

Philippians (Part Six)

Philippians 2:12 - 3:3

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Let us get back into the book of Philippians. When we left off the last time we were in verses 12 and 13 of chapter 2 so I am not going to go back very much there. Just a small amount of review. He says,

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

We spent quite a bit of time, in fact, the last two Bible studies pretty much on these two verses so I am not going to go into them a great deal. But the important thing to remember, I feel, is this: That the working out your own salvation is not a working *for* salvation, but rather a working to make what you believe, let us say, operational; to put it into practice, to live it by experience so that it is not just a matter of something that is held in the mind, an intellectual belief, but actually something that is being lived. And this really in a way cannot be emphasized too much because of the connection that it has with what eternal life is.

Eternal life is not just length of days, eternal life is also a *way of life*. It is a quality of life. It is the way that God lives. And so in His Kingdom are going to be those who are putting into practice His way of life. And so our beliefs then have to be made operational. It just cannot merely be something that we are carrying around in our mind with and say, "Well, this is my belief," but actually it is something that is lived.

Verse 13 ought to give us a great deal of confidence and that is, that it is God who works in you both to will and to do. We would not have the direction of mind that we have unless God had called us, unless He had already been working with us by His Spirit. You remember how Jesus told the apostles

there in John 14 that the Spirit was with them and would be in them. Now the Spirit was with them in the person of Jesus Christ, and they were seeing practical examples of the way that God would live. But when they became converted, which occurred when they received the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God was in them, they were begotten by it and then they had within them the life of God. But again, it has to be put into practice.

Now, what the Spirit does I have shown you many, many times and we might even go back to it again a little bit later today. Among those things that it does is it convicts us of sin. It convicts us of righteousness, that is, it brings to our mind not just knowledge about God and about His way, but, I will put it this way, a strong feeling about it so that we are motivated to move in a certain direction. To quit fighting against God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." The Spirit of God begins to help remove that from us by giving us the necessary knowledge and the necessary motivation to begin to conduct our lives in a certain way.

Well, it is God who is working in you to produce the will to do that. And then it says, "both to will and to do." So Paul was saying that He not only gives us the knowledge that we need to operate on, He also gives us the power to carry out what it is He wants us to do.

Here I went into I Corinthians 12, just to give a number of specific examples of how God empowers those within the Body of Christ to serve the church. To some He gives wisdom, to some He gives knowledge, to some it says He gives the gifts of healing, of miracles. Now what he is saying there is that the power to carry those things out for the benefit of the Body are coming by the Spirit of God. Now these are *not* powers that are physically generated. They are part or come with the grace of God. They are things that come from God to us to carry out His will for us in our lives within the church, out in the community.

Now, obviously an apostle is going to need more powers than we would need. And so God gave the apostles power to carry out their responsibilities. With that would be, maybe, greater faith. With that would be maybe more

zeal to face up to the fears that might come as a result of having to face hostile crowds. But whatever the responsibility that God has given within the Body, the powers are given.

All you have to do is begin to extend this out into specific areas of life, let us say, in regard to overcoming. God wants us all to grow. He wants us to overcome human nature. He wants us to overcome bad habits that have been ingrained in us for as long, maybe, as we can remember. He wants us to overcome the things that were passed on by the way of human tradition that just do not fit into His way of life. Now, those things come by the grace of God as well. The love that might be necessary to do that, see, the faith that may be necessary to do that, the will to do it, the understanding of why it should be overcome. Anything that is necessary to produce the motivation to set the will to go in the right direction, and then even the power to carry out that will.

Now, in a way, this can almost be a little bit discouraging in that we can look at ourselves and say, "Wow, there is an awful lot that I haven't yet overcome, and I know I have these problems, and this problem has been dragging on and on. And I haven't overcome it yet." Well, what God does is He just knocks the props right out from under us and lets us understand that, though He is patient in waiting for us to grow and overcome, we always have I Corinthians 10:13 to fall back on that He never gives us anything that is too great for us to do. Therefore, the power and the will is there to overcome those things that are a part of our bad human character. We will probably get to more of that just a little bit later as we go through this letter.

But do not be discouraged. Because I said, God is patient. You know, just like if you can think of Him in terms of being a teacher or being a coach maybe of something that is athletic, not everybody has the same skill, not everybody has the same gifts. And so, not everyone has the same problems or not everyone has the same problems to the same degree or intensity. And so some are going to overcome some problems very easily. But I will tell you this, there is always going to be something, maybe many things, that everybody is going to have difficulty overcoming. I am not talking about everybody having the same problem that is difficult to overcome because we

are all somewhat different. We have different backgrounds, we have different makeups, but everybody has problems that are for them very deeply ingrained and very difficult to overcome.

