

# PHILIPPIANS

## Confident in Christ (1:1-11)

Commentaries: Week One

### New American Commentary<sup>1</sup>

#### Salutation

The greeting Paul sent the church resembled the greetings of other first-century letters. Commonly they contained three elements: identification of the writers, identification of the readers, and the greeting. Some differences occur, however, which reinforce the Christian nature of the letters. Paul changed from the typical greeting *charein* to *charis* (“grace”); he added “peace” and explained that “grace and peace” come from both God the Father and Christ.

The greeting reveals that Paul chose to write this in a letter (epistolary) format. Epistles may be formal or informal. Formal epistles tend to reflect forethought in subject matter, stylized writing, and an organized presentation. Informal letters generally contain a tone of warmth and spontaneity and, at times, reflect an intimacy regarding specific contexts that leave the modern interpreter puzzled. Philippians is informal. This conversation between friends suggests two important truths. First, the letter is not systematic. This means that much of the writing simply flowed from Paul’s mind. At no place in the epistle did Paul sustain a fully developed, systematic presentation. The closest to it is in [Phil 2:5–11](#), which has the marks of more formal writing, but it illustrates another point. Second, the letter is occasional. Some specific situation(s) prompted Paul to write. The letter is “theology in street clothes.” Paul answered the Philippians’ specific concerns in ways that they could understand. That is the beauty of such portions of Scripture: they are applied theology. At the same time, that approach brings some frustration to modern readers, and the interpreter must always ask what lay behind the writing.

#### The Writers

[1:1a](#) The epistle identifies two writers: Paul and Timothy. Other New Testament books reveal significant information about both men, and no doubt the church at Philippi knew them very well. Timothy occupied a prominent place in Paul’s ministry. No doubt Paul met him on the first missionary journey in the area of Lystra/Derbe. When he embarked on his second journey, Paul asked Timothy to accompany him, and Timothy became a prominent member of the ministering team. Paul mentioned him in the salutations of six epistles (2 Cor; Col; Phil; 1, 2 Thess; Phlm) and wrote two epistles to him (1, 2 Tim).

Why was Timothy mentioned? Various suggestions have been made. The most obvious answer lies in the close relationship Timothy had with the Philippians. He was part of the team that founded the church ([Acts 16–18](#)), Paul intended to send Timothy to the church not long after writing the letter ([Phil 2:19](#)), and Paul had no one who better shared his outlook and burden for his ministry ([2:20](#)). M. Silva suggests that, given the prominence of Timothy in Macedonian evangelism, the surprise would have been if he were not included in Paul’s letter. Perhaps Silva is correct, but if that criterion is applied consistently, Timothy should also have been mentioned in 1 Corinthians.

---

1. Richard R. Melick, *New American Commentary – Volume 32: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1991), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 45-66.

Paul referred to himself and Timothy as “servants of Jesus Christ.” He generally reserved the title *doulos* (“servant” or “slave”) as a description of himself, and even then it occurs sparingly. This is the only place he referred to Timothy as a “servant” of Christ, and he only called two persons other than himself by the title. In [Col 4:12](#), Paul called Epaphras a “servant of Christ” (*doulos Christou*), and others are called “fellow-servants” (Epaphras, [Col 1:7](#); Tychicus, [Col 4:7](#)). Thus Paul identified Timothy by a title which revealed high esteem for Timothy’s commitment to Christ and his effective and humble service (see [2:20–24](#)).

The word *doulos* occurs in only three salutations (Rom, Phil, and Titus). Elsewhere he used the term “apostle” to describe himself. Before considering the meaning of “servant,” it is necessary to ask why Paul used it here and elsewhere. He had not met the Roman church personally, but neither had he met the Colossian congregation. In Romans Paul used both “servant” and “apostle” ([1:1](#)). There “servant” designates his humility, and he stated that even his apostleship came by divine call. Perhaps more to the point, he did not have to assert his authority at Rome or Philippi. In Romans, Paul hoped to solve the problem of division between the Jewish and Gentile elements, but ultimately he had no personal responsibility for the church. When writing to Titus, Paul did not need to assert his apostleship. Titus knew him well and accepted his authority. Further, the problems addressed in Titus related to sub-Christian practice, not false teachers entering the Christian community.

The word “servant” or “slave” has been defined in various ways. Its basic meaning is clear, but it may have implied two different ideas. The first comes from Greco-Roman culture. Slaves were common because of war, and Christian slaves probably worshiped in the churches along with their masters. Everyone knew slaves. A slave had no rights or privileges, and all personal interests and ambitions had to be repressed. Everything related to the master. This title did not refer to a position of honor in the first-century world. The Philippians no doubt thought it strange, if not shocking. Paul chose his words carefully, and “servant” truly characterized his life.

