



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Philippians 4: 14-23

2013

"The Tie That Binds"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Jim. We're going to look at Philippians Chapter 4, verses 14 through 23. The Philippians had given Paul a gift, we looked at that last week, and he's thanked them for that. And he concludes that section, and really, introduces the next with verse 14,

¹⁴ Nevertheless, you have done well to share *with me* in my affliction.

¹⁵ You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; ¹⁶ for even in Thessalonica you sent *a gift* more than once for my needs. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. ¹⁸ But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ Now to our God and Father *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.

²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Philippians 4: 13-23

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word. Let's go to the LORD in prayer.

Father, we do thank You for the time we have together on this LORD's day. What a privilege it is to come together as Your people. And one of the things that we're reminded of in this passage that concludes Paul's letter to the Philippians, and what we've really seen all through this letter, is that we're united to one another. We are a unique people. We have been called out of the world. We're in the world, but we're not of the world. We're not the people like the world. We have a new nature; and that nature unites us to one another. The Spirit of God unites us to one another. Our union in Christ unites us with one another. Help us to learn that language and that lesson—that You have put us together, and we're united, and we're to live that way.

So I pray that we'll learn the lesson and that we will live as we ought to—as men and women who have an interest in each other and care for each other as these Philippians did the apostle Paul. They're quite a model for us, and have been for the church down through the centuries.

So LORD, we pray You'd bless our time of study in this final passage of the book. What a great book it is, and what an enjoyable time of study it has been. Bless it to our understanding. Build us up in the faith and encourage us spiritually through all that we will study this morning. Equip us for the day and the week to come and advance us in the faith and make us more like Christ as a result of our time of study.

And bless us materially as well, LORD. We need Your physical blessing, as well as spiritual. And we're reminded of that from this passage, of how You supply our needs, 'All our needs, according to Your riches in glory in Christ Jesus.' (v19). That is a great promise. That's an abundance of wealth that is at our disposal that You give according to Your wisdom to meet our needs. Encourage us with that.

LORD, we pray that You'd apply that to those who have particular needs, for those who are sick. We look at our prayer request list, and we're reminded that so many on that have reached a point in life where the body begins to fail and they need Your strength and help. And we are dependent upon You for everything, LORD—for our health,

for our employment, for our disposition—our joy, we should have that in the midst of difficulty. And we get so much from You, LORD, You bless us abundantly. Help us to appreciate that, and to rejoice in who we are in Christ, because we're secure in Him, regardless of the circumstances of life that we find ourselves. Thank You for that.

But thank You most of all that regardless of how life goes for us, and it goes in a difficult way for some people in particular, but all of us to some degree—nevertheless, those problems are temporal. They pass. They aren't permanent. And even though we're not permanent in this world, we are permanent; for we have eternal life. And it's a glorious life that is before us. Help us to see life in that light. It's the way we're to look at life. We're not permanent here, we're passing through—and what's to come is glorious, and we're to be living for that now. So help us to do that.

And bless us this morning as we study, that it would be to that end. And we pray these things in Christ's name, Amen.

(Message) I've enjoyed my studies and the lessons in Philippians very much. It's a great book, but Paul now comes to the end of his letter, and concludes it with a recognition of the Philippians help in his ministry; encouragement that the LORD will help them and then a greeting from the saints in Rome. And what's particularly interesting is that greeting from Caesar's household.

But tying all of this together is a theme that Paul has emphasized all through the letter, and that is Christian unity. Christians are bound together in a local church—in the city in which they live and across the world. Maybe you've had the experience, (I think most Christians have), when you meet a person for the first time and you learn that he or she is a Christian—there's an immediate bond. I've had that experience here at home. I've had it abroad on the other side of the world. There is a tie that binds us.

There are lots of differences. They may be national differences, linguistic differences, ethnic differences, all kinds of differences that make us different from one another, and yet that's the tie that binds us—it is Christ. It is His life in us. It is the new nature that we have, what Peter calls in 2 Peter chapter 1, verse 4, “the divine nature”

that we possess. It's the Holy Spirit within us and He bound us all together because we're bound in the LORD. We are members of His family, and members of His body. And that bond is reflected in the mutual concern that we have for one another. The Philippians had shown that to Paul from the very beginning.

