

# PHILIPPIANS

## Living In Christ (1:12-26) Commentary: Week Two

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

#### Paul's Joy in the Progress of the Gospel

##### [1:12-26](#)

With v. [12](#), Paul began a discussion of his situation in Rome. He rarely wrote so early in an epistle about his own situation. Perhaps several reasons prompted this approach. First, no doubt the church anxiously awaited this news; it had sent Epaphroditus to Paul's side, anticipating his needs. Perhaps it had heard of the potential difficulties Paul might have with the Roman government. Although at this time Christianity was not a capital crime, no one knew how the emperor would rule regarding Christians. This was the test case.

The second reason Paul discussed his circumstances so soon was that the Philippians would hear a firsthand report from Epaphroditus, and Paul needed to address their concerns quickly. Their anxiety regarding Epaphroditus would quickly turn to continued anxiety about Paul. Although Epaphroditus's report would be accurate, it could easily be filled with his impressions. Little could be done constructively to address the needs of the church if readers were waiting to hear how Paul responded to his circumstances.

Third, Paul saw firsthand how divisions affected the work of the gospel. The divided church at Rome surely grieved Paul. Although he did not complain in his letter, and he pointed out the positive aspects of the situation, obviously the disunity concerned him. An explanation of his circumstances provided a natural and easy way to encourage the Philippians in the qualities he saw lacking at Rome. Thus the description of his situation served to anticipate his point to the readers. Surely they would conduct themselves differently from the Roman church.

Finally, this section responded to the gift they had sent. They wanted to know Paul's circumstances because they were friends; because of their stewardship, they needed to know how the work progressed. At specific intervals Paul wrote autobiographically, informing the readers of his own thoughts. Three times this occurs in major sections: [1:12-26](#), regarding his circumstances; [3:1-14](#), regarding his experience of salvation; and [4:10-20](#), regarding the gift from the church. In each case, Paul's experiences became an effective vehicle for communicating his concerns.

A major structural question concerns the ending of the first section. It is difficult to know whether [1:27-30](#) concludes the first section by applying Paul's concerns regarding Rome to the church at Philippi, or whether it begins the first set of exhortations. There are thematic and conceptual ties to both sections.

The problem is to determine what criteria actually indicate a new section has begun. On one hand, Philippians has the marks of a personal letter, and informal allusions to the tie between writer and reader occur throughout. In [1:27-30](#) Paul made reference to his desire to hear of the Philippians' firm stand. Such a stand confirmed his apostolic ministry. In [2:1-11](#) Paul appealed to the common bond between

---

1. Richard R. Melick, *New American Commentary – Volume 32: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1991), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 67-87.

himself and the church. The humility he advocated was a fulfillment of his joy. In [2:12–18](#) he urged them to obey and work out their salvation even if he were sacrificed. Their obedience vindicated his sufferings for them. The criterion for structural divisions may be personal allusion, but such allusions are frequent in the section. In each portion Paul appealed to their friendship. On the other hand, the criterion may be that the form changes to exhortation rather than information. Three basic commands occur in [1:27–2:18](#). This change of tone appears more significant, and the three no doubt form a section to themselves. The first section, therefore, ends at [1:26](#). It divides naturally into two primary sections: Paul’s circumstances ([1:12–17](#)) and Paul’s attitudes ([1:18–26](#)).

### **(1) Paul’s Circumstances [1:12–17](#)**

The church primarily desired to know Paul’s circumstances. While his description is in some ways quite explicit, in other ways many questions remain unanswered. For one thing, Paul assumed that the church knew the details. If it did not, Epaphroditus would surely report more than Paul could write. Writing all that he felt could have jeopardized his legal situation. For another, what he wrote was one-sided, and the readers had to piece things together as best they could.

PAUL’S IMPRISONMENT ([1:12](#)). [1:12](#) Rather than detail the hardships he faced, Paul took a divine perspective. He recognized that all events could be redeemed for the Lord’s sake, and he took what advantage he could to continue his mission. The primary concern was that the gospel go forward. This happened through adverse circumstances, but as long as it happened, Paul could be joyful.

Paul did not specifically mention his imprisonment. The Greek text says simply “the things to me” (*ta kat’ eme*). Most likely he included all the events from his imprisonment at Jerusalem through his imprisonment at Rome. These were the riot, the two-year imprisonment at Caesarea, the appeal to Caesar, the threat on his life, the trip to Rome with its shipwreck, his house-arrest and restricted freedom, and the impending trial. However, the focus is on the Roman events. As Paul described them, he spoke in terms of the effect on the soldiers and the Roman church.