The second possibility comes from the Old Testament. Frequently the Septuagint used the word “slave” for one who served Yahweh (e.g., [Num 12:7](#)). Moses was the “servant” of the Lord, and from his day onward, the title became one of honor. It stood for one who was commissioned by God for a special task. That background may have influenced Paul, but he employed the word because it spoke of humility. Paul used it of himself in epistles written largely to Gentile audiences (though the Roman church was mixed Jew and Gentile), where they would not necessarily perceive the Old Testament tradition.

The term represented the Christian era. Whether it was heard with Hellenistic or Hebraistic ears, it became a Christian ideal. Paul certainly knew of its centrality to the hymn found in [2:5–11](#); if the term characterized the Lord, it was equally appropriate as a model for his servants.

## **The Readers**

[1:1b](#) Paul identified two groups of readers. They were the church at large and special persons within the congregation. The church was called “the saints.” The term has no other New Testament meaning than Christian people, and Paul used it in place of “the church,” which he had used earlier in his ministry. The saints were those who were set apart by God at conversion, and they were in process of becoming like Christ. The term thus reminded the church of its special status in God’s redemptive plan.

The other group consisted of bishops and deacons. This is the only time Paul used the word “bishop” outside of the Pastoral Epistles. The word means “overseer,” and the question here is whether it refers to an office. At that time in church history, the title “bishop” did not refer to one person who had the charge of a number of churches in a geographical area. That came in the second century.

Was there some type of office in the church this early? The text reveals several factors. They were singled out in a special way, not as simply “saints” and not as “deacons.” They also were placed second in Paul’s opening remarks. Perhaps this revealed his concern that they had a secondary importance. Third, the term is plural. That definitely rules out the possibility of a “one man” rule over several churches, if Philippi had only one church, which seems to be the case. On the other hand, it suggests that several had this function or office. In the only Lukan use of the term, bishops were called to service by the Holy Spirit ([Acts 20:28](#)). The term sounds much like the separation of Barnabas and Saul for the missionary task in [Acts 13:1–3](#). Another reason for not considering the term as a designation of a church office is that it does not appear in any list of spiritual gifts or church functions outside the references identified above.

There was precedent for offices in the church. The early church probably took over the worship patterns of the synagogue, which had two chief officers. Likewise, some scholars point to a parallel in Essene communities, which had an administrative supervisor who was responsible for community leadership. Finally, some suggest that the titles “bishops” and “deacons” simply reveal “the Roman penchant for organization” which “gave the Philippian church a regular system of office-bearers.” How much any church was influenced by these organizational precedents is impossible to know. Anyone could have provided the organizational pattern.

Clearly the early church was organized. The lists of leadership positions reveal at least an informal structure ([Eph 4:11–13](#)), which probably grew out of natural ability and spiritual giftedness. Similarly, in [Acts 20:28](#), Luke recorded the presence of “overseers.” In just a few years after the Epistle to the Philippians was written, the church had defined offices with qualifications clearly identified ([1 Tim 3:1ff.](#)). Since 1 Timothy may have been written only two to five years after Philippians, it seems there was an emerging or developing structure.

On the other hand, the precise function of “bishops and deacons” is not clear. In writing to the Ephesians at about the same time as Philippians, Paul did not mention “bishops and deacons,” even though he listed several offices which helped the church develop ([4:11–13](#)). Ephesians has perhaps the most profound theological presentation of the church in the Pauline epistles, and the fact that bishops and deacons were not mentioned there is significant. In [Phil 4:3](#), Paul alluded to another church leader, asking for his help in solving the misunderstanding between Euodia and Syntyche.

Two other factors deserve mention. First, many commentators identify the overseers with the gift sent to Paul; perhaps they generated the gift. Since the letter is, in part at least, a thank you, their role was acknowledged. The title “bishop” was common in Greek society and had a variety of uses in the LXX. Perhaps it was a natural term to identify leaders within the church community. Second, if this were a description of formalized church officers, it is surprising that “elder” (“presbyter”) is omitted. That title drew more on Jewish/Christian background than “bishop,” although there is sufficient evidence that “bishop” and “elder” referred to the same persons. The title probably related to a function rather than an office. Providing oversight in the areas of teaching and administration were the primary functions of a bishop or elder.

The word “deacon” described the other group. It may have been used in a technical sense ([1 Tim 3:8](#)) to refer to an office in the church. This use probably draws its origin from [Acts 6:1–6](#), though the word “deacon” is not used of the seven who were elected. The word also occurs nontechnically in many passages. Many simply “ministered” in the name of Christ ([Eph 3:7](#) of Paul; [Col 1:7](#) of Epaphras). It may be difficult to suggest that the word “bishop” here could be functional in nature and the word “deacon” official. It is possible, however, that Paul identified the specific overseers of the gift collection first, out of courtesy, then mentioned the deacons. Since neither “bishops” nor “deacons” occurs elsewhere in the epistle, obviously the letter was written to the church at large, the saints.