And so God is patient and He understands that you are having a great deal of difficulty with that and He will wait and He will continue to encourage, He will continue to supply a deeper, broader understanding, anything that will motivate us to set our will to overcome that thing, whatever it might be.

Let us go on to verse 14.

Philippians 2:14-15 Do all things without murmuring and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

Try not to ever lose track of the fact that Paul is writing a letter here and that there is a context in which these things fit. And the context has to do with this problem that is erupting within this congregation. It is becoming divided over an issue that is not stated and so there is a general disunity problem. Now that indicates, when I put it with these verses, if there is disunity, there is going to be grumbling. There is going to be griping, either against the person that somebody feels injured by and is dividing them away from the congregation or just about a problem, a policy, a doctrine, the minister, or whatever it might be, something in general.

Right now Paul is undoubtedly thinking about the Israelites. I am talking about the Israelites in the wilderness. They certainly set an example of grumbling and griping. They grumbled about the food, they grumbled about the heat, they grumbled about the water, they grumbled about the way they went. They grumbled about Moses, they grumbled about God. I mean, there seems to have been just a few times when they did not grumble about something.

The key here, I feel, is the words "all things." Everybody can do some things without grumbling because there are things that come easy to us. Or there are things that we have experience with and usually things that we do well, we enjoy doing. And so we can do those things without grumbling or griping.

But it is usually when our attitude is set on edge by something that we do not feel either skilled about doing, or we feel uncomfortable about doing, or we feel it is too difficult for us to do because it is too demanding, that the bad attitude begins to show in terms of complaining.

Now Paul's instruction or his request or his command is that these people were to do *all things* without murmuring and griping, and the reason is that they, or you, may become blameless and harmless. Now we seem to take grumbling and griping in such a way we hardly even notice it—unless somebody grumbles against *us*. Then it becomes very apparent.

But I know that every one of you who have to go somewhere to work and you are working with fellow employees, you know very well that a large part of the conversation that they hold at work with you and with other people is complaining about something that the company is doing, the supervisor is doing. Or a policy that has been made, or a responsibility given. I dare say from my experience in the steel mill, that if we stop griping, we would hardly talk. I mean, it is that prevalent. And all this griping is interspersed with swear words, curse words, constantly, maybe about every third or fourth word is a swear word.

When somebody does not gripe that person really stands out.

God says back in Proverbs 10:19 (KJV) that in a multitude of words there wants not sin, wants meaning lacks. Anybody who talks a lot is really setting themselves up to sin. I mean, they are falling right into it. Now they may sin, maybe directly, in lying, in exaggerating, bragging, a show of conceit. They may also sin in that they fall short. You know, sin means to miss the mark as well as to break a commandment. So they fall short of the ideal simply by dominating the time and energy of everybody that is around them.

Now, the purpose of what he is saying here is it that these people might "become blameless and harmless, children of God, without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." Paul's object here to get these people to quit complaining was that they would be a good example.

It seems as though complaining and human nature go together. That it is a sure sign that human nature is dominating this person. I think I can say that dogmatically and with authority based upon what I see in the Old Testament regarding Israel coming out of Egypt. Where there is no complaining there is not only a good example, but human nature is being held in check. It is being suppressed.

Now notice in verse 15 that these people were already shining. See, "among whom you *shine*," present tense. And so the emphasis of what Paul is saying here is, do not complain so that your light becomes pure and uncontaminated. In other words, it is almost as if he is saying that there is nothing that will disfigure your witness for God like being a complaining person, nothing to disfigure the witness, the example that He wants. What he is saying is that he wants us to stand out like stars at midnight, you know, in a moonless sky, so that there is guidance given by the example. Guidance that is given that shows a person the way they ought to be.

Verse 16 again. The word of life, of course, is the gospel. What he is talking about is, of course, faithful living, that is, following the gospel, so that Paul will understand, the last part of the verse, that he has not run in vain or labored in vain. In other words, Paul wants to feel confident that his work as an apostle, on behalf of those people, representing God, will have borne good fruit. And that the good fruit will be seen in the pure and uncontaminated example that these people set because they are not complaining. They are overcoming and growing.

Now, why should we not complain? I am not talking about, say, the kind of talking that a person needs to do because there is a problem. They need to understand the problem, and they seek counsel about the problem. I am talking about the kind of complaining that the Israelites did. Why is Paul so concerned about complaining? Well, because it is something that is, whether we understand it or not, directed straight at God. It is really nothing more than a calling *Him* into account!