The church might have expected the worse, but Paul countered that quickly. The gospel advanced. The term “advanced” (*prokopēn*) was used in the Greek-speaking world to describe blazing a trail before an army, the philosophical progress toward wisdom, and the progress of a young minister. Paul, therefore, saw the events as forging new territory for the gospel. They took Paul into contact with a select group of people, soldiers and Roman officials, who otherwise would have had no relationship to him, and they also prompted a renewed evangelistic effort in the city. While others may have seen the end of missionary activity, Paul saw the new ways the gospel could advance. The events which seemed to inhibit the freedom of the gospel became its springboard. Paul did not say “in spite of” these events, but rather “through them.” There is a note of sacrifice here. Paul’s private concerns did not matter; the gospel did.

REACTIONS TO PAUL’S IMPRISONMENT ([1:13–17](#)). In explaining the situation at Rome, Paul disclosed two important results of the events that had happened to him. Neither of these was expected, and thus Paul’s word was news to them. At the same time, both reactions advanced the gospel; Paul made specific what he had claimed to be the case in [1:12](#). His statement there did not come without evidence. Even here, however, one of the reactions continued to be a mixed blessing, and it proved to be a continuing circumstance of the gospel’s advance through difficulties.

*The Gospel Spread Among Roman Soldiers (1:13).* **1:13** In this undesirable situation, the gospel spread through the ranks of the soldiers. Basically, Paul said that they knew he was a prisoner of Christ, not just of Rome. The clarification of that fact was an encouragement since Paul would later state “to live is Christ” (1:21). Two matters deserve comment: the meaning of the phrase “manifest in Christ” (*phanerous en Christō*), which the NIV translates “become clear ... for Christ,” and the meaning of “the praetorium” (*praitōrion*), which the NIV translates “palace guard.”

Paul’s basic reason for encouragement was that his real imprisonment became clear. Commentators differ on the meaning of the words “in Christ.” Some think they go with “chains,” with the resultant meaning being something like “it became evident that I was a Christian,” or “that I was a prisoner of Christ.” Since Paul lived for the gospel, perhaps he stated that he was not guilty of any charge brought against him and that the soldiers knew he could be released except for his commitment to Christ. In the truest sense, he was a prisoner of Christ. That prior relationship caused him to be a literal prisoner of Rome. Others, like the NIV translators, interpret the phrase to mean that the chains were manifest that they were “for Christ.” Pointing out the awkwardness of the construction in Greek if any other interpretation holds, they state that Paul was really a prisoner for the sake of Christ. His predicament was because of the Christian message he proclaimed.

Paul actually took advantage of the situation to call to mind a deeper slavery. In [Eph 3:1](#), he referred to himself as the prisoner of Christ. Surely he intended a similar meaning here, though neither passage is determinative. Paul did use words in such a way that they conveyed deeper meanings (not in violation of simpler meanings, however). The first interpretation fits better than the second. Paul’s joy came because what he lived for (the manifestation of Christ) was actually happening. Further, the principle he held so dear was clarified to those around. They understood his slavery to Christ.

Paul said this knowledge spread in the praetorium. Considerable debate focuses on whether the *praitōrion* (praetorium or palace guard) was a place (i.e., a barracks) or a people (i.e., an elite imperial guard). On one hand, the praetorium was a place. Those who interpret it as a place assume that the place was the barracks of the imperial guard. The evidence from Acts reveals that Paul had his own leased dwelling, so he could not have been incarcerated at the praetorium ([Acts 28:30](#)). Seen this way, Paul stated that the topic of conversation in the barracks was Paul and Christ. On the other hand, the praetorium was also a group of men. The term stood for the emperor’s bodyguard of nine cohorts. They were the only troops stationed in Italy after the settlement of Augustus. Although Paul did not claim that people of the guard were converted, he did claim that they heard his message.

*Christians Encouraged to Speak (1:14–17).* **1:14** The second result of Paul’s circumstances involved the church at Rome. A new evangelistic effort sprang up that affected the entire Christian community. Paul saw that his situation was the catalyst for this renewed interest in outreach, and he knew it would be good news to the church at Philippi.

In actuality, the church at Rome had two different reactions. Some members were encouraged by Paul and preached out of sympathy; others hoped to get Paul into more trouble with the Roman officials. Paul focused first on the brethren who supported him. In addition, he was able to see beyond the differences in motivation and realized that Christ was proclaimed. He was comforted by this reality.

Most of the Christians took heart from Paul’s situation. They preached more courageously and fearlessly. Some commentators have suggested that the believers’ preaching came because they knew

that Paul's only crime was Christianity, and that was no crime at all. Before they had feared their own imprisonment; now that fear no longer existed. There is no evidence for that interpretation, however. While Paul's general tone was optimistic, he never indicated that he knew the trial would exonerate him. Paul actually stated that "the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak." He emphasized their spiritual motivation, not the evidence they might have derived from Paul's circumstances. Further, the context assumes their preaching was encouraged by the imprisonment, not by the expected release. As the next verses indicate, their support for Paul had given them courage to preach God's word.

