us to know that He will always be faithful to us. He will never disappoint us, He will always be true. See [Isaiah 49:23](#).

There are three verses in the Bible that encourage us to trust in the Christ who will not disappoint, so that we will not be ashamed. The three are: Romans 1:16, 2 Timothy 1:12, and our text in Philippians 1:20. It will help us to see what Paul intention if we look at all three of his examples. Let’s look at the first now.

#1) Romans 1:16 – **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”** Paul is not ashamed, or disappointed in the gospel of Christ, because he knows who is behind the message. He’s not delivering a weak message of a well-intended person, he’s delivering the soul-piercing message of the omnipotent, sovereign God. This message he knows will save those believe, because God is the power behind it. “Power” is translated a few different ways throughout the New Testament. There’s *exousia* which is the power that comes from having authority. There’s an example of that word in [John 1:12](#). This isn’t the word Paul is using here. Then there’s *kratos*, from which we get the word ‘democrat’ among others, this word speaks of the power to rule. This isn’t the word Paul used either. The word that Paul used is *dynamis*, from which we get the word ‘dynamite’. IOW, Paul is saying that he is never disappointed in the gospel, because he’s preaching the explosive, intrusive, life-changing word of God. When this word hits you, it changes you. No one encounters with a stick of dynamite exploding beside them and walks away unchanged. Likewise, no one encounters the gospel and walks away unchanged either. You may reject the gospel, but you leave harder and colder in heart than you were before. But whether the gospel saves a person or not, Paul knew that God was the Saviour. Paul knew that his mission was to spread the word, and he knew that God’s word would never come back void.

Boice says this about the power of the gospel, *“[The gospel] takes the savage from the jungles of Ecuador, frees him from a slavery to superstition and fear, and makes him a missionary of Jesus Christ to other primitive tribes. It takes the immoral hedonist and gives him a purpose in life by which he contributes to his society instead of tearing it down. It changes the alcoholic into a man of whom his family can be proud. It turns the pious, hypocritical American churchgoer into God’s man for this hour*

*and makes him a prophet and a witness for Christ. Moreover, the Gospel can change you. It can transform your life and satisfy your deepest spiritual longing.*”<sup>33</sup>

#2) 2 Timothy 1:8-12 – I’d like to key in on verse 12 on this second point, **“which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.”** (I must admit that I always have a difficult time reading that verse and not singing the hymn that accompanies it.) Boice gives the analogy of banking, and explains that Paul has such a confidence in God that He will not disappoint, that he entrusts all to Him. Every day we live beside people who labour in hope to amass more things. They live for possessions and for a comfortable quality of life in the golden years. Yet as much as people wish to think so, they are not in control of their lives. They can plan (and it is never foolish to plan) but it can all be for naught, because we may never get to tomorrow. My point is that people many times invest all of their hopes and dreams into something that may never come to fruition. God has not designed us to find our hope and satisfaction in these lesser things that are here today and broken or dead tomorrow.

Great has designed each of us to find our utmost satisfaction in Him. He is the one that we should invest all of ourselves into. He is the only one who pays dividends on our investment. He is the only one who will not disappoint, we will never be ashamed of Him. Christ told us that He will secure the salvation of His sheep. His sheep will hear his voice and follow, and no one will be able to stop or interfere with the salvation that these sheep enjoy with their Shepherd. (John 10:27-28). Paul repeats this security of salvation, the dividend of faith placed in Christ, in Romans 8:38-39.

#3) Philippians 1:20 – **“As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death.”** Paul is stuck in prison and unsure of his near future, and yet he knew that despite the powers against him in Rome, that God would not disappoint him. Paul knew that quite the opposite of the possibility that God’s will for his life might be thwarted—that God’s will would most certainly be done. Paul had full confidence that no matter what happened, that Christ would be magnified. But even more specifically, Paul knew that Christ would be honoured in his body.

It is always God’s goal to produce in each of His children Christlikeness. There isn’t one child of His that God will not magnify His name through. Paul said, **“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”** (Eph. 2:10) Paul knew that Christians were created to bring Him glory, and Paul also had full assurance that God was going to complete His sanctifying work in each person. He wrote at the beginning of Philippians in verse 6, **“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”** This was the confidence of Paul. He knew that He was playing with a winning hand. His present reality couldn’t change his eternal reality. His pain couldn’t take away his joy. His death wouldn’t end his life.

