

An Interpretive Paraphrase of
Philippians

By Greg Sidders

Please note: *This paraphrase is in no way intended to be read as a precise translation of the divinely-inspired text of Paul's letter to the Philippians. It is nothing more than a concise commentary which reflects my personal interpretation of Paul's epistle. I pray that God will use it to help you better understand His word and its relevance to your life.*

Chapter 1

¹From: Paul and Timothy (slaves of Christ Jesus).
To: All of God's people in Philippi (holy because of your union with Christ Jesus)—office-holders included:

²May God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord lavish you with both grace and peace!

³⁻⁴Every time I pray for you, my heart is filled with joy and gratitude to God, ⁵because from day one you have been my partners in preaching the good news. ⁶And I have no doubt that the same God who has been working in you from the beginning will keep on working in you until the end—until Jesus returns!

⁷How can I feel anything but affection for you? You have a very special place in my heart—because, as ministry partners, we share the grace God gives to meet all the challenges of serving Him. ⁸Believe me, the affection I feel toward you, and the longing I have to be with you, is the fruit of Christ's love flowing through me to you.

⁹Here is how I pray for you: I ask God to make your love, which is already so evident, even more abundant. But I want your love to be shaped and guided by your knowledge of who God is and what good is. ¹⁰Then you will have the discernment to know what you should do and what you should not do—and, because you are thinking correctly, you will live blamelessly,

avoiding all impurity ¹¹and pursuing all goodness until Christ returns. And in all this God will get the credit He deserves—because, after all, it's Christ's power that infuses this whole process.

¹²I know that you are aware of my situation, brothers and sisters, but what you may not be aware of is that God has utilized my chains to unleash the good news—¹³not only among the palace guards and the many others in my vicinity who know that I am in shackles because I serve Christ, ¹⁴but especially through my Christian brothers who, with a renewed confidence produced by my confinement, are preaching the message more courageously than ever!

¹⁵True, some who proclaim Christ do so with an ugly competitive spirit, but others have absolutely pure motives. ¹⁶They are motivated by love, and they do not view my imprisonment from the perspective of how it enhances their personal ministry, but rather how it advances the progress of the gospel. ¹⁷Yes, there are others who proclaim Christ with hidden motives, hoping to better their circumstances and worsen mine, ¹⁸but what does it matter? As long as the message is pure, I couldn't care less about the motives. If Christ is proclaimed, I rejoice.

But not only do I rejoice because Christ is being proclaimed; I also rejoice ¹⁹because I know that I will somehow be delivered from defeat, as the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me—in response to your prayers ²⁰and in answer to my

own intense longing, which is that now, as always, I will do nothing to be ashamed of, but will boldly magnify Christ—even, if necessary, to the point of death. ²¹For Christ is my life, and so death is ultimate life! ²²If God chooses for me to live longer, fine—it just means a more abundant spiritual harvest. If I were forced to choose between life and death, I don't know which direction I would go; ²³both options have their pull on me. On the one hand, I have the urge to pull up anchor and set sail for heaven, where I could be with Christ. That would be far better for me personally. ²⁴But, on the other hand, you need me here. ²⁵And it is because of this that I know I'll remain with all of you, so that your faith will grow and your joy will overflow ²⁶and your bragging about Christ will abound because of my triumphant return.

²⁷But no matter what happens to *me*, it is essential that *you* live like citizens of heaven should live—enhancing the credibility of Christ's message rather than undermining it. Even if I don't get to see you again, I'll certainly hear about you, and what I want to hear is that you are on the front lines of battle, standing firm and unified, using the power of unity to help others believe the good news. ²⁸And let there be no cowardice in the face of opposition! Your courage will be like a neon sign to them, flashing this foreboding message: "We win. You lose." ²⁹Remember, suffering for Jesus is a gift of God's grace, as much a gift as believing in Him is. ³⁰That's why both you and I are in the midst of a struggle right now—because God in His grace has willed it.

Chapter 2

¹If you are grateful at all for your blessings in Christ—His encouragement, His comfort, His closeness, His affection, His compassion—²then fill my cup of joy by having the same heartbeat and the same mindset. ³Maintain unity by getting rid of rivalry and pride, and by humbly seeing others as more important than

yourselves. ⁴Be on the lookout for ways to help others, rather than just helping yourselves.