Paul acknowledged that they preached the word, but not all preached with proper motivations. In vv. [15–17](#) Paul described two groups of preachers who reacted to him. The verses fall into a literary pattern of a chiasm. The literary pattern reveals three important aspects of their preaching. First, the "outside" members of the chiasm receive the emphasis. When Paul turned his thoughts to these preachers, therefore, he thought first in terms of those who opposed him. Second, each group has two sets of descriptive phrases accompanying it. All of these contribute to an understanding of the motivations involved. Third, the chiasm further describes the preachers of v. [14](#). "Most of the brothers" included those supportive and those opposed to Paul.

The ones preaching to harm Paul are discussed in [1:15, 17](#). The content reveals a close connection between vv. [14–15](#), but the translators show a separation. The only word against the preachers of [1:15](#) is that they had wrong motives. They were still brothers. The first portion of the chiastic unit, however, mildly changes to describing an activity unexpected of brothers. The translation "It is true that" captures the thought. Some opposed Paul, but that was a minor obstacle.

[1:15](#) Paul exposed their method and motivations. The method was "envy and rivalry." The words always suggest relationships which have gone bad, and the terms normally occur in Paul's lists of sins to avoid. Paul used the same construction in stating that others preached "out of goodwill." Certainly their goodwill was not be directed toward the Roman authorities, and it was unlikely that it was goodwill toward the church. In fact, some would no doubt think that the best course of action for the church would have been to remain silent and allow unity and harmony to prevail.

The motivation of the opposing preachers was "selfish ambition" (cf. [1:17](#)). While they may have eyed Rome, hoping that an unfavorable judgment would come, they actually sought to elevate themselves at Paul's expense. Their insincere preaching intended to bring greater affliction to Paul. Perhaps they thought Rome provided the key to rid the church of Paul and his kind.

[1:16–17](#) Paul also described his supporters' motivations. They preached from "goodwill" and "love." These relational terms contrast with the descriptions of the opponents. Those of goodwill directed their support toward Paul, just as the others directed their animosity toward him.

One further contrast between these groups indicates how Paul's imprisonment became the occasion for such attitudes to surface. Paul stated that his supporters knew he was "put here for the defense of the gospel" ([1:16](#)), while his antagonists hoped to "stir up trouble for me while I am in chains" ([1:17](#)). The first statement, from his friends, reveals a theological understanding of Paul's unique place in God's missionary program. The words "I am put here" translate the Greek word *keimai* ("I have been set"). Paul used the word (*keimai*) to express the divine purpose of his imprisonment, which was "the defense of the gospel."

Paul revealed a similar self-understanding in [Gal 1:15–16](#). In a statement that parallels Jeremiah's experience (cf. [Jer 1:5](#)), Paul explained that God separated him from the womb, called him by grace, and sent him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles ([Gal 1:15](#)). He could not foresee all of the situations he would encounter in responding daily to God's call on his life. He knew his appointment involved suffering as a regular part of his ministry, and he knew God called him to defend and present the truth of the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. His defense before Jews reached a theological climax at the Jerusalem Council when it was decided that Gentiles did not need to adopt Jewish patterns of life, worship, and service. Throughout his ministry, however, he had to live out that agreement, many times among those who did not accept it as well as the Jerusalem apostles did. Paul's presence in Rome occasioned this segment of the ongoing debate. His defense before Rome also had a long developing history. In several cities where he founded churches, Paul defended himself against Gentile attacks (cf. [Acts 17:6–9](#); [18:12–14](#); [19:24–41](#); [26:19–20](#)).

Paul knew from these experiences that he not only encountered Jewish opposition but also had to answer to Rome. No doubt as he walked the many miles of Roman roads, he planned how to defend the gospel should such an occasion arise. Paul's defense involved the gospel. Others may have thought about the repercussions of their preaching in relation to their own lives, but Paul lived for the gospel. For him, the opportunity to appear before Caesar provided a test case for the gospel. Would it be accepted? Perhaps there is a note of anticipation, as well as resolution. He was the apostle to the Gentiles. He struggled to bring the gospel to them, and now he would have opportunity to present the new ideology to the emperor. He knew that in a real way the task of Gentile evangelism was his, and he could finish it this way. The emperor of the world would actually hear the gospel. Opponents also saw this as the time to silence Paul. They hoped—or perhaps imagined—to bring affliction to him and, perhaps, to sway the sympathies of the emperor against him.

