

Confidence, Certainty, and Cheer

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When Paul the apostle arrived in the city of Philippi to begin his ministry in Europe, he received very bad treatment. The entire city seemed to turn against him. He was arrested, seems to have been tried by the citizens of the town, was delivered into the hands of a jailer, beaten within an inch of his life, and put into the very darkest part of the dungeon.

The treatment that Paul received at the hands of the people of Philippi may give the impression that there could be no strong ties of friendship between Paul and the people there. But the facts are that the church in Philippi became closer to the apostle Paul than any other. He enjoyed a more intimate relationship with that body of believers than with any other of the visible churches he established. There were strong ties of love and fellowship. It is beautiful to behold, and it is worthy of our emulation. They loved him, and he loved them.

Paul went to Philippi on his second missionary journey. It was the proper place to begin in Europe. The city of Philippi had been named for King Philip of Macedonia. It was primarily a Greek city, then the great Augustus Caesar of Rome made it a Roman colony. (In this epistle, Paul says several things that are not understood unless you recognize that Philippi was a Roman colony.) Therefore, in the city of Philippi there were Romans, Greeks, Jews, and Asians — it was a cosmopolitan colony. For that reason, it was a good place to test the gospel in Europe.

Socially, the city of Philippi drew a higher type of person to the church. In other places, there were many slaves, but there seemed to be more freedom in Philippi. The upper strata of society was reached with the gospel, and, apparently, many were won from all the different races. When Paul came to the city, a very remarkable businesswoman named Lydia was his first convert. And then the Philippian jailer — a brutal and cruel Roman politician — came to know the living Christ.

There were, of course, other members of this Philippian church whose stories we do not know. They were a people very close to the apostle Paul. They followed him in his journeys and ministered to him time and time again. But when Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, they lost sight of him for two years. They did not know where he was. Finally, they heard that he was in Rome in prison. The hearts of these people went out to him, and immediately they sent their pastor, Epaphroditus, with a gift for the apostle Paul. They also sent a word of comfort and sympathy, expressing their love and affection for him.

So Paul wrote a thank-you note, which is the Epistle to the Philippians that we have today. In this epistle, there is no doctrine to declare. There is no error to correct, no conduct to rebuke. There is no problem to solve, no difficulty to handle. Paul just writes about Christian living at the highest level.

When Epaphroditus arrived with the gift and letter from the Philippian church, I think Paul asked him, “How are things getting along among the believers there?” He may have asked about each individual, for he seems to have known many of them by name. Epaphroditus probably said something like, “Things are coming along nicely, and God is blessing. But we have one little problem — two women in the church aren’t speaking to each other.” That was not a major problem, but it was there, and Paul dealt with it.

There was friction between two women in the church — Euodia and Syntyche. Paul mentioned it near the end of his letter: “I beseech Euodia, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord” (Philippians 4:2). I’ve often wondered what the background was to this. I’ve always suspected that Euodia was president of the missionary society and Syntyche was president of the choir. (I have a friend in the ministry who says that when the devil was cast out of heaven, he fell into the choir loft!) What may have happened was that both Euodia and

Syntyche had arranged to use the church parlor on Tuesday afternoon at 2:00. The conflict was not noticed until both groups arrived at the same time. One wasn't willing to give way to the other, and it caused a problem for a little while. I think it got straightened out all right, but Euodia and Syntyche didn't work in harmony after that. The relationship was strained.

An old Scotch elder once got up to read the fourth chapter of Philippians — he was not what you would call a trained man, and his pronunciation was rather faulty. When he reached this verse, he read, "I beseech Odious and Soontouchy that they be of the same mind." Although the pronunciation was bad, his interpretation was unusually good because, frankly, when you bring together Ms. Odious and Ms. Soontouchy you are going to have trouble — I don't care who they are. Apparently, that is what happened in the church at Philippi. Paul mentioned it briefly, but he moved on with warm words regarding his personal relationships, feelings, and close ties.

Paul's affection for these folk at Philippi is evident all through his letter. I want to notice how he began:

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God, our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:2)

That was his accustomed introduction, and you will find it in all his epistles. Grace comes first, and peace always follows. One is the cause, and the other is the effect. "Grace" was the great word of the Roman world. It is the Greek word *charis*, a word of introduction and greeting. You could have heard it all over the ancient Roman world. Two men would meet, and they'd say, "*Charis*," to greet each other. The Hebrew word of greeting was *shalom*, "peace."