You have to understand that we are part of the Body of Christ. Now he uses that analogy to show how close, how intimate our association is with Him. He is the Head, we are the parts of the Body. Now he tells us (I will go back

to I Corinthians 10:13 again in order to help you to get the picture), that He will allow nothing to come into our life that is too great for us. In order for Him to do this, He has to have a very intimate concern with our lives. He tells us, does He not, that He has every hair in our head numbered, which again gives you an idea that He is really watching over us closely.

Now, if we complain about what we are going through in our life, we are directly accusing God of allowing us to get into a situation that we feel is unfair. Well, God is not unfair. There is nobody who loves us more. There is nobody who is more concerned about the outcome of our life. And so a complaint of the nature of the kind that Paul is talking about is a calling of God into account for what He is allowing to happen in our life.

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

Paul is again calling on them to have the same attitude that he has. So he is saying that they must not stand there wringing their hands, bewailing their fate as to what has occurred to them in their life. Again, you see, it is a calling of God into account if we do that.

What was their sacrifice? He says, "Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering." Now Paul's sacrifice, at least the one that he was thinking of right at that moment, was the possibility that he was going to be put to death as an enemy of the state. Remember, he was in prison. And if he was put to death, like a sacrifice was put to death, then he was offering his life to God and going to the ultimate extent, and being a martyr for the cause.

Now he was ready to do that willingly. It is not what he wanted, but he was ready to do that. When he signed on, when he got baptized, he gave God his all. He did not hold anything back. He did not hold back his life in reserve, say, "No God, you can't have this. My faith will go as far as I want it to go, not as far as you, God, want it to go, and I'll be the one who draws the lines here." No, Paul did not do that. So you can say that his offering was one all the way to death. So he says, if I am being poured out.

I want to pick up on something else here. You will notice the verb is progressive. It is in process—being. It was an act in process. Now Paul here is including not only the possibility that he would be put to death, but also the fact that his life was continually an offering. Now what he is referring to of course, specifically here, is that he came to Philippi and that he preached to those people and then as they were being converted, then he became their pastor. And he counseled them and he taught them, and he encouraged them, he corrected them, he rebuked them where necessary. But he was the one that was sacrificing his life daily for them in service of God to them. So here he is showing then, and at the time of his conversion, actually, he has been a living sacrifice, and now he may end up a dead one.

Now what was their sacrifice? It is right in the verse. Their faith. They were living by faith. That was their sacrifice. Now you see, that is what Paul did. That is why he was doing what he was doing as an apostle. He was living by faith that God had called him to be an apostle. And so he conducted his life accordingly, and he put himself into all kinds of peril as a result of it and just a multitude of hours of service to God. Or let us say, to the people on behalf of God. So his life was just completely given in sacrifice to that, but here he is acknowledging that these people too were living by faith.

Philippians 2:19-21 But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Jesus Christ.

Let us put this in its setting. Paul was in prison. He was writing to the Philippians because he was concerned about their spiritual well-being. But Paul's case was not yet decided. He still did not know how his case was going to be resolved, whether he would be put to death, or whether he would be set free. He said earlier that he felt that he would be set free. Now even with that, he still did not know when it would occur.

I mentioned to you that he really had a feeling for this congregation. He loved it. I am sure that he loved the other congregations, but you might say that this one was first among equals. Because he said nobody had ever helped him like they had. There was a special rapport between them. He

wanted to go to Philippi to see what he could do personally about solving the problem that was growing there but he did not know whether or not he was going to be able to make it.

So what he is saying here is he is paving the way for at least maybe a resolution of the problem that it might be worked out by someone else. Now we are going to find that there are two people that he had in mind. Now the second one he mentioned first and that is Timothy. The first one is Epaphroditus. We will get back to him in just a few verses. He mentioned Timothy because Timothy was going to remain with Paul for as long as he possibly could in hope that Timothy would be able to go to Philippi with definite news of how Paul's case was going to be resolved.

Now we find in the pastoral epistles (those are I and II Timothy and Titus), that Paul did not get to Philippi right away. Instead, something came up and instead of going to Philippi first, Paul went to Ephesus. So it turned out that it was a very good thing that he sent Timothy on ahead of him. Because what happened was, Timothy went to Philippi, Paul went to Ephesus. Paul eventually was set free. However, Paul was going to keep Timothy with him in Rome as long as he possibly could in hope that maybe Epaphroditus would be able to settle things down until Timothy got there.