He reminds them of that at the close of his letter. They had sent a gift to him in Rome. It was a generous gift, and he greatly appreciated it. Hadn't asked for it. He hadn't been waiting for it. They had done it of their own accord.

But it was only the latest of their gifts. There were many other gifts, as well. They had sent him others, and he mentions that in verse 15 and verse 16. he recalls how they had helped him from the very beginning. When he first brought the Gospel to them they received him; and having received the Gospel, they received his friends into their home. They fed them, they bound their wounds, and sheltered them until they left and went south to Thessalonica.

And even there the Philippians helped them, and did so "more than once", he says in verse 16; which is especially noteworthy since these churches in Macedonia were young. At that time they were just a few weeks old, and yet they have that generous spirit about them, that loving spirit about them—and not only that, they were poor. We've talked about that more than once, but it really bears upon the passage and the thanksgiving that Paul is giving—the Philippians didn't have much money. But when they learned that Paul and Silas and the others were in need, they gave what they had—and that's a responsive love.

Paul had come to Philippi, not seeking anything from the Philippians. In fact, he had come to Philippi bringing something to them. He'd come bringing the Gospel, which is free. But by doing that, he brought them everything. He brought them riches beyond anything that this world can offer. He brought them the promise of a clean conscience, forgiveness of sin, life everlasting, and membership in God's family. So as grateful people, and as brothers and sisters of Paul, they gladly helped the apostle and his

friends in their need in what they were doing, in their condition—but also in spreading the Gospel, the Good News across the globe.

From Thessalonica Paul went south to Berea, and then on to Athens. And while he was there, just before he'd gone there, his companions went back north to Macedonia, and then later caught up with Paul in Corinth, (Paul had gone on to Corinth). Remember, he was a tent maker, and he supported himself with that. In Corinth he met Aquila, and his wife Priscilla. Aquila was also a tent maker and together they divided their time between work and preaching.

But when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, they brought another gift. Paul alludes to that in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, in verse 9. He's telling the Corinthians there that, 'He'd done everything not to be a burden to them.' He didn't take their money. He worked. He supported himself, and he only stopped doing that when those men came. And then he was able to preach freely without working. And the reason evidently was that they had brought a substantial gift to him. It was likely that the gift was from the Philippians, and it allowed him and others to minister full time.

So there was a history of support from this small Macedonian church. In fact, he reminds them in verse 15, that 'no other church helped him in the ministry'. Paul didn't appeal for funds. He certainly appealed for money for others, such as the poor saints in Jerusalem and Judea, but he didn't go out looking for money for himself and seeking personal support. But he got it. He got all that he needed. And he got it from these Philippians because they loved the apostle—and they were generous.

He kept in contact with them; he visited Philippi on his third missionary journey. After that he went to Jerusalem where he was arrested. He was in prison for a time, then moved down to Caesarea where he was in prison for two years—and after that sent to Rome for trial. And when the Philippians learned that that had happened, and that he was there, they sent another gift. Epaphroditus brought it, who also came to minister to Paul, to help him in any way that he could. And he did that until he became sick and almost died.

So again, some ten years after the church had been established, they were still supporting Paul's ministry in whatever way they could. They were supporting it financially. They were supporting it personally, even making great risks to themselves, and sacrifices in order to be a blessing to him.

So, he thanks them for doing that in verse 14, for, as he put it, 'sharing in his affliction', which indicates the close bond that they had with Paul. They shared in his affliction. That word, *to share with*, is actually *fellowship*. That's its meaning. So they had fellowship with him in his trials.

By helping him financially and personally as they did, the church entered into his ministry, was a vital part of his ministry, and a vital part of his affliction—his suffering and his trials. They had united themselves with the apostle. They suffered with him and they were partners with him in the work of the Gospel.

So Paul calls their gift and service to him *beautiful*. That's what he means. That's what the word means when he says, "You have done well." (vs14). That word for *well* is a word which also meant *beautiful*. The word is *kalós* in Greek, and we get words like *calligraphy* from that, *beautiful writing*. 'This is a *beautiful* deed that they had done.' — That's how he describes it. And that made him happy, not for what he got from the gift, as much as for what they received from it; because by sharing in his affliction and ministry they gained great blessing. He calls it "*profit*" in verse 17; "Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account."