### **The Greeting**

[1:2](#) The specific greeting, “grace and peace,” adds to the normal epistolary introductions. Since grace always reminded Paul of God’s grace in Christ, no doubt this word conveys full Christian meaning. It means “may God’s grace be with you.” The fact that Paul placed it before “peace” may indicate further his theological orientation that grace provided for and secured peace. “Peace” no doubt conveyed Paul’s Hebrew background and the typical greeting “shalom.” It had a full sense of “may all things be well with you.” Both words as used by Paul imply a petition as well as a greeting.

Grace and peace come jointly from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. That God sends them to believers was no surprise to anyone. Many prayed to their gods for the same qualities. The addition of “Jesus Christ” here adds a profound Christological dimension to the blessing. The church knew well that grace was embodied in Jesus ([Titus 2:11–14](#)), and peace was his gift to the believer ([John 14:27](#); [16:33](#)). In so combining the work of God and Jesus, Paul reflected his deep conviction about the deity of Jesus. Jesus does what God the Father does.

### **Explanation of Paul’s Concerns**

#### **Paul’s Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Philippians [1:3–11](#)**

The epistle proper begins like many of Paul’s epistles—with praise to God for the church and a specific petition on its behalf. The pattern occurs regularly enough that it no doubt reflects Paul’s natural inclination in prayer. God’s call on the Philippians’ lives brought Paul joy, even though he had specific concerns about their Christian growth.

[Philippians 1:3–11](#) forms a unit of thought in two movements. Several factors reveal the unity: the synonyms “I thank my God” ([1:3](#)) and “this is my prayer” ([1:9](#)), the general content of praise and petition, and Paul’s epistolary pattern in introductions. The section divides naturally into two subsections, however. First, vv. [3–8](#) express praise for the Philippians. The verb translated “I thank my God” contains the idea of thanksgiving. Furthermore, all of vv. [3–8](#) modify that one main verb. Second, vv. [9–11](#) express Paul’s more specific petition. He introduced his prayer with a consecutive conjunction (“and,” *kai*) which both continues the previous idea and introduces another. These verses contain one long sentence in Greek, but Paul made two petitions in them.

(1) *Paul's Thanksgiving* [1:3–8](#)

The format for this thanksgiving resembles others, but the content is unique. Paul remembered God's working in the believers' lives, as well as their participation in his ministry. Clearly, he did not simply recite a thanksgiving that could be true of any group of Christians. These verses are warm and personal. The best analysis is thematic. Three ideas support Paul's main statement in the opening verb: "I always pray with joy" ([1:4](#)), "being confident of this" ([1:6](#)), and "It is right for me to feel this way" ([1:7](#)). Following these structural components, the text reveals that Paul's thanksgiving was joyful ([1:4–5](#)); it was confident ([1:6](#)); and it was proper ([1:7–8](#)).

[1:3](#) Paul expressed his pleasure for the church. He let the believers in on his thoughts. Two significant aspects of Paul's thanksgiving emerge in v. [3](#). These aspects reveal information about Paul's prayer life and his fondness for the Philippians. First, Paul was thankful for them, even though a problem of disunity threatened the fellowship of the congregation. He lived his life in response to the love of Christ ([2 Cor 5:14–15](#)), hoping to reach people everywhere. The validation of his ministry, which was his life, was that people actually did respond to the gospel he preached and that they remained true to their faith. He stated as much in [1 Thess 2:19; 3:8](#). Any positive response to the gospel brought Paul joy; when a church embraced the Lord and the gospel message as enthusiastically as the Philippians did, it was cause for great thanksgiving.

Second, Paul's thankfulness never wavered. It was "every time I remember you." The reasons for that are detailed in [1:4–5](#). Here he stressed the consistency of his memories. Paul turned each thought of them into praise for them. What kind of church produced those memories? They had shared hard times which served to deepen their friendship.

[1:4](#) The first characteristic of Paul's thanksgiving for them was that it was joyful. The Greek text stresses this by placing the words "with joy" before the words "I always pray." This is the first reference to joy, a major theme in the epistle.

The grammatical and syntactical relationships in this section are quite complicated. Several questions must be answered that pertain to vv. [4–5](#) and their function in the sentence. Is the NIV text correct in starting a new thought at the beginning of v. [4](#)? Does the phrase "because of your partnership in the gospel" connect with the main verb "I thank," or does it go with something else? Where does the phrase "from the first day until now" go?

Regarding the first question, how should the thoughts of v. [4](#) be arranged? The NIV correctly interprets the sense of the passage, though there should be no major break such as it makes. This observation is based on some literary patterns which prevail. Twice the same root word for "prayer" occurs, though in different parts of speech ("In all my prayers" and "I always pray"). These two occurrences, which go together logically, also somewhat repeat and specify the word "I give thanks." Paul informed his readers that his thanksgiving was actually done in prayers. Therefore, the sense of the thanksgiving was resumed in the two words for "prayer."