We are going to find that Epaphroditus, who was going to go first, would actually carry the letter. And that Timothy would follow him sometime later, an indeterminate amount of time, and then Paul would follow Timothy. So what Paul is doing here, in this next section that goes all the way to the end of the chapter, is that he is paving the way for these two men to come back.

Now, he does that because he has feelings for these people. They wanted to see him and he felt that he could not get there. And yet he did not want these people to be disappointed that he was not going to come, and in his place would be Epaphroditus and then Timothy. He did not want them to be disappointed and he did not want to undermine Timothy and Epaphroditus at all either, and give the feeling that, well, these are just substitutes for me.

And so he spends a number of sentences here building these men up in the eyes of these people so that they will accept the decision that Paul has made regarding what he feels is the most important thing for him to do. And the

most important thing for him to do, he felt, was to go to Ephesus first and not go to the Philippi. Hopefully then, when Timothy got there, he would know the outcome of Paul's case, and then he would bring them news of that as well.

I wanted to explain this thing about in verse 20 where "I have no one like-minded who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus." Now if we take that the way that it appears in the English, it almost looks as though Timothy was being elevated to a place that was greater than any other of Paul's companions. You know, like he was greater than Luke or that he was greater than Silas who had also spent time with Paul. But that is not what it means. It just gives a wrong impression in the English.

What it means is, let us put it this way. Paul did not say this but this is what is intended. He meant that there was nobody who was with him at the moment that was better suited to carry out this responsibility than Timothy. It is highly unlikely since Timothy and Epaphroditus are the only ones that are mentioned in the letter, that Luke was not with him, that Silas was not with him, that Aristarchus was not with him, and any of the other men that Paul has spoken highly of in other books. Instead, there were Timothy and Epaphroditus. And it is likely that there were also people from the Roman church who were also there, maybe assisting Paul in his work.

Now we know from chapter 1 that there were other people there in the city who were preaching the gospel. It is entirely possible that Paul may have asked others who were associated with him there in Rome and they decided on their own not to be Paul's message-bearer.

In other words, what I am saying here gives us a little bit of insight into the way Paul operated. It is not like he just commanded somebody like the emperor of Rome and said, "You go there and you take care of that." But rather, it appears that if there were others present that he counseled with them regarding this to see whether or not he felt they would be the ones capable of doing the job. So the combination of maybe counseling with and also maybe even asking others who refused to do it, he decided that Timothy

was the one to carry out the job, that there was nobody else who was like-minded. It does not mean that he was better than all the others that Paul associated with. But in this situation, he was the best man to send.

Now the phrase there in verse 21, "For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus." is what gives the impression that he did ask others whether they would do it and that they did not want to.

You might reflect on what it says back there in chapter 1, verse 15, "Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains." It gives one the impression that amongst the people who were there in the Roman church there were some who were not really all that dedicated to the work of God. So in that situation, Timothy was the best man for the job, and so then he was the one who was sent.

Verse 22 continues the thought regarding Timothy.

Philippians 2:22-24 But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served me in the gospel. Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. But I trust in the Lord that I myself will also come shortly.

I think that what we can begin to see here is maybe the importance of a personality. Paul was writing a letter. A letter consists of words and these words, this letter was coming from a man that the recipients of this letter respected very highly. And yet Paul recognized that words on a piece of paper were not going to solve the problem. It was going to take the words *plus* a personality. I want you to think about that because it is an important thing to to understand.

Now God could have just given us His Bible, His Word, and, let us say, handed the Book to us and say, "Do the best you can," with the Book. But He did not do that. Instead, He gave us the Book *and* personalities, see, human beings through whom He would work, through whom He would

inspire in order to add impact to the written Word. A personality conveys not only the truth in words, but he also conveys a living example and in a sense, the more perfect the example, the more powerful the impact.

If you want an idea of how important the personality is, all you have to do is think about Jesus Christ. He was the living Word of God. But it was not until the Word became alive, you see, in the personality, that there was such an impact made on the world that even today, 2,000 years later, He is the greatest force that has ever hit this earth. We never saw it. But the force of that personality living and speaking the Word of God has carried right on through to this day.

Let us go back to Isaiah 43, verses 10 through 12. Now God here is speaking generally to Israel. He is speaking specifically to you and me.

Isaiah 43:10-12 "You are My witnesses," says the Lord, "and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no savior. I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you; therefore you are My witnesses," says the Lord, "that I am God."