Paul brought these two words together, and someone has said that he Christianized them. I wouldn't say that, but I do think that Paul gave them a new meaning, and they'll never be the same again. Grace speaks of that declaration of God's love for us, and the result of the reception of the love of God is to know the peace of God. But grace always comes first.

Paul continued:

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you. (Philippians 1:3)

Actually, the meaning is even stronger — "I thank my God for *all* the remembrances of you." This is wonderful. Every now and then, some kind brother will include this verse in a letter to me. I always feel as if today it's stereotyped, something we like to say. But when Paul said it to believers at Philippi, he *meant* it. Isn't it wonderful to be among a people like these believers were? Paul said, in effect, "Any time, anywhere in the Roman Empire, when Philippi comes to mind, I do not think of that jail. I think of you believers who are there, and I thank God for you." What a wonderful thing that is!

He wasn't through, for he then said:

Always in every prayer [literally, every petition, for it's very direct here] ***of mine for you all making request*** [supplication or petition] ***with joy.*** (Philippians 1:4)

These people were on the prayer list of the apostle Paul.

He said something else here — I must call attention to it.

Even as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart....
(Philippians 1:7)

Isn't that lovely? Paul said, "I carry the church in Philippi in my heart." The other day a man showed me his wife's picture in his watch. She's dead now, but I am sure he still carries her picture because he carries her in his heart. Paul did not have a watch, but he said, "I carry you in my heart." Lovely, personal relationship, is it not?

He was still not through. Notice that he said:

For God is my witness, how greatly I long after you all in the tender mercies of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:8)

The King James Version uses the word "bowels" instead of "tender mercies." Now, don't be afraid of that term "bowels." It is considered crude today, but it's not that at all. Even psychologists say that motivation and the feeling of affection takes place down in that area.

In other words, Paul said — and what a beautiful thing it is — "I long after you all in deep affection, the heart affection, of Christ. Just as *Christ* longs for you, *I* long for you." Someone has said that Paul had the heart of Christ, and that is exactly what God wants us to have today. Such a relationship is the beauty and the wonder and the glory of this epistle.

Confidence

In the introduction to his letter, Paul talked about three things: confidence, certainty, and cheer.

Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)

The first word, "being," is causative and is better translated as "since" — "Since I am confident of this very thing." Confidence is something that comes to a person who has trusted Christ and become His child. "Being confident [or, *since* I am confident] of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you *will* perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (emphasis added).

The word for "perform" means "to perfect." Dr. R. C. Lenski translates it, "He will finish it up." Dr. M. R. Vincent translates it, "He will carry it through." The word is the Greek *epiteleo*, and from that word we get "telescope," "telephone," and "telegram" — that which goes from here to the end. God is able, Paul says, to perform it, to perfect it, to complete it. If God has begun a good work in you, He will complete it. You can count on His bringing you right through to the end — to the day of Jesus Christ, which is the Rapture of the church!

So the confidence is there and so is the certainty.

Certainty

Some people today are confident, but you look at that in which they are confident, the content of it, and you know it will never come to pass. There is no certainty there. Paul said that the child of God could have confidence and certainty.

Philippians 1:6 became my life verse when I finished college, and I wish I had known it

before. Oh, that I had the power to convey to you what this verse has meant to me and what it could mean to you!

Some years ago, my wife and I drove up through Oklahoma. We turned off at a little place by the name of Atoka on Highway 75, and we went through a place called Coalgate. They ought to take that one off the map, because it's going to be out of existence before long! But you can look right across those fields and hills and look over and down a road into a town in which I lived as a boy. That town has never and will never become famous. Nevertheless, it's still there, and my dad is buried there.

As I looked down that road, I went back in memory to the time I was fourteen years old. My dad had died, and I remember getting on my bicycle one morning, riding out to his grave, and kneeling there. I didn't know very much — I shudder when I think of the ignorance of this country boy at that time — but I knelt there, and in the best way that I knew how, I told God that I wanted to serve Him. I didn't know what it meant, I didn't know anything of what it would involve, but I knew that I wanted to serve Him.

When I looked down that road, I reaffirmed that again to God. I do it now with a little more intelligence. I want to serve Him. I look back to that day (and, friend, that's been a *long* time ago) when I knelt there, and I'm here to testify that down through the years, God has made good on Philippians 1:6 — “Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you...”

Oh, how I failed Him after that, how I got into sin! And I never shall forget how a pastor told me about the peace of God that comes to a sinner who will trust Christ. Oh, what that meant to my heart and my life at that time!