Boice adds, *“I wonder if you have such confidence in God. When life is smooth it is easy to say, as we often do, “all things work together for good to them that love God.” It is easy when you have everything you want, when God blesses you materially and blesses your family. But it is not so easy at the grave. It is not so easy in the face of bitter disappointment and pain. If you are to have confidence in God in such moments, you must learn to trust Him in the small disappointments of life.”*<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Boice, James Montgomery, *An Expository Commentary: Philippians* Zondervan, 1971 (p. 75)

<sup>34</sup> Boice, James Montgomery, *An Expository Commentary: Philippians* Zondervan, 1971 (p. 77)

We all go through tough times in our lives. But we must learn to trust in God's wisdom, His power, His love, and His care. We must learn to follow Him through it all, and not be ashamed, knowing with full confidence that He will finish what He has begun in us, and that Christ will be honoured in our bodies.

Verse 21 is a favorite of many Christians, and it is also one the highlight verses of this short letter. Paul knew that going on living meant that he would continue to live to honour Christ, care for the saints, and spread the gospel. Paul had no other purpose or desire than to live for Christ, he lived in a single-minded devotion to God. Yet even death, if it were God's plan, would be gain for him, eternal gain, to be with his Lord forever.

#### Paul Found Joy in Living On in the Flesh, As Long as the Church Benefited

We will conclude this lesson by examine the part of our text from verses 22-26. I suppose a good question to ask of the text when we read verse 22 is, "What is the flesh?" Paul's mentioned the flesh before in Romans 7:5, 18, 8:5, and so on. And we learn from our findings across the expanse of scripture that the flesh refers to the heart of sin, the nature of the heart of man. But that isn't what Paul is referring too here in this verse. When Paul speaks of the flesh in 1:22, he's referring to physical life, being in his physical body as opposed to being in his glorified body. Paul's also used the term 'flesh' to refer to physical life before too, as in Romans 1:3, 1 Cor. 6:16, 2 Cor. 10:3. So, I thought it would be good to clear up the terminology before we carry on with this verse.

Paul says, "**If I am to live in the flesh** (carry on with my life), **that means fruitful labor for me.**" This ties to what the Apostle will say in the next chapter in 2:13, "**for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.**" Paul knew that so long as he lived, the work of his ministry, God's work, would carry on. He knew that, in God's power, many more would be saved, many churches would be planted and grow. Paul knew that he was "**God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works** (fruitful labour for me), **which God prepared beforehand, that [he] should walk in them.**" (Eph. 2:10)

But yet, despite Paul's passion for souls brought to Christ, and in light of the glories of being with Christ forever, Paul was stuck as to which direction he'd rather go in. I never cease to be amazed at what we can learn from Paul's life, as we read through the scriptures. We see that Paul wants to make up his mind in regards to thinking biblically about his life and future. He says, "**which I shall choose I cannot tell.**" Clearly, Paul knows that he doesn't have a choice to make. Paul's not calling the shots. Paul isn't going back and forth between whether to sign a fixed term or variable? Chocolate sauce or raspberry sauce? Michigan or Michigan State? Paul hasn't been given an option to live or die. So what choice is he talking about? The key to understanding his choice comes in the word 'tell'. The word in Greek is *gnorizo*, which translates 'know'. So Paul's saying, "I don't know what to choose." What's interesting is that the word *gnorizo* is used by Paul more than a dozen times in the NT, and it always used to describe having something revealed that was not previously known. IOW, what Paul is saying is that God is in control, and He knows, but Paul doesn't. Paul doesn't know what's going to happen, and so Paul isn't sure how to think according to the will and plan of the God who does know. The one thing that Paul was always careful to do was align himself under God at all times. He did not want to sin against God, he was not looking to oppose Him.

Paul was facing life or death, and he was trying to think of how he could make much of Christ in either outcome. But, like Job, he was left in the dark as to what the outcome of this trial might be. He didn't know which way to turn. He says in verse 23, "**I am hard pressed between the two.**" Luke mentioned the same Greek word in Luke 8:45. Just as the crowds were pressing in on Jesus from all angles, so there was no place to turn, Paul was hard pressed by these two possibilities.