Now there is what our witness has to be of. But God is not relying only on the written Word. You know, Jesus said a couple of times that there is one who bears witness against you, even Moses. See, He meant that the written Word of God bears witness against people in regard to what they are doing. But when it came to making a witness for God, God chose to do it through the combination of word and personality. We say that a picture is worth a thousand words. And this is where the personality comes in. It can convey things to people that words cannot because they do not understand words. They cannot define them. They cannot use them. But they do understand what they see: a personality living it.

Let us go to another one in Deuteronomy 4.

Deuteronomy 4:5-6 "Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you

should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. [Now consider this as instruction to you and me. Instead of Moses speaking it, it is Christ.] Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'

Yes, they hear the word. But God wanted Israel to set them the example of living it. And you see, here are a multitude of personalities who are conveying the message of the words which the people would not understand.

Let us go to another one back in I Peter 2.

I Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people. [Now why?] That you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

The proclamation is made in the form of words. But the proclamation is also made by personalities living it. And it is the life, it is the personality, that gives impact to the words. And without the personality, the words just do not have the same effect. In fact, the personality is so powerful even if a person never hears the word, they can understand the personality.

Let us vary it a little bit further. I Timothy 4, verse 12. First Timothy was written shortly after Philippians. Quite shortly, I mean, within the next couple of years.

I Timothy 4:12 Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

That was so the congregation, even if they did not understand what was said, would still be very powerfully and effectively instructed by the example of the man. It has to be that way. In a congregation like we have here, there is a large variety of educational levels here. And not all of us are sharp in understanding the English language. We do not understand the subtleties of it. We do not always pick up on the idioms. We just do not always get it. But

if there are personalities around that are living it, then even those who are not well instructed in the language can still understand what is going on and what is expected of them. And they can overcome and grow even though there are severe intellectual handicaps or educational handicaps.

Again, you see, God is backing us in the corner. He gives us no excuse. Because when it comes to our judgment, and if we try to say, well, I really was not of a very great educational level, He is going to say to us, it does not take a great educational level. I gave you the example of people to follow. See, there were personalities there. So again, you see, God has not given us something that is too great. And I know, practically every person that I ever visit, sometime in my contact with them, tells me in so many words, they can sit down and read the Bible and 15 minutes later, they have forgotten and it just goes out of their mind. And that is not something to be ashamed of, it is something that happens to everybody, and we have to keep going back repetitiously and doing it.

But even though we are all encumbered with minds like that, we can still see. We see the power of a personality. And that is why Paul was going to send Timothy. Words would not cut it, and he knew that. Even though there was the best of intention on the other end, it was going to be the power of that personality, coupled with what Paul wrote that was going to cut it and get these people turned around.

Back in the Philippians 3, verse 17 (we are going to come up to this a little bit later), Paul says, "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern." So when you understand this paragraph, please understand that Paul is not writing to these people as a harsh criticism by Paul of others in comparison to Timothy. But rather it was just a paving the way of Timothy, that under the circumstances he felt that he was the best one, the best personality, to send out there to help them to to solve that problem. And they would understand that. Because again, if you can remember from the book of Acts, Timothy was with Paul when he went to Philippi, and the church was founded. So Timothy was there right on the ground floor with Paul and these people knew his character, knew the kind of man he was. And so when Paul sent him there, he understood that he was sending someone that these people had a great deal of confidence in.

So it was not just Paul that they were confident in, was not just God that they were confident in, but even the personality of a man who had helped to pastor them before was going to be there as well.

Philippians 2:25 Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; . . .

Remember, the scenario that I set up for you. Paul was in prison. He was going to hold on to Timothy for a while, until maybe his case was decided. We find out later that Paul went to Ephesus before he went to Philippi, and so that was part of his reason for sending Timothy later, you see, on to Philippi. Now, in order to ensure that the problem was begun to be worked on, he was going to send Epaphroditus back to them.

Now, it is entirely possible that part of the squabble in this church was over Epaphroditus. We find a little bit later that Epaphroditus was the one who carried, delivered, their latest gift to him, apparently a gift of money, and he also was part of that gift because they sent him to serve Paul. What we find out here (we are going to read in just a little bit), Epaphroditus arrived in Rome, and then he became sick. And being sick, he was unable to serve Paul. He was unable to carry out the reason for which he was sent.

Apparently it got back to Philippi in a garbled manner, that Epaphroditus was shirking his duty. You see, they considered that to be damaging to their name, to their reputation, because the very man that they picked out and felt would represent them the best under this circumstance, turned out to be a flop. Well, apparently they did not understand or they did not believe that he really was sick. They did not believe that he had carried out his responsibility to Paul.