I have not walked by faith as I should have walked. I went through college discouraged. It was during the time of the great Depression, and I thought that I would never be able to finish one year after the other. When I completed my senior year and took my degree, my roommate found me sitting on the edge of the bed and feeling hopeless. He said, “What's the matter? You look like you've lost your best friend!” I said, “I've lost everything. God brought me up to this moment, but I can't go to seminary. I don't have a dime. I'm going out this afternoon and hitch-hike back to Nashville, Tennessee, my home.”

Then the telephone rang, and I went to the phone. Two dear little widowed ladies from Memphis, Tennessee, were calling. They said, “We want you to come over because we have something for you.” Well, they had sent me a tie for graduation, and I thought that was their gift. So I went over that afternoon, and when I went in, I could see it was formal because they were all dressed up. They looked like they had walked out of antebellum days. They wore those big high collars with cameos at the throat. We sat down and exchanged a few pleasantries. Then they said, “You are going home?”

“Yes.”

“Are you going to school next year?”

“I don't know.”

One of them got up, wiped away a tear, came over, and handed me an envelope. She said, “I present this to you in the name of my husband,” and then went back and sat down.

Then the other one got up, came over, and handed me an envelope, and she said, “I present this to you in the name of my husband.”

Then they said, “We know you are in a hurry, and you want to get going, so we will just let you go now. This is all that we wanted to do.”

I thanked them, and as I left that home with those big white pillars, I shall never forget how I got around the corner just as quickly as possible to open those envelopes. I opened the first one, and in it was a check for \$250.00! I opened the second one, and there was another check for \$250.00! Now if you are old enough to remember the Depression, you may remember how much \$500.00 was during those years! It was just this side of a million dollars, that's what it was! I've never had as much money in my life as I had that day.

That night, the Sunday school class had a farewell banquet for me, and they gave me \$100.00. So then I had \$600.00! That was the money I used to attend seminary the next year. That night at the banquet, someone gave me this verse: "Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." I'm here to say that He has made that promise good. Over three quarters of a century have gone by, and He has made it good.

Now, friend, God has brought *you* up to this day. Has He blessed you, has God been good to you up to this moment? Then why do you think He is going to let you down now? He says, "Since I have begun a good work in you, I will perform it, I will perfect it, I will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." My friend, how *wonderful* our God is! There is *confidence*. There is *certainty*.

Cheer

Now in closing, I want to notice the *cheer* that is in store for the believer.

The Philippians loved Paul, and they wrote him a note of sympathy, cheer, and comfort. I imagine that it read somewhat like this: "Poor Paul, we are so sorry that the Romans have put you in jail. You have been such a blessing to the Gentiles, but now you are in prison and can't go out to preach the gospel anymore." Notice Paul's response:

But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel. (Philippians 1:12)

That word "furtherance" is an amazing word in Greek. It was used by the Roman army when they went out into the impenetrable forests of Europe — where my ancestors (and maybe yours) were hiding at that time. When the Romans went out into those forests, they had with them a group that were known as pioneers. These pioneers went ahead of the army, cutting a way through the forests in order that the Roman troops might advance. That is the figure of speech that Paul used here. He was saying, "I want you to know that the things that have happened to me have been like pioneers, cutting the way through the impenetrable forests to get the gospel out." Isn't that amazing?

You say, "Paul, you mean to tell me that being put in prison has actually made the gospel move out where it wouldn't go before?" Yes, that's what he meant. How can that be? Well, he explained that two things were happening. First, "My bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places" (Philippians 1:13).

When the Lord Jesus waylaid the apostle Paul on the Damascus Road, He said that Paul would go to the Gentiles and bear God's name before kings. Now, up to the time he was arrested, he had not had an audience with rulers. But after he was arrested, he stood before kings and other rulers. As you know, Paul was a Roman citizen and had appealed his case to Caesar,

which placed him in custody with an unusual group of prisoners. We are told in the Book of Acts that he was kept, actually, in his own hired house. However, he was chained to a guard, and these guardsmen belonged to the patricians, not the plebeians, of Rome. They were known as the Praetorian Guard of Caesar. They were the ones who were in the palace and in the Senate and in the higher echelons of Rome. Paul had never been able to reach that group before, but then he was *chained* to members of this imperial guard. Can you imagine anything more wonderful than having your congregation chained to you? The soldiers had to take turns, of course. They worked certain shifts, and Paul had a member of the Roman nobility chained to him at all times! What do you think Paul talked about? He talked about Christ, of course. I imagine that many of these guardsmen, when the next fellow came on duty, would say, “Hurry and unchain me; let me out of here — this fella’s trying to convert me!” And some of them *were* converted. Paul led them to Christ. “The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel” (Philippians 1:12).