[1:5](#) The resolution of the second question begins at this point. Does the phrase "because of your partnership" (*koinōnia*) go with v. [3](#) or v. [4](#)? The parallelism of the text suggests that it goes with v. [4](#). The two terms for "prayer" belong together in sense, and the two clauses which provide a reason for the prayers conform to each other as well. The first clause, "every time I remember you," provided a reason for Paul's thankfulness. The second, "because of your partnership," provided a corollary reason for his



specific joyful prayers. His remembrance was stirred by the gift they gave him. Their partnership was also the support they rendered to the apostle. Here it is emphatic, not careless. The new element in this verse is the statement of joy, which emphasizes the importance of the phrase “with joy.”

The third question is the location of “from the first day until now.” Some scholars want to place it with “I thank my God”; others, with “being confident of this”; still others, with “I always pray.” Taking it with “I thank my God” makes the sentence extremely awkward and surely should be rejected. Understanding it with “being confident of this” causes an abrupt change of direction from the emphasis on the gifts of the church to the attitudes of Paul. That, too, should be rejected. The church participated with Paul in the gospel from the first day until now. That considers the normal flow of the text and satisfies the need for consistency of subject matter.

Since the primary contribution of v. [4](#) is the identification of Paul’s joy, the basis of Paul’s joy is revealed in v. [5](#). The NIV correctly captures the relationships by stating “because of your partnership in the gospel.” The relationship between Paul and the church went deeper than human friendships. They had a tie that came from joining in the work of God in the world. Such cooperation in the spread of the gospel was something Paul appreciated very much. That fellowship was with Paul only in an intermediate sense; the ultimate contribution they made was to the spread of the gospel itself.

“Fellowship” is a major theme of the letter. The word occurs primarily in the Pauline Epistles (thirteen of nineteen times in the New Testament) and three times in Philippians. In [2:1](#) Paul urged, “If any fellowship with the Spirit,” and in [3:10](#) he expressed his desire to share in the “fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.” Additionally, the verbal form of the word occurs in [4:15](#), which the NIV translates “shared with me.” This last occurrence presents a context for understanding Paul’s use of the word in Philippians. It referred to the believers’ involvement with Paul by sending a gift to support his work. The grammar of [1:5](#) confirms this primary meaning. The noun “partnership” may be followed by various cases or parts of speech. For example, in the other two occurrences of “fellowship” in Philippians, the word “of” occurs. Here the word “unto” follows. In other places where the preposition “unto” follows, the people experience “fellowship” by contributing to a gift ([Rom 15:26](#); [2 Cor 9:13](#)). Thus when Paul thanked God for their fellowship “in [*eis*] the Gospel,” he meant that they were contributing to the spread of the gospel in tangible ways, i.e., primarily through their support.

The gospel was not only the environment of their fellowship but also its goal. Had it not been for the gospel, they would not have met. Paul generally stated that the tie that bound Christians together was the gospel message. Here, however, the construction suggests that the advancement of the gospel united them. In their support of Paul, they contributed to the work of God in the world through the gospel. When the Philippians were converted, they were given a privilege of promoting the gospel. Through their relationship with Paul, they were true to that aspect of their faith.

Paul mentioned the gospel nine times in Philippians. His other epistles reveal that he conceived of the gospel as a message of salvation based on historical, theological, and experiential evidence.

In this epistle, the gospel was proclaimed ([1:15–17](#)), defended ([1:16](#)), and advanced by the lives of those who knew it ([1:12](#); [2:22](#)). In this text, Paul used the term to suggest that the gospel was the movement of God through history and that it was perpetuated by God’s human spokespersons.

Paul's joy came as he remembered the history of the church, as well as the relationship it had with him. Immediately upon Paul's preaching, some people had responded to the gospel, and the church remained firmly committed to Paul, who had taken the gospel message to them. Paul, therefore, looked back to the beginning and appreciated its general support from the first day. [Acts 16](#) records the early history of the Philippian church. The beginning was difficult for both believers and the apostolic band. In addition to the common difficulties faced in spreading the gospel, Paul faced imprisonment for his faith. His joy as he remembered the Philippians, therefore, was not because of his good circumstances when they believed. Rather, it was because of the firm faith of the believers in spite of their difficulties. As they grew in their Christian maturity, they also grew in their appreciation of Paul. He, in turn, prayed for them with joy.

[1:6](#) The second characteristic of Paul's thanksgiving for the Philippian believers was that he prayed with confidence. That confidence was based on the working of God in their midst, not in his own ability or persuasiveness. Two matters emerge as significant emphases: the nature of the work in the Philippians and the time orientation involved.