⁵Think like King Jesus, ⁶who, as God, could easily have demanded His rights as God, ⁷but instead chose to give it all up and become a slave—a human slave. ⁸In humility He obeyed His Father, even when it cost Him His life, not to mention His dignity (stripped as it was by the cross). ⁹But, you see, it was precisely because He was willing to become the lowest of the low that God made Him the highest of the high. ¹⁰And one day every creature in all the universe will bow to Jesus ¹¹and agree that He indeed is Lord of all. And God the Father will get all the credit for it!

¹²In light of all this, I exhort you, my friends whom I love and who have always obeyed the Lord, to give your salvation an even more vigorous workout now that I am absent than you did when I was present—a workout that reflects a healthy fear of the Lord. ¹³And remember that He Himself is the one who is giving you both the desire and the ability to do what pleases Him!

¹⁴And what pleases Him? Conduct that is complaint-free and argument-free. That is not only the recipe for pleasing God, ¹⁵but also for offering an invincible and untainted witness to this warped and perverted world. We live in the spiritual dark ages, but the darkness around us just intensifies our brightness. ¹⁶When you offer to others the words of life, backed up by a blameless life, you shine like stars at midnight. Live like this and I'll be so proud when Christ returns, because my labor among you will not have been wasted. ¹⁷It may be that my life is being poured out as an offering to the Lord, just as your life of faith and service is a sacrifice to Him, but I am rejoicing, and I share my joy with you. ¹⁸So you too should rejoice and share your joy with me!

¹⁹Lord-willing, I'll be sending Timothy to you soon, so that he can bring encouraging news about you back to me. ²⁰Among my co-

workers, he alone thinks of you like I do—with anxious concern. ²¹Everyone else pursues their own agenda rather than what matters most to Jesus Christ. ²²But Timothy is altogether different. You know that he has a solid track record—that he has proven to be every bit as much a slave of Christ as I am. He has been like a son to me, working by my side to spread the good news. ²³So he is the one I hope to send, as soon as my own fate is determined. ²⁴And I'm confident (not in myself but in the Lord) that I too will come soon.

²⁵But, in the meantime, I think it's time for Epaphroditus to return home. I hate to let him go, because he is a dear brother . . . a reliable co-worker . . . a partner in battle. You sent him to minister to my needs, ²⁶but ever since he heard that you knew of his illness, he has been concerned that you might fear the worst, and so he has been longing for a reunion with you. ²⁷It is true that he was sick. In fact, he almost died—but God had mercy on him . . . and on me as well, because losing him would have added unspeakable grief to my other sorrows.

²⁸So I am anxious to send him home, both to increase your joy and to lighten my load of sorrows. ²⁹Please do welcome your Christian brother with great joy, and esteem him and those like him highly, ³⁰because his service to Christ almost cost him his life. It was a risk he was willing to take to fulfill the commission he had been given by you.

Chapter 3

¹Finally, Christian brothers and sisters, I want to urge you to rejoice, not in your own achievements, but only in the Lord—in His righteousness! I do not hesitate to repeat myself here, because I am doing so to keep you safe. ²Watch out for those who add law to grace! They're rabid mongrels! Their work is wicked! Their "circumcision" is nothing more than mutilation! ³In God's eyes, we're the ones who have been truly "circumcised"—because we serve Him according to the promptings of the

Spirit (not the lists of the law), and we brag about what Christ Jesus has done for us rather than trusting in our own religious trophy case.

⁴I say this even though nobody's trophy case is larger than mine. ⁵Just listen to my credentials: My parents were exemplary law-keepers; I am a pure-blooded Jew (in fact, I am of an elite tribe); I have retained the language and culture of the dispersed people of God; I was a member of the most fundamental sect of Judaism; ⁶I was zealously intolerant of heresy; when it came to keeping the letter of the law, I had a perfect score. ⁷But whatever I used to put in the "profit" column on my spiritual ledger, I now view as "debits"—because I have met Christ!

⁸I can't say this strongly enough: Compared to the "profit" of knowing Christ, everything else is a "debit". True, I have lost every religious "trophy" for Christ's sake, but I say, "Good riddance!"—because it is only as I have viewed my self-righteousness as rubbish that I have made room for Christ, ⁹and have found myself to be wrapped in His righteousness rather than my own. Now I don't have to depend on my own law-based righteousness; I can rest in the God-given gift of righteousness that is mine through faith.