Such a disclosure of the situation at Rome prompts the question of who these two groups were. Some have suggested they were Judaizers like those who troubled Paul at Galatia and, perhaps, in [Phil 3](#). Paul had little sympathy for Judaizers, however. His harshest words spoke against their theology and methodology. They hardly fit the accepting attitude of Paul in this text. Others suggest that they were preachers who believed martyrdom was a high ideal. They preached with an intent of bringing Paul to martyrdom, while realizing that whatever consequences he received, they would likely bear as well.

These preachers, however, preached against Paul out of jealousy. They could hardly have hoped to bring Paul to a higher spiritual stature if they were envious of what he already had. This suggestion has little to commend it. A third possibility is that they preached against the Jews for what they did to Paul. The Jewish flavor of the situation is quite likely, but preaching against the people who opposed Paul does not fit the context. Paul stated that they preached against him.

Finally, some scholars note that the opponents preached against Paul. Perhaps they did so because of his weaknesses. The fact that he was a prisoner demonstrated for them that he was not who he claimed to be. Surely he would triumph in Christ if God were with him. Instead, they said that God had *manifested* his presence through them. Paul responded by saying what was *manifest* about him.

More than likely, the problem came from the dynamics of the Roman church and Paul's relationship to it. Possibly the situation resembled Corinth, where the various factions rallied around one great leader or another. The situation at Rome was pluralistic. No great Christian leaders were there before Paul arrived,



so there was no primary apostle. Perhaps many vied for the position or, at the least, they did not want someone from the outside claiming that status.

Rome welcomed various ethnic groups and cultural practices. Normally immigrants lived in common tenement houses by ethnic and language groups. Sometimes various groups subdivided by ideologies or places of origin. For example, the city had at least thirteen Jewish synagogues, which probably served Jews from different places in the empire. How the church fit into that social and ethnic structure is difficult to discern. The issues that separated the Gentile and Jewish Christians had become more pronounced with the expulsion of all Jews from Rome in A.D. 49 and their return in A.D. 52. No doubt Gentiles dominated at least during the period of expulsion, and they probably vied for power and leadership when the Jews returned. Earlier, Paul had written to the Roman church with a major concern about unity between Jews and Gentiles. Although the letter to Rome was written five years before [Philippians](#), the complexities of the situation surely continued until Paul arrived in Rome.

The situation regarding Paul is, therefore, difficult to untangle. Tensions arose between and among the various groupings: Jews against themselves, Gentiles against Jews, Jews against Gentiles, and various Gentile factions against each other. Further, Paul entered this difficult situation with the authority of the apostle to the Gentiles but limited by the Roman government. All of the groups within the church knew him, but not all welcomed him.

Perhaps a theological tension underlay the social and economic situation. Paul championed Gentile freedom from the law. In his Roman letter, he had sided with the Gentiles in affirming that they did not need to keep the practices of Jewish culture. Although the Jewish Christians would have expected that from Paul, no doubt it forced an intense debate on the matter. The debate followed Paul wherever he went, and his arrival at Rome perhaps triggered it again. Most likely it involved the law. Paul's writings and the historical data reveal that Paul had intense conflicts over the relevance of the Ten Commandments and the ceremonial aspects of Jewish law. Additionally, the argument in [Phil 3](#) concerned these matters. There the debate intensified and broadened beyond the concerns of the preachers of [Phil 1](#).

Significantly, Paul evaluated these preachers carefully and objectively. Three areas of concern emerge in his evaluation of others: their methods, their motives, and their message. They clearly had a correct message. Christ was proclaimed ([1:14–18](#)). Likewise, their methods caused no problem. The text reveals only one way of ministry: They preached. The point of difference was their motives. Motivations generally remain inside and quiet, but these preachers quite openly explained their motives. Paul had a great concern for motives in the ministry, yet he did not attack these preachers the way he did others. Apparently this was because they acted toward him, not toward the gospel or Christianity in general. He chose to look on the bright side since the message and the method furthered the truth. God alone can deal with motives!

## **(2) Paul's Attitude [1:18–26](#)**

Paul's situation caused deep reflection. His concerns were twofold: the outcome of his imprisonment and trial and the possibility of death. These verses reveal the tensions in Paul's life. The tribulation he endured reached their zenith as he awaited his trial. In many ways, that was his finest hour for the gospel. The commitments which drove him in his life now kept him as he contemplated his death. Even

in the midst of such deep reflection, Paul was optimistic. He would be saved, Christ would be glorified one way or another, and the gospel would go forth.

Structurally, two questions arise in these verses. The first is, Where does the section begin? The second relates to the progress of thought through [1:18–26](#): Are there one, two, or three movements? Regardless of the number of movements, Paul’s argument progresses with one discussion flowing from a previous idea. The thought of joy ([1:18a](#)) brought to mind the expectation of continued joy in the future ([1:18b](#)). In v. [20](#) Paul introduced the concept of death, and in [1:21–24](#) the themes of life and death are further developed. Finally, [1:24](#) ends with a desire to do what was best for the Philippians, and [1:25–26](#) continues the themes of remaining on earth and sacrificing for them. It is a carefully composed section that expressed Paul’s emotions.