God began the work in the church. Obviously if he starts something, it will reach completion. Paul easily moved between the tensions of human agency and divine initiative, accepting both in a natural way. The Philippians had a partnership with Paul, but God actually worked it in them. Both the contrasts between these two realities and Paul's comfort with each deserve attention.

What work had God begun? Referring to the immediate context only, some interpreters prefer to explain it as the support the church gave to Paul. They say Paul meant the "sharing in the gospel." The rule of context always guides the interpreter, but it is conceivable that Paul may have drawn on the wider context of Christian experience as well. The experience of God's grace always lay under the surface of Paul's words. Most likely that is true here since a reference to the support seems awkward. Further, how does the reference to the "day of Christ" relate to their completion of the gift? Did Paul expect them to continue supporting him until the second coming?

Paul had a general Christian characteristic in mind when he made this statement. Even those who interpret the passage as referring to the specific financial gift normally generalize it somewhat. They refer to the spirit which produced the gift or the opportunity and responsibility of supporting the gospel. It is more likely, however, that Paul saw the Philippians' generosity as evidence of the grace of God in their lives, and in this text he spoke to that grace. In [2 Cor 8:7](#), a passage that urged the Corinthians to be like the Philippians in giving, Paul urged the development of the grace of giving. Giving evidenced the maturity of their thought and action. The good work in [1:6](#) refers to what lay behind their generosity, the calling and Christian maturity of the church.

Since Paul spoke of the work beginning and ending, that he had only their initial salvation experience in mind is unlikely. He also had in mind an ongoing process of growth in the Christian's life ([Phil 2:12](#)). The whole salvation process, particularly the progressive element, is what Paul meant here. Since God began a work of Christian growth, evidenced by their giving, he would complete that growth.

Paul expressed the confidence that the growth would take place "until the day of Christ Jesus." He glanced backward to their salvation and forward to the completion of their character when the Lord returns. No doubt the reference to the "day of Christ Jesus" is the "day of the Lord" so common in the Old Testament ([Joel 2:1](#); [Amos 5:20](#)). The question is why the end times were included at this point.

Although Paul could have thought in terms of the imminent coming of the Lord, he also was more aware of a delay than earlier in his ministry. Paul's use of the phrase "until the day" actually called to mind the consummation of the present age. It was Paul's way of making two emphases: sanctification was an ongoing process and the process would continue to the end of the age. At that time the believers would be complete in character. They needed not to fear the judgment which characterized that day.

Some scholars take the confidence to be directed to the church at large, rather than to individuals within the church. The plural "you" makes the text uncertain, and it could have been addressed to the church collectively. On the other hand, the distributive plural commonly occurs in the epistles. It seems better here. Paul's thankfulness came with the confidence that God would work in the individual Christians until the day of Christ. This confidence occurred for two reasons. First, Paul was confident that what God began God would complete, and his words came from a deep conviction that God worked in them. Second, Paul saw the manifestations of their right relationship with God. Their gift evidenced their Christian maturity. Since God worked in them and they responded, Paul's confidence was justified.

[1:7](#) The third characteristic of Paul's thankful attitude was its properness. The Greek text has the word "right, just" (*dikaion*), a descriptive term expressing the sense of propriety. A structural question should be asked here: What does this clause modify? It could explain why Paul felt such confidence in God's working in the Philippians. Alternatively, it could add a reason Paul was thankful for them, expressing a thought parallel to his great joy for them. The latter is better. The "even as" clause parallels the two verbal ideas found here ("I always pray" and "being confident"). Further, Paul's confidence that God would complete his work hardly rested on emotional ties with them. His thankfulness for them could.

Paul provided three reasons for his attitude of thankfulness. First, he had them in his heart. Commentators differ over the precise meaning of this structure. On one hand, the Greek could read, "You have me in your heart," and the context could be interpreted to support it. Paul was explaining his appreciation of their gift on his behalf. Perhaps he continued his appreciation for their financial support. On the other hand, the construction more naturally reads, "I have you in my heart." Taken this way, Paul's thanksgiving was more than a response to the gift they sent and to the knowledge of God's working in their behalf. It came from a true blending of hearts. Emotional ties bound them together.