Now that word *profit* is actually *fruit*. But the word is used here as a business or banking term in order to say that their gift was an investment, like putting money in a bank or in a business venture. And it was an investment of eternal value. So it reminded them, (and it reminds us), that we cannot make a sacrifice for the LORD, a legitimate sacrifice for the LORD's work without profiting greatly, and profiting for all eternity. Long after all of the investments that we have made in this world, (and it's good to make investments in this world to plan for the future, and to make wise investments), but even when the best of them pay off and long after they have ceased to be of any value, this investment lasts. —It's eternal. And it's a blessing for eternity, it's a blessing for the

present time. We cannot be generous with others without unconsciously benefiting ourselves; we may not realize it, but we benefit ourselves when we benefit others.

And so, it thrilled the apostle that his friends were gaining 'spiritual dividends' or 'spiritual fruit' from the gift that they gave. And it profited them in many ways.

First, from the joy it gave them personally to have helped another believer. — That's a great profit just in and of itself. There's joy in helping another. Proverbs chapter 11, in verse 25 states, "A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed." We are refreshed personally. It's an edifying act to give. It strengthens the soul to be selfless, to extend ourselves to others. It causes us to develop character and kindness. As we extend ourselves, as we stretch ourselves, so to speak, as we reach out to help others, it expands our souls. It makes us big souled people and it causes us to mature.

And so he rejoiced to see that in them. They were growing in that way; they were becoming kind and helpful, and maturing as Christians. But also, as I said, simply a joy to be a help to someone in need and especially to a fellow believer—especially someone you love. You like helping people you love and seeing the joy that it gives them; and the profit that it is for them.

And that should be our attitude whenever we help a fellow saint, a fellow believer. To give a person help and relieve them of difficulty, that's a great blessing. And to help them in a way that promotes the Gospel; that's a great blessing because that blesses not only that person, it blesses many people. What a rich thing to do. What a blessing that they were experiencing—and that we can, too.

They'd given this at great sacrifice to themselves, and not for any personal reward. Paul's telling them about the reward that they've received temporally and eternally. But they hadn't given for that reason. They'd given because he was a friend; they'd given to Paul because they loved him. They wanted to help him in need. And that's what Christians do for one another. That's the Christian life.

I think they gave spontaneously. I don't know that. It doesn't say that, but I think I understand the nature of this congregation, that Philippian church, that that was just their response. It was what they did routinely for the apostle Paul whenever they got the opportunity.

And so they did that spontaneously, it was natural. And that gave Paul great joy to see such vitality in their lives, such reality in their lives, for it proved that they were genuine in their faith and that they were growing in their faith. He loved these people. It's like a father with a child, and he loves seeing the child grow and mature and do well, and in fact do beautiful things. So it was with the Philippians.

Still, as selfless as their motive was, their gift and service to him had great reward for them personally, (he's indicated that), and also eternally. And ultimately, that's when the greater profit is realized, in the life to come, in the eternal rewards that the LORD will give. And what that will be is described variously in the Word of God. Paul speaks of 'crowns'—and we read about crowns in the Book of Revelation. I think that's a metaphor for something. I suspect it's a way of describing the glory that we will have, that those who are living a sacrificial life now, a life of service now, will have greater glory in the world to come, a greater joy, a greater experience of all of that in heaven and in the world to come.

William Hendriksen referred to it as 'Judgment day praise'—and that's certainly what will happen, what we will receive for a faithful life. And that itself will be great profit, because we will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ, (all of us will, Paul talks about that in 2 Corinthians 5, and other places). We'll stand before the Bema Seat and He'll talk to us about our life and He'll reward us for the things that we have done. And He'll give great praise at that time for those who have been faithful. And He will say, 'Well done. That was a life well lived'. And He'll say, 'Thank you for helping My people. You had a part in that.' That's a blessing. That's a great reward.

So Paul sees all of this as taking place for his close friends; this church that he loved so much, these Philippians. And that gave him joy, first and foremost. (Well, for

what he received from it; it was a blessing too.) But first and foremost for the profit that that gift would bring them.