Now, notice how Paul builds the man up before them. He calls Epaphroditus "my brother." That is pretty close. That puts him in a very close family relationship with Paul. Do you know that siblings are more closely related than mother and child? They are. So when Paul said that this is my brother, he was saying, this is the closest blood relationship, if I can put it in a

physical way, that you can possibly have. Well, he is doing that in order to show that he is not down on Epaphroditus at all, not in any way, and he does not want these people to be down on him at all.

Next, he called him a "fellow worker." You know Paul sent Mark back to Jerusalem. At least he wanted Mark to go back. He did not want Mark with him anyway because he felt that Mark was shirking his responsibility. He did not want somebody who was going to shirk their responsibility to be teamed up with him. Paul had big things to do and he wanted somebody that was going to cooperate with him and get along with him. So Barnabas went one way with Mark and Paul went another way with Silas. And so they they split up.

Well, this is the same apostle, and in this case, he calls Epaphroditus a fellow worker. So he was not separating Epaphroditus away from him because he was discouraged about the lack of work that Epaphroditus was doing. And again, he wanted them to understand that.

Then he called him a "fellow soldier," which indicates that Epaphroditus had suffered the dangers of persecution as a Christian soldier with Paul. In other words, he had exposed himself to the kind of dangers that the apostle Paul had. What Paul is trying to do undoubtedly is puncture anybody's ideas that somehow or another Epaphroditus was shirking his responsibility because he was not.

He calls him "your messenger." You know what this word messenger comes from? It is the same word that the word *apostle* comes from. He was their apostle. It shows you what an apostle is. He was one sent forth. Now, he was not apostle *rank*. But he was one who was sent forth from the Philippian congregation bearing a message, bearing a gift, and he was one who ministered to Paul's needs.

Now, it is interesting this word "minister" is not the word that is normally used for minister. However, it is used in the book of Hebrews to indicate the way Christ ministers. In other words, it is a priestly function. Now what Epaphroditus did was he carried their sacrifice to the apostle Paul, and he

continued to sacrifice for the apostle Paul in ministering to him there. So he was bearing, as far as Paul was concerned, a priestly responsibility in doing that.

Philippians 2:26 . . . since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.

Now, the wording here in the Greek is unusually strong. It is almost as if Paul is striking out at these people who had spread the rumor that somehow or another Epaphroditus was not doing his job and some had leaped to conclusions about Epaphroditus' character, that Paul was saying very strongly, *he was sick*, making it very clear.

Philippians 2:27 For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

Undoubtedly what Paul is inferring here is that Epaphroditus's illness was directly related to his priestly service. What all that included, I do not know.

Let us see here. I want to drop down to verse 30 just very briefly, because I want to pick up a thought here.

Philippians 2:30 Because for the work of Christ, he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service to me.

He came close to death. Now can we assume under these circumstances that since Epaphroditus was ministering to Paul, that Epaphroditus was anointed by Paul, that Paul laid hands on him. Well, it would have to remain an assumption because we do not know. But it seems to me a logical assumption that someone that close to the apostle would want to be anointed by the apostle, and the apostle would want to do that himself.

The reason I am bringing that up is that it shows very clearly that not even an apostle could heal on demand. He could only heal on demand or by command, if it was also God's will to heal the person at that time. I mean,

these miraculous occurrences like Peter putting out his hand and lifting the guy at the gate called Beautiful. In other words, the prayer that the apostle made had to be in complete agreement with the will of God at that time for that to occur.

Now, if Paul did anoint him, then indeed a miracle did occur because the man was raised up from a state of almost being dead. However, there is no indication that it occurred immediately but rather, Epaphroditus was restored to good health over a period of time.

What I am saying here is, indeed if the apostle Paul, or whoever it was, anointed him—but I am using the apostle Paul because I want you to see that these miracles do not occur simply because the apostle or the prophet or whatever simply wills them to occur—even an apostle has to wait upon the will of God for that to occur. So it did occur, but it did not occur right away. And Epaphroditus had to wait and his faith had to be tested. And Paul's faith as well. So God did intervene, and He did heal, but He did not do it simply because the apostle asked that it be done. Even though it was in accordance with the general will of God, He says that He will do it, it did not happen right away.

So if you should want Mr. Tkach to anoint you, why, you can expect pretty much the same thing to occur as if I did it. Because it is not the man. It is God working *in* the man. And it is God's will, see, that needs to be taken into consideration. I am of course leaving out other things, the faith that is involved. But we are considering all things equal here and that faith is there.

Philippians 2:28 Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful.