The second reason for this attitude was their fellow-service in the apostolic ministry. Paul's circumstances did not hinder their relationship. Being a prisoner could have presented an obstacle to their wholehearted support, but they took the attitude that it was their imprisonment too. No doubt this meant more to Paul because the church at Rome divided into two groups concerning him—to some, his imprisonment was part of the problem. No church was in a more patriotic setting than the Philippian church, but the chains proved to be no obstacle. Paul also mentioned his "defending" and "confirming" the gospel. The words are legal terms. They are official language for a formal defense, and some interpret them as evidence that Paul had presented his case in court. In fact, he had presented himself and the gospel to various political officials in Palestine. His presence in Rome was also a defense of the gospel. Paul stated later that the topic of conversation was "Christ" ([1:13](#)). The ordeal of his incarceration may be correctly called a "defense and confirmation." It was the ultimate opportunity for Christians to present their claims to the emperor. Thus, by life or death, Paul was committed to the



gospel message. The church stood by him in it. Whether good or bad times came, Paul counted on the Philippian church. Their support evidenced the fact that they were true “fellow-workers.” They joined with him in his apostolic calling to reach Gentiles for Christ. The partnership between them formed the strong tie which Paul addressed in the next verse.

Paul referred to his apostleship with the word “grace.” The term may identify general Christian attitudes, a state of grace in which a Christian stands, or Paul’s specific calling of grace. The last correctly describes this reference. To understand it as depicting a general state of grace does not take the immediate context seriously. The defense and confirmation of the gospel directly relate to the grace. They are the arena in which the grace operates. Here is another reference to his apostolic function. The Philippians recognized Paul’s unique place in God’s economy as apostle of God’s grace, and they demonstrated their support for it by participating with him as they could.

[1:8](#) The third reason for Paul’s attitude in prayer was the deep Christian tie between them. The force of this statement is demonstrated in two ways. First, the new sentence is in the form of an oath, as Paul called God to the witness stand. They could not see Paul’s heart for them, but God did. Second, this intense desire was distinctly Christian. Paul used two terms: “long” (*epipothō*), which expresses a strong desire, and “affection” (*splanchnois*), which identifies the “entrails” as all being involved in the emotion. The “entrails” were actually those of Christ Jesus. Paul thereby expressed the fact that his feelings came from the Lord. This was a total Christian emotion that was the result of both of them being Christian and of both sharing in what God was doing in Christ.

(2) *Paul’s Prayer for the Philippians* [1:9–11](#)

Paul’s thoughts easily moved from thanksgiving to petitioning prayer. The two were part of the same spiritual activity, but more than that, Paul acknowledged that the good done in the Philippians’ lives came from God. As a part of his response in praise, he prayed that God would continue his work in them.

This prayer resembles the prayer in Colossians. The similarity goes beyond the fact that the prayer follows quickly upon thanksgiving. Similarities of words reveal a similarity of content. No doubt Paul wrote them both at a time when he pondered the same thoughts on Christian growth, perhaps because of his own situation in life. The lexical and conceptual parallels include the following:

<a href="#">Phil 1:9–11</a>	<a href="#">Col 1:9–11</a>
I pray ( <i>proseuchomai</i> )	praying ( <i>proseuchomenoi</i> )
abound in knowledge ( <i>epignōsei</i> )	growing in knowledge of God ( <i>epignōsin</i> )
in all discernment ( <i>aisthesei</i> )	in wisdom and understanding ( <i>sophia kai synesei</i> )

being filled	you may be filled
( <i>peplērōmenoi</i> )	( <i>plērōthēte</i> )
fruit of righteousness	bearing fruit
( <i>karpon dikaiosynēs</i> )	( <i>karpophorountes</i> )
glory and praise of God	power of his glory
( <i>doxan kai epainon</i> )	( <i>kratos tēs doxēs</i> )
a good work	every good work
( <i>ergon agathon</i> )	( <i>ergō agathō</i> )

These parallels reveal that Paul thought consistently on the matter of Christian growth, and the fact that they are parallel emphasizes the basic themes found in his requests.

The prayer contains two basic petitions. These are known by two “that” (*hina*) clauses in the Greek text. The NIV fails to pick up this distinction and even makes the second petition part of a parallel statement (“and may be pure and blameless”). The two petitions are: “that your love may abound ... so that you may be able to discern what is best” ([1:9–10a](#)); and that you “may be pure and blameless ... having been filled with the fruit of righteousness” ([1:10b–11](#)). The first looks to the time interval between the present situation and the return of the Lord. The second takes the perspective of the second coming and looks back to the preparation of the church for that event. Paul prayed for a growing love ([1:9–10b](#)) and for a complete character ([1:10b–11a](#)).

Prayer for a Growing Love ([1:9–10a](#)). Love entered Paul’s thoughts first. Perhaps that was because of the Philippians’ love demonstrated in supporting him at such a crucial time in his life. Perhaps it was because love summarized the Ten Commandments, as presented in [Deut 6:5](#) and [Luke 10:27](#). Love also epitomized Christian responsibility to other Christians ([John 13:35](#); [1 John 2:7–11](#)).

To these rather obvious commands regarding love, Paul added his own insights. If the Philippians’ love abounded, they would be well on the way to Christian maturity. Here Paul described the nature of a growing love, the environment for a growing love, and the result of a growing love.