He tells them, in verse 18, that 'he had gotten all of it', and had "an abundance", —which was a way of telling the Philippians that Epaphroditus had brought it, and he had gotten all of it; Epaphroditus had fulfilled his mission. He'd been faithful, completely. He said, "...I am amply supplied...", which was a way of thanking them for their generosity. They had more than covered his needs. I think he's saying something to them like, 'Thank you. I am a rich man indeed. Your gift was overwhelming. It was more than ample. I am well supplied.'

But then he adds that he wasn't the only one who received a gift—the LORD did also. And what they had sent was "a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God." (vs18c). In other words, 'Our service to others is not to them alone, but to the LORD as well. It's not only a help to our friends, it is worship of God. It is pleasing to Him.'

The description that Paul gives here of their gift as "a fragrant aroma", is taken from the Old Testament. And it is a way of saying that such a gift is pleasant to God in the way that a fragrant flower pleases us. Maybe you've had an experience like this; of being in an orchard and smelling the fruit as it blooms. I got off the plane in Ben Gurion Airport with my wife many years ago, just outside Tel Aviv, and it was late at night. I think it was about midnight; all very quiet. We got off the plane; it was in the springtime and you could sense this aroma in the air. It was like someone had perfumed the air—and I wondered 'What is that?' I talked to a friend; he said 'that was the orange groves that had bloomed and when they bloom they put out this fragrance'—and it was like someone had just perfumed the air.

That's what he's saying their gift is; that's the idea here. We give a gift to God. He takes notice of it. He's pleased with it. It's a sweet aroma that fills heaven. It may be a small gift. Doesn't matter; it fills heaven like an aroma. And what makes our gifts

fragrant to Him is not the amount. As I said, it could be a small gift. It's not the amount, it's the motive, it's the heart of the giver.

So a poor person's small gift can be greater than a rich person's large gift. We know that from what our Lord said in Luke 21, when he's sitting there in the temple before the treasury, and all of these rich people are coming—and they're giving their lavish gifts by putting them into the temple treasury. And then this one, sort of obscure person, this widow comes, and she gives her two mites, her little gifts, all she had. But Jesus was so impressed with that He said that, 'In giving her gift, she gave more than all of those rich people gave at that moment.'

The LORD knows what we do. He knows our circumstances. He knows our motives. And the LORD is no man's debtor. We cannot out give Him. Paul assures the Philippians of that in verse 19, "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

What a great promise that is: 'All of our needs'—the things of life, material or otherwise, but certainly the material things seem to be on his mind here. They're on the mind of God; and they're under His care. They are under the care of the absolutely sovereign, gracious, all-wise God. He knows, He cares.

So we don't need to be anxious about how we're going to live. Now that might seem like a glib statement, a little trite, easy to say from the pulpit, but, (because we live in a world full of uncertainties, and we certainly do), we wonder sometimes how things are going to hold up politically, or how they're going to hold up financially, or how our job's going to be six months from now, or a year from now. Or maybe we're without work, and we wonder how we're going to get by...and is our health going to hold up for long? All these things, these uncertainties of life, can become the focus of our mind and become distracting and worrisome.

Paul knew that; that's why he speaks about anxiety in this book. And it's common to all of us. But what he's saying here is, 'We don't need to become anxious about life.' There may be some things to be concerned about; the Philippians may have had that.

And I think this may lie behind what Paul is saying here; that he knew the circumstances of the Philippians; and that would seem, at least on the face of it, concerning.

The Philippians had given Paul a large gift that very likely had depleted their small resources. They were poor, you'll remember, as all those Macedonian churches were. And there's some indication, earlier in the book, in chapter 1, that the church was being persecuted.

And so many of them may have wondered, having given this gift, 'Well, what's going to happen now? How are we going to live?' Paul reassures them by saying, 'Don't worry, God will supply.' In fact, the word, *supply*, is the same word that Paul used in verse 18, where he said, "I am amply supplied." In other words, Paul was saying, 'If you can amply supply me, God can more than amply supply you.' He's God. He owns "the cattle on a thousand hills." (Ps 50:10). Everything is His possession; and He cares about us—we are bound to Him through His Son. We are His children; and just as the bond between Paul and the Philippians produced a gift, so too, God gives to His children.

The LORD won't let a gift go unrewarded. When we give in His name, for His people and His ministry, He repays. And He has ways of doing that, all kinds of ways, providentially, to take care of us, and make up for our losses—ways that we can't imagine, ways that will surprise us when they happen. He's not restricted in any way. And He gives abundantly.