Now it seems very likely that if there had not been the problems in Philippi, that Paul would not have sent Epaphroditus back. If it had not been for that, he would have kept him. But because the problem was there, this is one of the things that makes us feel that a lot of the squabble in Philippi was over Epaphroditus. And so Paul was sending him back eagerly because he wanted the problem to be resolved. Because again, a personality was there. It was not just words on a page that the apostle had written.

Philippians 2:29 Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem.

The general instruction here is that they were to welcome him because he had fulfilled his mission with distinction, and that he deserved an appropriate homecoming. And again, this is one of those cases where the wording in the Greek is very strong. It indicates that alienation had occurred in the congregation, and again, it seemed to be swirling around Epaphroditus. And so he is commanding those people that they not just refrain from criticism, but actually give recognition to Epaphroditus as being like "hailing the conquering hero" kind of thing. That this man had served with distinction and he needed to be received the way a hero would be received.

So verse 30 then tells why. Because he had faithfully engaged in Christ's work, and he actually risked his life for it and he was trying with all of his might, that is what this last phrase means, "to supply what was lacking in your service toward me." Now, it does not mean again that Paul was criticizing what these people had done for him. But he was saying that they could not be there, Epaphroditus could. It was in their absence that Epaphroditus was serving in their behalf and that he had done it well. So Epaphroditus did for them what they could not do because they were not there.

Now on to Philippians 3, and another really exciting chapter. It says,

Philippians 3:1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice. . .

I do not know whether you realize it, I did not realize it until I looked it up, but that is the common Greek closing for a letter. Now this makes for all kinds of interesting speculations. Why did he write it right in the middle of the letter? There is all kinds of speculations about it. It is almost, though, as if he was getting ready to say goodbye and then he remembered something else. And so it is entirely possible that the remainder of the letter, which is 40% of the letter, is almost like a postscript. That is, like he started to write, Well, goodbye for now. Rejoice! And then he would have followed that by saying, Timothy greets you, Epaphroditus greets you, Aristarchus greets you, you know, like is common in all of his other letters, when he gives a couple of personal notes from people who were surrounding him. And then he

would say, I, Paul, have written this with my own hand or something. So he started to say goodbye, rejoice, and then suddenly this other thing popped into his mind and he forgot all about it.

Now there are those who say that the word that is translated here in my Bible, "finally," can also mean furthermore, or in addition to. That is entirely possible.

He is asking them to rejoice, even though he goes on to discuss something that was pretty unpleasant. Now, in this case, what he is talking about being unpleasant has nothing to do with anybody in the congregation except for his concern that somehow or another, they will be persuaded or influenced by people who are trying to deceive them. So he writes, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you. . ."

Now the same thing turns out to be comments about Judaizers who were trying to deceive them into following Judaistic practices. What he means is that these things were discussed a great deal, very thoroughly previous to this. Now does that not remind you of somebody? It reminds me of Mr. Armstrong. We went back to Genesis 1, 2, and 3, easily 300 times, and maybe more. And finally it got to the place where even he would say, "I know we've been here before, but we're going to go through it again. You people just aren't getting it!"

Well, that is what Paul is saying here. I know I have talked about this thing before but I am going to go over it again and again. He says it is no trouble for me because repetition is the best form of emphasis. That is what he is saying. It is like a school teacher repeating a lesson over and over and over again until it is a groove in your mind and you just think that way because you have heard it so frequently. That is what he is doing.

Philippians 3:2-3 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Now for you and me, that is something that does not have the direct application that it did to the apostle Paul and to the Philippian church.

However, it still has applications. It still has application in principle, because all of us have come out of this Protestant society in the United States. And whether we realize it or not, we are imbued with Protestantism. There is nowhere else we could turn from the time that we were growing up. This country, even if you were Catholic, is founded upon Protestant principles. And so it hits you from every direction. It hits you in school, it hits you in government, it hits you in business. And the warning is a warning that needs to be well taken because even though they may not be putting the pressure on you and me directly the way the Jews were here, nonetheless, there is always that subtle influence that is preying around the periphery of our mind to fall back on the way that we have thought before. And so, do not dismiss it just because it is talking about Jews. The principle is still valid, and we need the warning.

These Judaizers, the way that Paul is talking of them; again, is in very strong language. He first calls them dogs. Now, the metaphor comes from an animal with its nose to the ground, not really looking where it is going, only guided by its sense of smell for garbage. Now these Judaizers, you understand from the book of Acts, dogged Paul's heels everywhere he went. If they found out he was there, they were there to try to refute what he said, either directly with him, or to bring persecution to bear on him, or to argue with and bring persecution upon the church after the apostle Paul left, on the converts.