*The Nature of a Growing Love* ([1:9a](#)). Some confusion always exists in discussing love. It is at the same time the universal ideal to which all should aspire and the most personal and existential of all expressions.

[1:9a](#) The definition of love is addressed in this part of v. [9](#). Paul used the word *agapē*. The word predominates in Scripture as the expression of love. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish *agapē* from *philos* because the two occur frequently in Scripture with seemingly interchangeable meaning. Nevertheless, *philos* does contain an element of mutuality not found in *agapē*. It is a satisfying interaction with others. What is clear is that for Paul *agapē* emphasized the self-sacrificial love of Christ. It is a selfless action to benefit someone else. The model for this love is Christ, who gave himself for the sins of the world.

As Paul prayed for the readers' love to abound, he prayed for their Christlike attitude of self-sacrifice to continue as it had been demonstrated earlier in their giving. The sacrificial nature of the love is further stressed in that there is no object for the love; it is a characteristic of the "lover" regardless of the object. Jesus taught that aspect in the parable of the good Samaritan ([Luke 10:25–37](#)).

The lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" seeking to come to a clear understanding of his neighborhood and, thereby, of his responsibility ([10:29](#)). Jesus responded, "Which ... was a neighbor?" informing the man that he had framed the question incorrectly ([10:36](#)). There are no boundaries to a Christian's neighborhood. Love was to follow in the wake of their living.

The dynamic growth of love is presented in two ways in this first clause. First, the verb "abound" (*perisseuē*), which means to "be present in abundance," occurs in the most dynamic of expressions possible. Their love was to "keep on abounding." Second, the adverbial expression "more and more" stresses the dynamic of love. The Greek text actually has the expression "still more and more," the first part of which is omitted in the NIV. The expression builds layer upon layer to make the point. "More" would have sufficed, "more and more" was better, but "still more and more" accentuated the point being made. Although exemplary in their love, the Philippians had not yet reached perfection. There was still room for growth.

*The Environment of a Growing Love (1:9b).* [1:9b](#) The prayerful exhortation to love came with instructions about how to implement it. The words "knowledge and depth of insight" provide the twofold environment in which love may grow. They are, in fact, the most basic elements which foster love. The first aspect of the environment for growing love is knowledge. The Greek word for "knowledge" (*epignōsis*) is difficult to translate into acceptable English. The root word is *gnosis*, and the preposition *epi* ("upon") is prefixed to it. Both parts of the compound need explanation.

The basic word used here (*gnōsis*) contains a slight contrast with its synonyms. Most often it is compared or contrasted with the common Greek term for "knowledge" (*oida*). This latter term generally signifies an intellectual knowledge (the product of the mind). It may convey the idea of a complete knowledge because the other terms are not well suited to the idea of completion. In contrast, *gnōsis* generally conveys the idea of an experiential knowledge (the product of experiencing by living). It easily lends itself to expressing relationships since they come from experiences. Further, since experiences provide the process of learning, *gnōsis* often stresses the process of knowing, rather than the outcome. Here Paul used the term in its full sense of real, personal knowing. It is not the product of deductive reasoning and, therefore, intellectual (*oida*). Nevertheless, it is not fully relational, indicating only relationships with persons. Paul wanted them to have a personal knowledge which, as he stated later in this prayer, would surface in practical ways as well.

The compound form heightens the definition. In Greek, prefixed prepositions may be either directive, pointing to a specific knowledge, or perfective, emphasizing an accurate knowledge. Since this context does not provide a direction, clearly Paul used the word in the perfective sense. This first aspect of love, therefore, is a complete knowledge. Part of the completeness is its ability to apply what is known to the practical aspects of life.

Paul added judgment, the moral environment, to knowledge. The term "depth of insight" occurs only here in the New Testament, although a form of the root word occurs in [Heb 5:14](#). It conveys the sense of moral discretion. Thus morality affects the growth of love.

Although the terms knowledge and judgment have no specific modifiers, two matters are clear. First, Paul wrote in Christian terms. The love and judgment he espoused were those seen in Christ and consistent with Scripture. While the words sometimes occur in secular contexts discussing general morality, Paul certainly rooted his prayers in Christ and the resources which come from the Holy Spirit. The Philippians would realize, therefore, that in disclosing his prayer for them, Paul called them to the highest and best of Christian qualities and growth. Second, these two terms provide a collective environment which fosters growth. If either is lacking, love will not grow. In this, Paul's expression is consistent with his Jewish-Christian ethical background. Knowing and living go hand in hand. Failure to grow in the knowledge God expects of Christians hinders love. Similarly, failure to discipline the moral life hinders love. Attention to both of these realms promotes a healthy and positive Christian life.

Like "love," the terms "knowledge" and "insight" have no expressed objects. They speak to broad, general concerns. The comprehensive knowledge includes an accurate understanding of God and the world, as well as the "lover" himself. Similarly, the moral insight comes from various sources and is comprehensive in nature. It exposes the rightness and wrongness of all thoughts and actions.