PAUL’S JOY IN SALVATION ([1:18–24](#)). [1:18a](#) The section begins in v. [18](#)— all interpreters affirm that. The problem is whether it begins at the beginning of v. [18](#), at the middle, or at the end. The NIV translators assumed correctly that the new section began in the middle of the verse. The theme of the preachers continues until that point, and Paul ended the previous section on a note of joy. The repetition of the word “rejoice” serves as a transition, providing another reason for Paul’s joy: his own anticipation of success in the trial that lay before him.

The second structural question relates to the three movements within the section. The question is whether they should be seen as three different ideas or two. Those who see three separate units argue that the grammar suggests them. The first unit is [1:18–20](#), which is one sentence in the Greek text. The second unit is [1:21–24](#). This contains the section about life and death and is introduced by “for” (*gar*), as is the first section. The third unit is [1:25–26](#), which is one sentence in Greek introduced by the expression “and having this confidence.”

This arrangement is quite possible, but a two-unit arrangement makes better sense in light of the parallels and the thematic structure of the passage. Two basic parallels confirm the flow of thought. The main verb of [1:18b–19](#) is “I know,” and that same verb is repeated in [1:25](#). The other parallel is a conceptual tie between “I will ... rejoice,” which introduces the first “I know,” and “convinced of this,” which introduces the second. Paul’s joy and confidence were two expressions of the same attitude: He would be able to achieve his deepest desires of glorifying Christ. The same ideas and root words occur in [1:4–6](#), where Paul’s prayer for the Philippians was both joyful and confident. Here Paul’s desire was that Christ would be magnified in his life, and his confidence was that he would remain for their edification.

Paul’s optimism was obvious. Why was he optimistic? Was it because he expected to be released from prison soon? Was it that he knew whatever happened, he was surely to be delivered from this evil world? Was it a joy that came from a backward glance to his conversion experience that sustained him through the difficulties of the present? These three suggestions call for careful analysis, and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The first section contains two parts: a description of Paul’s salvation and hope ([1:18b–20](#)) and an expression of his commitment to them ([1:21–24](#)).

*Paul’s Salvation and Hope* ([1:18b–20](#)). [1:18b–19](#) Paul fully expected deliverance, and these verses express that hope clearly. He wrote with a joyful note as he contemplated what that meant for him and for the Philippians. The first question to answer in this text is about the nature and means of Paul’s salvation.

Paul spoke of his salvation with a note of certainty. The verb “know” (*oida*) used here contains an air of confidence. The term may be used of a complete knowledge identified with the mind rather than the process of knowledge which comes from the experience. How Paul knew this is unknown, and the many suggestions made depend on the meaning of the word “salvation.”

“Salvation” has been interpreted in two primary ways. First, a common interpretation today is that Paul knew he would be delivered (“saved”) from death and/or imprisonment. Since Rome had nothing against Christians at this early date, Paul had no reason to suspect anything but a positive decision at his trial. Two main lines of argumentation support this conclusion. The word “salvation” may have the sense of “deliverance from death.” Those who accept this interpretation, such as the NIV, invoke that meaning in this passage. Additionally, [1:25](#) expresses Paul certainty that he would remain on earth. This last argument is the most significant.

Against this interpretation, several factors in the context must be considered. First, Paul stated that his adversity would result in his deliverance. His words indicate that the difficulty would itself have the positive results he anticipated. That hardly fits a deliverance from prison. Second, Paul entertained the possibility of death, but that did not affect his optimism. His deliverance would come in spite of imprisonment or even death. Third, Paul anticipated gaining his hope of “not being ashamed.” Finally, Paul’s statement in this section is similar to [Job 13:13–18](#). Thus, while many equate the passage with an expectation of release, that interpretation does not fit all the details well.

The second interpretation of salvation takes the word in its full, eschatological sense. The completion of the salvation begun with commitment to Christ would be the final vindication of the believer when he met Christ. Paul knew that he would arrive at that great day and see the complete salvation he so desired. This longing did not come from an unsettledness or unassured attitude toward salvation. Paul knew that perseverance through this life was one of the identifying characteristics of a Christian. Knowing he had been saved, he also anticipated the full joy of complete salvation. Several factors support this interpretation.

Paul’s wording in this section clearly reflects [Job 13:13–18](#) in the LXX text. Both the Greek wording and the circumstances parallel each other. If Paul quoted Job *in context*, as he normally did when he referred to the Old Testament, he must have consciously derived comfort from Job’s course of life. Paul’s life had, in fact, taken much the same course. When nothing made sense to Job and everyone opposed him, his “salvation” was that he knew he was just and that he would stand before God and be vindicated.