Now, dog is a term of reproach to a Jew. It is what a Jew referred to a Gentile as. And apparently, the term arose from the fact that the Gentiles ate meat without discriminating between that which was clean and unclean. And to eat meat that was unclean was, to a Jew, that which you fed to an animal. You see, that it did not make any difference. The dog did not care whether it was clean or unclean, and so the Gentile by inference became a dog. You see, it became a term, an epithet, against them. So what Paul is doing is he is turning the term back on the Jews. And what they are doing, you see, is doing what the Jew accused the Gentile of doing: following after refuse and becoming a dog.

Evil workers is a reference to the fact that these people put a great deal of energy into what they did to try to upset the faith of these people. Now there is a secondary application to it. Considering what follows this section, this first paragraph here in chapter 3, and that is that he might be speaking about

the energetic labors that these people made in trying to achieve salvation by works. You know, the works of the law, the making of sacrifices, those kinds of things. All kinds of external ritual. That indeed was a part of the Jewish religion. But they looked upon it as being something that was going to get them saved.

Now, the mutilated refers to circumcision. A circumcision was not a mutilation. You have to understand this from Paul's point of view. To him, the fact that they were circumcised without understanding circumcision, without understanding its spiritual intent was the same thing as mutilating God's intent, and so he turned the word into a disparagement. And instead of calling them the circumcised, he called them the mutilated because they were *pretending* that they were the circumcised. And that is why he says in verse 3 that "we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." That is what a true Christian does. He worships God in the Spirit, rejoices in Christ Jesus, and has no confidence in the flesh.

"Worship God in the Spirit" (John 4:22, 24). John talked about that. He is talking here about not worshipping God through externals, that is, the doing of ritual or human traditions.

The second thing, "who rejoice in Christ Jesus": A Christian takes satisfaction from knowing that his hope is in Christ, not in a meticulous conformity to law. Now please understand, Paul is not saying that we are not to keep the law. But a Christian knows that he is going to be saved by grace through faith and therefore, he does not have to be overly concerned that even though he does break the law, he is not going to be saved or lost merely on the basis of the fact that he has broken a law. If your salvation depends on how well you keep the law, you are going to fail. And so our hope is in Christ Jesus. We know that He already kept the law perfectly. We know that He is at the right hand of God. We know that He is our High Priest administering the Spirit of God. We know that He is our intercessor before God. Our hope is in those things, not in our meticulous conformity to law. Again, let me hasten to understand, this does not mean that we do not keep law. *We do keep law.*

Number 3 is directly connected to the one that precedes it, that we "have no confidence in the flesh." We ought to understand thoroughly that human nature cannot produce righteousness before God. Now what this does is it removes any ground that we have for human pride before God. We have no case for boasting or being conceited or failing to be humble. A Christian ought to understand that human nature cannot produce the righteousness to give us access before God. We are able to access God because of Jesus Christ.

So there is no confidence in the flesh for that kind of thing. It does not mean that we cannot have confidence in our abilities. You are a good typist? Great. You are a good driver? Good. You do things well in athletics, well, fine. Well, all of those things, even the keeping of the law, does not earn us a place before God. That kind of righteousness, God says, is filthy rags. And we go before God on the righteousness of Jesus Christ. So we have no cause for boasting, no basis, no foundation.

Now, "flesh." Let us explain this just a little bit and the way the apostle Paul uses it. Skin, you see, is flesh, but that is not the way that he is using. Muscle, you see, is flesh, but that is not the way Paul uses it. He is not using it in a literal sense, but rather he is using it in the sense that it stands for all the rounds, you might say, all of the external acts, including our thinking processes. What we do with our hands, what we do with our feet, what we do with our eyes, and what we do with our ears, what we do with our tongue, including our thinking processes, human reason.

Let us see if I can explain this. Human nature and the acts that it produces is never exactly right because it is already spoiled, fouled, because we have already sinned. So, anything that comes out of the flesh is already tainted by the life that has preceded it and that is not something that is acceptable before God. And so we cannot possibly put any confidence in the flesh.

If we have to stand before God based upon the things that we do in the flesh, then all we have earned with our life is death because the wages of sin is death. And since we have sinned, and since the only way that we can possibly pay for the sins that we have done is to die, because that is all we have earned, how is that going to create life?

You see, it is impossible. God has us, in a sense here, boxed in the corner again. The only way that we can access before Him is to go on the basis of the righteousness of Christ. And so we can do that because of faith. Faith in His atoning work, faith in the fact that He is there to intercede and to help us and to represent us before God.