¹⁰And, having tasted the sweetness of knowing Him, I have such a hunger to know Him better! I long to experience His resurrection power and the intimate fellowship with Him that is only possible through shared suffering. I want to share the likeness of the crucified Christ ¹¹and then to, somehow, be raised from the dead!

¹²Not that I've already arrived, but I keep pressing on to seize that for which He seized me—a deep relationship with Him! ¹³Brothers and sisters, I'm not living under the delusion that I have already seized that prize; but my energies are focused on one goal—to forget the past and lean into the future, ¹⁴striving to be the one who breaks the tape and receives the prize—the prize for which God called me to Himself: intimacy with Christ.

¹⁵This is the mindset that all who are mature should adopt. If you have your sights set on different goals, that's OK; God will open your eyes in time. ¹⁶In the meantime, let's all be sure to live according to what God has already revealed to us.

¹⁷Brothers and sisters, I want you to unite in imitating me—and to keep your eyes on those whose lifestyle reminds you of mine. ¹⁸I'm telling you this to protect you from the ever-present influence of those who profess Christ but whose lifestyle brands them as enemies of the cross. (Just the thought of how Christ's reputation is soiled by their sin brings me to tears.) ¹⁹Listen! Their destiny is destruction, because their god is their appetite. They are proud of what they should be ashamed of! All they think about is the here and now. ²⁰Why should we avoid people like this? Because we are citizens of heaven, not earth! And we are eagerly awaiting the return of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, from heaven. ²¹When He comes, He'll take these humble bodies of ours and transform them, making them as glorious as His heavenly body. It's going to be a display of His tremendous power—the same power that will also bring all things (including enemies of the cross) into subjection to Him.

Chapter 4

¹Therefore, brothers and sisters whom I love and long for, you who give me joy now and who will be my crown in heaven, I say to you in love: Be unmovable in living like I lived among you.

²And now, a personal appeal to Euodia and Syntyche: Put your differences aside and find common ground in your love for Jesus! ³Please! And you, Suzugus, play the peacemaker. These women must be restored, because at one time they (along with Clement and a host of other co-workers whose names are on heaven's rolls) locked arms with me in advancing the gospel.

⁴Keep your focus riveted on Jesus at all times! I repeat: Rejoice in Him! ⁵Let everybody see that you are willing to yield to others rather than fighting for your rights. (After all, the return of the Lord of justice is near!) ⁶Worry about nothing; pray about everything. Pray specifically and pray thankfully. ⁷Do this and the peace that only God can give (a peace that is beyond our understanding) will guard the gate of your heart and your mind, keeping stress at bay.

⁸Finally, brothers and sisters, I urge you to feed your mind mental health food—thoughts that are true and honorable and righteous and pure and pleasing and praiseworthy, thoughts that are morally excellent and commendable before God. ⁹And put into practice all that you have heard from me and seen in me, so that God—who is peace personified—will draw near to you.

¹⁰How joyful I am, and how thankful to the Lord, that your concern for me has blossomed again! I know that you have been concerned all along, but until now you have had no opportunity to let me know of it. ¹¹Please understand that it is not because I was needy that I am rejoicing. No, I have learned how to untether happiness from circumstances. ¹²I know how to live with an empty stomach and with a full stomach. You see, I have discovered the secret of contentment, and here it is: ¹³to feast Christ rather than stocking up on groceries! He gives me all the fuel I need for every challenge I face.

¹⁴Still, your partnership in my affliction was a good thing—¹⁵not to mention unique. As you well know, in the early days, when I left your area to continue my ministry elsewhere, you were the only church to offer financial help—¹⁶and not just once, but again and again, whenever I had a need. ¹⁷I am not saying this to hint for more; my motive is to see your eternal reward increase. ¹⁸I myself have received all I need, and more. I am well-stocked, especially after Epaphroditus delivered your generous

gifts. These sacrificial gifts were given, not to me, but to the Lord, and with them He is delighted. ¹⁹And, I assure you, He who has glorious riches will see to it that all your needs are met through Christ. ²⁰So to God our Father be eternal praise!

²¹Say hello for me to all the Christians there.
²²The brothers and sisters who are here (particularly those who work in Caesar's palace) send their greetings as well.

²³May our Master, Jesus Christ, give your spirit a fresh infusion of His grace. Amen!