A significant question to answer in [1:19](#) is the reference to “this” (“this shall result in my salvation”). The NIV translates “what has happened to me.” The pronoun must look to the mixed preaching of the Christians at Rome. In that way, many brought their accusations against Paul and his righteousness. Like Job, he would stand vindicated at last.

A second reason for this interpretation is that it deals seriously with the question of life and death ([1:21–24](#)). Paul would be “saved” regardless of his physical condition. The element of uncertainty regarding the trial did not affect his confidence inside.



Third, Paul's real joy was that Christ was proclaimed. The factor of his life-call enters this context. Paul wanted to hear "well done" when he stood before God. His task was to reach the Gentiles for Christ, and how that was accomplished was of secondary consequence. The mixed preaching at Rome actually furthered his deepest Christian desire, which was to make Christ known.

Finally, the passage contains terms that relate to spiritual deliverance: salvation and hope. Thus, the better interpretation is to see Paul's salvation in an eschatological sense—he looked forward to his entrance into heaven and vindication by the Lord himself.

In spite of Paul's confidence in his destiny, he sought the Philippians' help. His deliverance would come "through [their] prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (1:19). Paul considered these two ideas to be closely related because they both provided the means through which his goal was achieved. He sought their prayers on his behalf, realizing that God answers prayer and works through it to accomplish his purposes. There was no "resignation to the inevitable" here. Paul combined his foundational trust in Christ with the need for prayers on his behalf.

The "help given by the Spirit" goes along with the prayers. This phrase has been handled in different ways. Some scholars take it to be "the supply that the Spirit gives," or "the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (NIV). Others take it to mean "the help which consists of the Spirit." A parallel idea occurs in [Gal 3:5](#), where Paul asked how they had received God's Spirit, obviously meaning the gift of the Spirit himself. Most likely the NIV translation is correct. Paul expected the Holy Spirit to provide whatever he needed to meet life's demands. This would occur through their prayers as well.

[1:20](#) The second portion of this section focuses on Paul's hope. The NIV captures the force of the text well in making "I eagerly expect and hope" introduce the content of Paul's hope. The anticipation of his deliverance accorded perfectly with his lifelong hope that Christ would be glorified in him.

Paul stated his hope in two ways. First, he hoped that he would not be ashamed; second, that Christ would be exalted in his body. What did he mean that he would not be ashamed? This certainly does not express the feeling of guilt which the English word often conveys. There is an objective aspect to it. Here Paul was using the objective aspect of "hope" or "trust" as it was used in [Isa 28:16](#). He quoted this verse both in offering the gospel and as one of its foundations ([Rom 9:33](#); [10:11](#)). The verses from Romans help interpret Paul's understanding of the passage. In [Rom 9:33](#), he contrasted a stumbling over a stone (Christ) with those who do not stumble (i.e., are not put to shame). In [Rom 10:10–11](#), Paul stated that the one who confesses Christ "with his mouth" after believing "in his heart" will not stumble (i.e., be put to shame). Confession seals the commitments, and those commitments do not lead to embarrassment. This suits the context of [Isa 28:16](#), where the Lord spoke through the prophet that Israel should remain true to the Lord. If it did, it would not be "put to flight." These texts have little to do with being ashamed to confess Christ. They do not speak to the point of timidity. Rather, they speak to the security of believers and the certainty that they are on solid foundation when they believe on the "cornerstone."

Paul expected, therefore, not to be put to shame. He confidently had confessed Jesus as Lord. It was not a thoughtless or quick confession; it was the direction of his life. He had Old Testament Scripture to support his contention that the Lord aids those who confess him. Perhaps his thoughts turned to the day of judgment. That was the greatest test, and Paul hoped to be bold (not to "be ashamed") on that day. The context, however, points to the present life, as the contrasting clause to this one makes clear. He

expected God would give him the grace so that he would not be put to shame in his confession here and now. The Roman trial was another opportunity for him to triumph in Christ. In no way would he fail. Christ would give him the strength.

The positive side of Paul's hope was that Christ would be exalted in his body. This clearly identifies the hope with an earthly situation rather than the final judgment. The first clause of the section presents the hope that Paul would stand strong through the various situations of life. This clause makes that hope concrete. They both refer to the same aspects of existence. The use of the term "body," which Paul used for the physical body, and the discussion of life or death as the means of accomplishing this hope demonstrate Paul's present expectation. Two matters help interpret Paul's statements here: "sufficient courage" and "in my body."

The phrase "have sufficient courage" translates a strong Greek expression (lit., "have all presence"). Usually, Paul employed it referring to the proclamation of the gospel ([2 Cor 3:12](#); [Eph 6:19](#)) so that it described boldness in witness. However, it describes a courage of life. He hoped that he would have the courage to live or die as a true Christian should. Paul's ministry encompassed both living and speaking, and he needed courage for both. He had enjoyed success before, but now he faced greater tests. He expected to end as he began, courageous in his witness.