*The Result of a Growing Love (1:10a).* [1:10a](#) Paul envisioned mature Christians who had the ability to distinguish right from wrong. He directed his prayer toward that end. The NIV correctly translates what may be taken in several ways. The word "discern" has the meaning of *test by trial*, and the term "best" emphasizes the result of that testing. The phrase need not stress the fact that some things are harmful and, therefore, should be avoided. It has equal application to affirming and embracing the best of good choices, and that reading fits this text better. Since this context calls for a wisdom related to life, the words suggest the ability to discern moral conduct and values so that life and energy are not misdirected. A growing love, fed by proper knowledge and moral insight, enables one to see the best way to live in light of the day of Christ.

**Prayer for Complete Character (1:10b–11).** Discerning what is best develops character. A growing love provides for character development and completion. As Paul prayed, his thoughts moved to the day of accountability. He prayed that the Philippians would live in such a way that they would be without blame at that time. In this second petition, therefore, Paul saw the end of life on earth. As always, the return of the Lord and Christians' preparation for it occupied his thoughts. Paul identified through prayer the nature of complete character, the means to it, and the purpose of it.

*The Nature of Complete Character (1:10b).* [1:10b](#) Two words describe Paul's concern for the Philippians: "pure and blameless." Strictly defined these words convey two slightly different ideas. "Pure" (*eilikrinēs*) occurs only one other time in the New Testament ([2 Pet 3:1](#)), although other words with the same root occur (i.e., [1 Cor 5:8](#)). The most common etymology of the term suggests that it comes from the two words "sun" (*helios*) and "to judge" (*krinō*) and that the word meant *to hold up to sunlight for inspection*. "Blameless" (*aproskoptoi*) also occurs rarely in the New Testament. The term may have an active meaning (*to cause blame*) or a passive one (*to be free from blame*). The decision is a difficult one since both have a precedent (cf. [Acts 24:16](#); [1 Cor 10:32](#)). The text, however, follows with a reference to the "fruit of righteousness," a term which implies character, and thus it favors the passive sense. Paul hoped they would have a blameless life.

*The Means to Complete Character (1:11a).* [1:11a](#) Similar to the first petition, Paul provided a context out of which such character could come. In the first, the environment of knowledge and morality produced a discriminating love. In this petition the fruit of righteousness produces complete character.

The phrase “fruit of righteousness” also demands interpretation. The primary concern is the use of the term “righteousness.” Some interpret it to mean the fruit produced by their imputed righteousness. Most, however, understand the phrase to mean the result of righteous activity as Christians. It refers to an ethical righteousness. The Old Testament supports this conclusion ([Hos 10:12](#)), and it fits Paul’s attitude expressed in Philippians.

Here Paul used an agricultural metaphor which included the word “fruit.” Some translate the word as “harvest,” a translation which no doubt captures Paul’s thought well. The fruit was that which Jesus Christ produced in them. It parallels [Gal 5:22](#). For that reason, the participle is best understood as a passive idea, “having been filled” (e.g., by Christ). The prayer was for them to live in such a way that Christ could work in them the harvest of morality and righteousness which would be acceptable at the day of Christ.

Righteous living would protect the church; it would be blameless. As Paul would clarify later (see [3:4–6](#)), his concern was that blamelessness be because of Christ and his righteousness, not one’s own. The passage teaches that if those who are righteous by God’s grace through faith live as they should, the fruit of their lives will be true blamelessness. No one will condemn them, and they will stand the test of judgment day.

*The Purpose of Complete Character* ([1:11b](#)). [1:11b](#) Paul concluded this prayer with a reference to God’s glory. The day of Christ characterized Paul’s thoughts; the glory of God motivated Paul’s actions. He saw the entire scope of salvation as an outworking of God’s grace and as a contribution to God’s glory. The chief end of persons was the glory of God. He reminded the Philippians of their ultimate calling, to reflect God’s character in their lives. He explained the reason for their careful living: the glory of God in their lives.

With this prayer for God’s glory, Paul ended the first section of the epistle. The epistle began with appreciation for their relationship to Paul from the beginning. It called them to realize that God began a work in them and it must continue, and it reminded them of the need to prepare for the day of Christ’s appearing. Paul masterfully revealed his concerns for them, introducing each of the major themes of the epistle. In a manner appropriate to friends, Paul spoke first in appreciation for who they were, then urged them to continue in Christian growth. Even his prayer provided a positive approach to them. His was no disinterested concern. He prayed that they would achieve the character prized so highly for them and himself ([3:8–11](#)). The concern did not bypass the present life, however. Love was to characterize all Christians. It uniquely expressed their relationship to Christ and prepared them for meeting him at the end of life.