He gives, you'll notice, not 'out' of His wealth, but "*according to*", (vs19), His wealth. Don't miss that, because that's significant. A wealthy person, a Bill Gates, can give a dollar and that is *out* of his wealth—and not much, just a pittance. But giving *according* to his wealth is giving in proportion to it—and that is large; that's huge! And that's what God does.

Now, it is our *needs* that God meets, not our luxuries. There's no basis here for a 'Health and Wealth' theology—and the Scriptures make that very plain. This world is not our home. We often say that, sometimes sing that, but we often repeat it here. I know I do. I think it needs to be repeated. I need to repeat it for myself. But our inheritance is

not here. We're pilgrims, passing through. We're on a mission, and we're not to become attached to this world.

It's not wrong to live wisely; of course it's important to do that. It's not wrong to live as though you're going to be here for a while and prepare for the future. But our home is not here. I think of Abraham so often when I think of this. He's the pilgrim; you see that in the Book of Genesis and you see him described in that way in Hebrews, chapter 11. He had been promised the whole land of Canaan, and yet he didn't live in a city. He didn't build a house. He didn't build anything permanent. 'He lived in tents'.

And I don't think it's wrong to build a house here. I don't think it's wrong to have a bank account and a retirement fund and all of that. But, the point is, how do we *think* about this world? We need to think of this world as *temporary*. We're passing through; we're pilgrims; we're not here permanently.

And yet, we are here. And as we pass through this world, God promises to supply our needs, and supply our needs every day as we make our way through this world as pilgrims, until we arrive safely in our eternal home. And the Scriptures are filled with promises that He will do that, and that He'll do that faithfully.

David wrote in Psalm 37, verse 25, "I have not seen the righteous forsaken Or his descendants begging bread." David wrote that Psalm rather late in his life. I don't know how old he was, but he seems to make reference to Saul at one point when he speaks of 'An evil man, spreading himself like a great tree, and then suddenly he's gone.' That fits very well with Saul, who pursued David so many years of his life. So David could look back now on his life of so many years and see the great blessing of God and could say, 'I've never seen the descendants of the righteous begging bread.'

Now that doesn't mean that circumstances don't get difficult and tough in life. They do. They did for David. He was out in the wilderness much of his life. He was on the run; he says that there was 'one step between him and death', (1 Sam 20:3),—and yet that step was enough. God always provided; provided for his life, provided for his protection, provided for him in every way.

No, life gets difficult and there are challenges in it; but God allows all of that for a good purpose. It's part of His plan for us: To teach us about Him, to teach us dependence upon Him, and teach us something about ourselves. We learn a lot about ourselves in times of trial and difficulty. We grow in those difficult times. I don't wish those things on myself, or on you, but I do know that that's often when growth occurs and when we learn much about ourselves.

Dr. Harry Ironside, (H. A. Ironside), wrote a book. He wrote many, many books, (commentaries and a variety of books), but this one is titled, *Random Reminiscences from Fifty Years of Ministry*; and in it he tells a number of stories. Each chapter is kind of an anecdotal remembrance of something that he experienced in his life. One of those stories he told was of a night of personal poverty that he had in the summer of 1900.

He had gone to Fresno, California, to preach the Gospel. But after a while he ran out of money. He had to check out of his hotel room, and he began to complain to himself because he began to think about this very verse, Philippians 4:19. There Paul promised, 'But my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches by Christ Jesus.' And he began to think, "Well, where's the provision? I don't have a room tonight. I thought You were supposed to meet all of my needs." And so he began to rebel a bit in his mind as he thought about what seemed to be a failure of that promise.

He ended up spending the night under a tree on the courthouse lawn. But it was there that the LORD reminded him of many things about which he had been very careless in his life. And he began to think about those things, and he began to confess them to the LORD. And as he did, he was amazed at how patient God had been with him in spite of his many failures. And that brought a change about in his attitude and in his perspective.