The location of this final witness was "in my body." Paul consistently used the term for the physical body, and there is no need to suggest some metaphorical use of the term here. In [Rom 6:6](#) Paul spoke of the crucifixion with Christ to "paralyze the body [physical] of sin" (author's translation). Later, in [6:12–14](#), he made it clear that the body was the mortal body, and sin had to be overcome there. Further, in a positive command, in [Rom 12:1–2](#) Paul employed the metaphor of sacrifice to exhort the believers to consecration. He still used the terms of the physical body. It is not surprising, therefore, that he thought here in terms of the body's responsibility in Christian commitment.

Paul knew that Christian commitment cannot happen apart from the body. In fact, Christian growth requires a focus on the body as the vehicle of expression of the true person, and as the instrument for receiving the communications of others. The person is intimately connected to the body, and Paul easily localized Christian commitment in the physical parts of his body. Since, therefore, he had committed his body to God and served him through the body, he had to continue to glorify him there as well. The immediate context confirms this conclusion where, in [1:24](#), he again referred to life in the body.

No matter what it took or what it cost, Christ would be honored by everything about this apostle. Paul's commitment to Christ, his confession of him, and his understanding of the power of God to sustain the believer demanded no less.

*Paul's Commitment to the Philippians* ([1:21–24](#)). In vv. [21–24](#), Paul revealed a deep inner struggle. The contrasts between life and death indicate that Paul seriously contemplated the possibilities of both. Of course, he did not have the power over his destiny; it was in the hands of God (perhaps as he might work through Rome). However, he faced the alternative situations with forethought. In his own mind, he resolved the tension by the same principle that guided his life to that point. He would serve to the end.

**[1:21](#)** The themes of life and death explain how Paul would glorify God in his body—even death would not keep him from it. These themes also prompted him to evaluate the purpose of living. With this introduction to [1:21–24](#), it seems that the section explains the commitment of the previous verses (vv. [18b–20](#)). As far as Paul was concerned, "to live is Christ and to die is gain." This differs from what

others thought and what might have been expected. Normally, one would say to live is gain and to die is Christ, but Paul reversed these. At death a Christian gains a more intimate relationship with the Lord. The statement “to live is Christ” is magnified by the statement “to die is gain.”

Often Paul spoke of Christ as his life. In [Gal 2:20](#) he said, “I live by faith in the Son of God.” In [Col 3:4](#) he stated that Christ “is your life.” These two passages differ in context and concern. The emphasis in [Gal 2:20](#) is soteriological; in [Col 3:4](#), Paul speaks to the mysterious union between Christ and the believer. Paul did not mean precisely either here, however. In this context he spoke of glorifying Christ through whatever means he had, and that provides the interpretive environment. The statement is completed by envisioning death as a better state than life. Thus, “to live is Christ” must mean that Paul so totally wanted to glorify Christ that as long as he lived everything about him was to point people to Christ. This was accomplished in part by the chains which were “manifested in Christ” ([1:13](#)); but even if he were called to die, it would be an occasion for Christ to become prominent. Death was a gain because he would see the Lord, enjoy him, and no longer endure the difficulties he was called to bear on earth.

[1:22–24](#) These verses describe both Paul’s dilemma and his resolution of it. The literary pattern emphasizes his conviction that he would remain, that the result of his trial would be life not death. In [1:22](#) he expressed the conviction that fruit would result from his continued physical life. The way the discussion takes place reveals the interpretation of “fruitful labor for me” ([1:22](#)). This statement is matched by the conviction that he would remain for the sake of the Philippians ([1:24](#)). While it may appear that the “fruit” was some spiritual development in Paul’s life, the context clearly relates “fruit” to the service Paul performed. In between these two statements, he posed the troublesome question of his choice. “What shall I choose? ... I am torn between the two.” It was helpful to them for Paul to remain; the fruit was what resulted from his work for others. The longer Paul lived, the more people would be touched by his life. Many understand Paul to say that he would reap the harvest of his past work. Therefore it would benefit him to remain in the flesh. These interpretations, however, seem to neglect the fact that Paul’s rewards, and therefore his “benefits,” awaited him at death. That is why dying was gain. Further, this passage reveals Paul’s concern for others, not himself ([1:24](#), [26](#)). He must have been thinking of the future and the harvests that would come from his life should God allow him to continue on this earth.