That’s not all —

And many of the brethren in the Lord, becoming confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. (Philippians 1:14)

When Paul the apostle went through the Roman Empire, he’d come to a place like Antioch in Pisidia or Ephesus or Philippi, and he would preach Christ. When he preached, men were won for Christ. As they became believers, the issue was then — as it is today — “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel” (Mark 16:15). Somebody would say to a man who was then a Christian, “Why don’t you get busy and preach the gospel?” He would respond, “I’ll tell you why. Have you ever heard the apostle Paul preach? Well, I want to tell you that when I hear him preach, I know that he does it so much better than I ever could, I just don’t feel like saying anything. As long as he is out preaching the gospel, I have nothing to say.”

Then one day word was flashed through the Roman Empire (when I say “flashed,” there was no radio news, no rapid means of communication, but the news went by word of mouth from place to place), “Paul the apostle is now the prisoner of Nero in Rome! It looks as if he’ll never be free again.” And men all over the Roman Empire who had heard the gospel and believed in Christ took to the highways and to the fields, saying, “Now we are going out and preaching Christ, because Paul the apostle can’t go anymore.” By the very fact that he was in prison, literally hundreds of missionaries took to the Roman roads to preach the gospel, so that Paul the apostle was multiplied hundreds of times. Paul said to the Philippians, “I want you to know that what’s happened to me has happened for the *furtherance* of the gospel.” It had not hindered but actually had enhanced it.

There was something more that Paul couldn’t see in his day, but which you and I see. We wouldn’t have the Epistle to the Philippians, we wouldn’t have the Epistle to the Ephesians, nor would we have the Epistle to Philemon if Paul had not been in prison. As a prisoner, he had time to write these epistles. Otherwise, they would never have been in existence. May I say to you, the things that happened to him certainly resulted in the *furtherance* of the gospel!

Some, indeed, preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds; but the other, of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel.

(Philippians 1:15-17)

Actually, these were some people who apparently were jealous of Paul, and they criticized him. They didn't like that he went into the synagogues and preached. They thought he ought not cooperate with everyone. But Paul was not critical of them; he wrote, "Some, indeed, preach Christ even of envy and strife." And I think that most criticism in the contemporary church can be summed up in these two words: *envy* and *strife*. Those are the things that prompt critics today. My beloved, if the gospel is being preached, let's rejoice.

Note Paul's reaction:

What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in that I do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. (Philippians 1:18)

Now this word translated "rejoice" and "joy" is a marvelous word. It has in it the meaning "cheer." Actually, it means "courage." Our Lord used it when He said:

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation [trouble]: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

"Be of good cheer" is a word of courage, and it is the same word that Paul used in Philippians 1:18. And, by the way, it is the same thing that Paul heard in the storm when the Lord appeared to him before the shipwreck.

And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. (Acts 23:11)

"Be of good cheer."

So, you see, it didn't make any difference to Paul what happened to him, just so Christ was preached. The reason was that he had this philosophy:

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21)

I wish I could say to you that I've come to that high level of living. For me to live *Christ*, to die *gain*. Don't you see that you cannot hurt a man like that?

Finally Nero, mad as he was, sent in the executioner to Paul. Since Paul had led some of those fellows to the Lord, the soldier may have gone very reluctantly. I imagine that the conversation went something like this: "I am sorry, Paul, that we have to do this, but you know Nero!" I am pretty sure Paul's reply would have been, "It's all right — actually, I want to thank you. I want you to know that for me to live is Christ, but to die is *gain*."

"Gain" is always more of the same thing, and in this case more of the same thing is *Christ*. Paul had said to the Philippians:

For I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ,

which is far better. Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.
(Philippians 1:23, 24)

But the time had come to be with Christ, where he most wanted to be. The best thing that can happen to a Christian is for the Lord to come. And that may happen soon, I do not know. But I do know this: the next best thing that can happen to a Christian is to *die*. Yes, it is! “For to me to live is Christ, and to die,” Paul said, “is *gain*.” So he said to the executioner, “Go back and thank your master, Nero, for me, because he’s doing me a favor. I’m about to get dividends on my investment. I’ve lived for Christ, and I’m going now to be with Him.”

My friend, as I said before, you can’t hurt a man like that! John Milton wrote a marvelous poem in which a slavemaster says, “I’ve whipped that slave, and he thanks me. I can’t hurt him, but he’s hurting me.” Oh, if you and I could get above the smog of this world and learn to live for Christ, there would be cheer and joy in our lives today. *Confidence, certainty, and cheer* for the child of God.