The next morning his circumstances changed. Providentially he met an old friend who bought him lunch. Another man, an old friend, provided him a room. The church where he was ministering took up a collection to help him return home. And at the end, he went to the post office to find, to his surprise, a letter from his father. His father

didn't know any of this had happened, but his father had written him this letter. And he had written, "God spoke to me through Philippians 4:19 today. He has promised to supply all our needs. Some day He may see that I need a starving. If he does, He'll supply that."

And Ironside wrote, "Oh, how real it all seemed then. I saw that God had been putting me through that test in order to bring me closer to Himself, and bring me face to face with things I had been neglecting." And then he added that, "He passed this story on, hoping that it might help those who are going through a similar time of testing and difficulty."

Sometimes we need that. Sometimes, 'We need a starving.' Sometimes we need a test; but in it, God's with us; He's always with us. He never forsakes us. He gives us what we need, and always for our good.

In Romans 8, verse 32, Paul wrote, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" Since He sacrificed His own Son for us, since He gave the greatest for us, there's nothing He won't give us, and nothing that's not for our good. If it's for our good, He will give it. We can trust Him for that. We can trust Him to supply all of our needs. We can exhaust our riches—but we cannot exhaust His.

George Mueller believed that and lived it. He trusted God for the supply of his life and ministry, and he saw God faithfully provide for his needs and those of the orphanages that he established. In fact, early in his ministry he and his wife decided they would make their life an experiment to prove that God is real; and that by faith and prayer alone, without asking any individual, the means would be provided for the orphan house.

It's very interesting: The reason he lived the life that he did was not simply because he felt that was the right way to live, but "Primarily", they said, "this is going to be like an experiment and our lives are going to prove to people that God is faithful and we can look to Him alone." And so, that's what he did. He wanted his experience to be

instrumental in strengthening the faith of others by showing the reality of the things of God—showing that they're real. This is not something we just read about and think about; this is real. God does provide.

And he did. Mueller calculated 50,000 cases of distinct answers to definite prayers. By the end of his 63 year ministry he had received almost a million and a half British pounds, which I'm not sure what that is in today's dollars, but it's something like three million dollars, or more than that. He provided food, clothing, housing and education for tens of thousands of children, as well as paying his staff—and never once made an appeal for funds. He looked to the LORD. God honored Mueller's faith and richly provided for him. Nearly three million dollars passed through his hands and not into his pocket; it passed through his hands to others.

He himself lived a very simple life. At his death his whole estate, counting furniture, was 160 pounds, (and he lived in a simple apartment). So that tells us something about living the life of faith, like George Mueller. Well, you don't live a lavish life; you live a very simple life. And that's what he did. But God provided all of his needs, and his life demonstrated the very thing that he set out to demonstrate; and that is, 'God is real. He does provide.' And there's no greater proof of that than the life of faith, a life of looking to Him, looking to the LORD, and simply taking God at His Word. That's when we see His hand.

The thought of God's faithfulness moved Paul to break out in praise. "Now to our God and Father *be* glory forever and ever." (vs20). Now, 'that is the tie that binds.' God is our Father; we are His children. We share His nature. We're like Him. We have a new nature. We're new creatures in Christ. We are His children, and so He cares for us like children. He's faithful to us. And that makes all of us brothers and sisters in the family of God. That means that we're to be people who care *about* one another, care *for* one another.

The letter ends on that sentiment with greetings being sent from Rome. First Paul tells the Philippians to "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus." And that's a helpful definition, or indication of a definition: It defines a saint. Who is a saint? We hear that word, we think of these elite people that have been canonized. They've done a miracle, they've done something. 'The Saints!'

No: Every believer is a saint. And Paul makes that clear here. He or she is a saint who is "in Christ Jesus." Everyone who's in Christ Jesus is a saint. We're in Christ Jesus through faith alone. The saints are the saved. They're believers. And Paul says, 'Greet them.' And in saying that I think he's saying do more than just say, "Hello", to them—he's saying, 'Take an interest in them, be concerned about them, and regard them as more important than yourself.' It's one of the great lessons of this Book of Philippians: Selfless service, humility, and putting others first. That's what we're to do: 'You're bound together with one another, so take care of one another, be concerned about one another, pray for one another, greet one another.'

The saints in Rome were interested in the Philippians; and they were sending their greetings. Verse 22, "All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household." Paul doesn't list them by name, but many of them are probably those who are listed at the end of the Book of Romans: Priscilla and Aquila had moved back to Rome by this time and many others.