Beyond the discussion of rewards, however, Paul clearly expressed the desire to be with Christ ([1:23](#)). It was better. The discussion of rewards clouds the basic issue. Paul’s longing for death was, in reality, a longing for a more intimate, open, and total relationship with Christ himself. Such a relationship could only occur after death. The practical dilemma, therefore, consisted of whether Paul would choose his own preference or remain to benefit others. His conviction was that he would remain. While the statement obviously takes an optimistic perspective on the trial Paul faced, it spoke more to his conviction regarding his life service. His work remained unfinished. He thought, therefore, that God would have him remain and accomplish it.

One final concern emerges from these verses. Some commentators introduce the problem of the doctrine of soul sleep here. Generally those who do must address the fact that these verses do not teach the doctrine. They must harmonize the passage with what they have deduced from others. Paul directly stated that in death he would be “with Christ,” and the language speaks of being immediately in Christ’s presence. Further, Paul would hardly have been comforted by being away from Christ after death. He

was already with him and looked forward to a more open relationship with him at death. Why would Paul want to sleep (away from the conscious presence of Christ which he enjoyed on earth) when his tension resulted from the desire to enjoy Christ more fully? Finally, making this passage conform to an already assumed position such as soul sleep is difficult. The natural way to read the passage speaks against it, as do the other Pauline discussions of life after death. The fact is, Paul did not discuss the doctrine in this text at all. He simply expressed his conviction that if he died he would gain because death was a departure whereby he would be in the presence of the Lord (*syn Christō*, [1:23](#)).

**PAUL'S CONFIDENCE OF FUTURE MINISTRY ([1:25–26](#)).** [1:25](#) The second section of this passage begins here. It not only looks back to the discussion of [1:18–20](#) but also expresses Paul's hope in new ways. Specifically, Paul shared his confidence that he would remain with the Philippians to advance the gospel and to further their progress and joy in the faith as they saw him again.

Looking back, Paul based his statement on the confidence expressed in [1:18–20](#). The glory of Christ would be achieved best by Paul's remaining on earth to continue his ministry. Paul did not tell the readers why he felt this conviction. Perhaps he knew that Rome had no reason to punish him, and his optimism lay in the confidence that Rome would do justly. At a deeper level, his confidence grew out of his understanding of the ministry God had given him. Paul lived for others. He knew their needs well, and he knew that they would grow spiritually through his presence with them. This statement applied the hope that Christ would be glorified ([1:20](#)) to the realities of daily life. He might have chosen to go on to heaven and enjoy fully the Lord whom he loved, but the task was unfinished, and he must remain.

Paul would remain because of their needs, which he first stated in an overview and then in specific terms. The overview is “for your progress and joy in the faith.” The word “progress” (*prokopēn*) was used earlier of the advancement of the gospel message ([1:12](#)). There Paul's circumstances pushed the message forward into new territory. In a similar way, his return to the church would push its faith forward. As the events became opportunities for preaching the gospel, his presence with the church could only help it. This advancement of its faith was also called a joy. Both “progress” and “joy” are modified by “in the faith.” As the Philippians matured in their understanding of Christ, their joy in the faith would deepen and would be encouraged. This thought is repeated in v. [26](#).

[1:26](#) The specific statement is that Paul's presence would bring great joy. It was a joy in Christ through Paul's release. A similar statement occurs in [4:10](#), where Paul said, “I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me.” Their financial support caused Paul to worship and praise the Lord, who sent it through them. Naturally, the gift brought joy, but the greater joy was what it meant in the work of the Lord. Applying that understanding here, Paul realized that his presence provided an occasion for worship and praise. In spite of the similarity of [1:26](#) and [4:10](#), two different words describe “joy.” In [4:10](#), Paul used *chairō*, “to rejoice” or “be glad.” Here, the word is *kauchēma*, “to boast or be proud.” *Kauchēma* often suggests an occasion or object of the joy and has the sense of “taking pride in” something specific.

Three complementary phrases explain the ground of their glorying. First, it would “overflow” in Christ Jesus. For Paul, Jesus was always the basis of joy. Second, it would be through Paul as representing Christ. Paul, as apostle, brought Christ to them, and they longed to see him again. He was their best example of Jesus. Third, they would boast because of Paul's presence with them again. Additionally, there may be an overtone of joy that the trial would be over and that the work of the Lord could go forth.

Paul's words express his optimism. Without a doubt, he expected to continue his ministry after the trial. Even so, he contemplated the realities of what could happen and how he would respond to the worst of situations. He would triumph. If he went to be with his Lord, that was triumph. If he stayed with them, they would be helped. But as he understood the work of the Lord, he would remain to further their faith.

This passage suggests that Paul anticipated a visit to Philippi upon his release. The same expectation occurred in Colossians and Philemon. Paul's plans to go to Spain had been postponed. Perhaps he sought the strength of fellowship that his converts provided. Perhaps he knew they needed him. At any rate, they would prosper if God allowed him to remain on earth.