Verse 23b, **“My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”** You can see the connection in thought, when Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:8, **“Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”** Paul had a confidence in his Lord. He knew that dying (departing) would result in eternal life (be with Christ), which is far better. Paul later says in 3:10, **“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death.”**

Hansen wrote, *“Such a positive view of suffering and death would have been helpful for Paul’s first-century readers who were also facing persecution and possible execution for their faith in Christ. They would have been reassured that their suffering and death were not meaningless tragedy, but an eloquent witness to the reality of their union with Christ. But what application does Paul’s positive view of death have for his twenty-first-century readers? Many twenty-first-century readers have experiences similar to Paul’s: they face intense persecution and even martyrdom. They will be encouraged by Paul’s words to believe that the Lord will be with them in the valley of the shadow of death. Others face no threat of persecution; they have every expectation of living a long, healthy, relatively pain-free life. But even though they are not in prison facing execution for their faith, they can be inspired by the courageous faith of Paul and many like him throughout the history of the church. When we see how others followed Christ through suffering and even martyrdom, we are challenged to be faithful to Christ in our own lives.”*<sup>35</sup>

Paul, as all Christians should, desired to share in the suffering of Christ, and magnify Him even in his own death, and then to be in the presence of Christ, but that was not his only desire. He writes in verse 24, **“But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”** Paul also realized that God had blessed him with a life of ministry, which he cherished and took very seriously. We shouldn’t read into this passage what some before us have. Paul is not sick and tired of this life, he’s not burdened by the pressures of ministry and seeking for the quickest and most comfortable way out. He truly cared for their well-being, and if being present with them was what God deemed necessary, that’s exactly where he wanted to be. We’re only ten verses away, but listen to what Paul told them in 2:3-5, **“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interest of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”**

It was because he considered the Philippian believers to be better than himself that he could say to them, **“to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”** Paul’s decision, his choice, is to glorify God if he dies, and to live for His glory and minister to the saints if he lives. Paul continues in verses 25-26, **“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.”** Who convinced Paul? I think it’s clear that Paul has convinced himself. This is the best read that Paul has on the situation. It’s not that Paul felt he was indispensable to God. God didn’t need Paul to continue with his ministry. As a matter of fact, God could have built His church without the Apostle Paul at all. Paul’s life and ministry was a gracious gift from God, and Paul knew it. And Paul also saw the need for his ministry to continue. We know that God did nothing to reveal His plan to Paul, otherwise the last six pages of our notes are meaningless. Paul didn’t know what was going to happen, but as much as he could see, his imprisonment would be over soon, and he would return to his work. He was convinced of it.

Paul was convinced that he was sticking around, and as the rest of his letter shows, he had an agenda. These believers, as mature as they were, needed more instruction and godly example of humility (2:1-8).

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<sup>35</sup> Hansen, G. Walter, *The Letter to the Philippians* Eerdmans, 2009 (p. 90)

Paul wanted them to be aware of false teachers (3:2), he wanted them to live in harmony with one another (4:2-3), and he wanted them to continually be thankful and set their minds on those godly things (4:8). Paul desired to remain with them, for their “progress and joy in the faith.” The word ‘progress’ that Paul used, is the same word he used in verse 12, ‘advance’ the gospel. IOW, the gospel advanced, progressed, despite great difficulties, roadblocks and oppositions. And much in the same way, he wants to remain so that the Philippians believers will progress in their sanctification, undoubtedly through much difficulty and opposition. Paul writes that they not only progress, but that they progress in joy also. Any true progress in the faith will come with a hefty price. Any who stand with Christ will stand at odds with the world. But no matter the hardship, Paul wants to remain to see that as these believers grow, that they also grow in joy.

“So that”. The great purpose statement. Paul wishes to be with his Lord, but he selflessly desires to put them first, to ensure that the saints are growing as they should. But there is a grand purpose to Paul’s desire to remain, and it can be worded this way, “in order that your proud confidence may abound in Christ Jesus, as He is seen in me.”

All Paul wanted was to see Christ. And that is precisely what he wanted others to see too. Everything else in this life may have value but it is fleeting. Read Paul’s words in [3:7-9](#), [12-13](#). Nothing could steal Paul’s joy, he knew how to abound in little, and he wanted them to see and value Christ this same way.