Most of them probably didn't know the Philippians personally, but they had met Epaphroditus, and they had heard from him and Paul about the wonderful saints at Philippi. And so even though they didn't know them personally, they loved them. There was that 'tie that bound' them with these people they'd never personally met. And so they sent their greetings to them with genuine affection.

What's intriguing among these Roman saints is "those of Caesar's household." That catches the eye. You wonder, who were they? Were they people related to the emperor? Brothers or sisters, or something like that? Cousins? Or were they people in Nero's immediate circle, because he's the Caesar at the time. Nero!...which really makes this interesting.

Who were these individuals, these saints in Caesar's household? Well, we don't know. According to the early church historian, Eusebius, when Domitian was emperor at the end of the first century, some of his family did profess faith in Christ, and they were persecuted for their faith—they were exiled.

But most commentators feel Paul's reference during the time of Nero was to those in Caesar's service. That would be slaves, and freedmen, including the Praetorian Guard. Still, these were people in the palace. These were people who were near a man, the emperor, who was worshiped by many as a god. And yet they, (those close to him), remained true to Christ, faithful in a worldly place. Faithful, perhaps even a danger to themselves. And that should have been a great encouragement to the Philippians and strengthen them in their faith—and in their resolve to serve the Lord in their worldly place as well. Those of Caesars household had actually greeted them.

It's also a reminder that God has His people in every place. In the palace, in the ghetto. He's no respecter of persons. The Gospel is for all kinds of people. It's for slave and free. It's for Jew and Gentile. It's for male and female. It's for the rich and the poor. It's for all kinds of people. It's for all who believe in Jesus Christ. And we're all bound together in Him, regardless of who we are.

Paul then concludes with a benediction: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." (vs23). So ends Paul's brief but great epistle on Christian unity. It began with a *greeting* of grace, and it ends with a *prayer* for grace. And grace is what we all need to grow in the Christian life. It's what we all need for our spirits; our souls to grow and our unity to increase. We're not perfect. We won't be perfect this side of the grave. There's still a lot of sin within our members—and it will be that way until the day we leave this world.

At the heart of it all, there's selfishness within us. We need the grace of God to do what Paul is speaking about here: Be united with one another, be concerned with one another, and put others ahead of ourselves. We need grace. We live day by day, moment by moment by the sovereign grace of God. But as we believe His Word, the

grace of God fills our spirits, our inner lives, our personalities with the blessings of grace, with love, with joy, with peace—and this all comes from God as we live by faith, as we live in obedience with His Word.

He changes us. He causes us, not only to be different within ourselves, but then to be a channel of blessing and goodness to others as He supplies our every need. We have the life of God within us. We are in Christ, and He is in us. And that binds us together. May the LORD bless us, that we would live in unity with one another; that we would live with a love and concern for each other. And we will do that by His grace.

If you've not believed in Jesus Christ, our hope for you is that you will do that, and by the grace of God that you'll see your need for the Savior. You're lost; we all are apart from Him. None of us can be called a child of God by any merit of our own. It's all the sovereign grace of God that comes to us.

And you have the invitation to come to Him: Simply believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, the eternal Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, who became a man in order to die for sinners, so that all who believe in Him would have life everlasting, have the forgiveness of sins, and a glorious future, through faith, and faith alone. You have that, and you become a member of God's family, and He takes care of you. He's with you throughout this life.

May God help you to look to Him, and help all of us who have to rest in Him and rejoice. We have a God who supplies all of our needs. We can rely on Him. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank You for that great promise. You will supply 'all our needs, according to Your riches in glory in Christ Jesus.' (vs19). Your riches are unfathomable; they are unlimited; they are infinite—and all of that is for us. You apply it to us according to Your wisdom. What a blessing that is. May we reflect on that and believe that and live in light of it. Help us to live faithful lives, knowing that You meet our needs.

We thank You that You've met the greatest of all needs. You've met the need of our sin, the need of our forgiveness. You've obtained that for us at the cross of Christ,

and we simply receive it as a free gift. Thank You for blessing us, and for blessing so many; an innumerable multitude of people who have received Your saving grace. We thank you for Christ, thank You for all that He's done for us. Thank You for this great book of Philippians. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)