

## CHRIST'S STRENGTH IN THE BELIEVER

### Summary and Historical Background

Paul closed his letter to the church at Philippi with an appeal for unity. He had just reminded them that their citizenship was in Heaven, and because of this, they were to stand fast (4:1). Two women in the church were irritating each other, and apparently were dividing the church over their differences (cf. 2:1ff). So Paul graciously appealed to them to settle their differences (4:2). In addition, he commanded the church to rejoice, be gentle, and seek God's blessings through prayer, and then they would be filled with the peace of God (4:4-7). Realizing the divisive power of evil thinking, Paul pointedly instructed them on having proper thoughts (4:8-9).

Next, Paul showed his appreciation to the church for their love-gift to him (4:10, 14-18). He especially liked the gift because it would be fruit added to their account (4:17). Such giving was an acceptable and pleasing sacrifice to God (4:18). Regardless of his external circumstances, however, Paul was content (4:11-12). He could do all things through Christ who strengthened him (4:13), and he was also certain God would bless them, too, by supplying all their needs by Christ (4:19).

### Study Notes

#### I. Paul's Advice for Unity — 4:1-9

##### A. Settle Personal Differences — 4:1-3

4:1 — "Stand fast in the Lord" - While Paul appealed to the church to be steadfast, he expressed great love for them. Notice his words: "my brethren," "dearly beloved," "longed for," "my joy and crown," "dearly beloved" (repeated). He knew that his love would be a stronger appeal for having them remain steadfast than personal duty. But in what way did he want them to be steadfast? The context gives the answer. He wanted them to be steadfast in their unity. There was a danger that their unity was being threatened from a division within the church.

4:2 — "Be of the same mind in the Lord" - Two women in the church, Euodias and Syntyche, were at odds with each other and their differences were threatening the unity of the whole church. Paul appealed to them personally to settle their problems with each other by having the same mind in the Lord (cf. 2:5-8).

4:3 — "True partner" - Paul asked someone in the church to help these women get reconciled. Many guesses have been made as to the identity of this person, but the best answer seems to be Epaphroditus, the bearer of the letter from Paul to the church. He would have understood Paul's entreaty perfectly well, having talked with Paul about this situation in Rome. He also fits the description of being a "true partner" of Paul.

"Names are in the book of life" — These two women along with those they helped in spreading the Gospel in Philippi were people with eternal life. This church problem was not caused by unbelievers from outside the church but from believers inside the church.

##### B. Seek Precious Blessings — 4:4-7

4:4 — "Rejoice in the Lord always" - "Rejoice" is repeated in this verse because of its importance. Christians can rejoice always, even in difficult times, because they rejoice "in the Lord," and not in their circumstances. The command to rejoice is in the present tense which has the meaning, "Keep on rejoicing." When Christians obey this command, they discover a true appreciation for the Lord and a deep spring of overflowing satisfaction in their Christian experience.

4:5 — "Moderation" - This word can be translated, "gentleness," or "reasonableness." "Gentleness" is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). We are to be gentle and reasonable toward all people, not only toward Christians. It is an evidence of the Lord's peace in our souls. Keeping this command will be a blessing to all Christians. It is easy to see how a person's gentleness can be a blessing to others, but how is it a blessing to oneself? The last phrase gives a clue.

"The Lord is at hand" — The second coming of the Lord is getting close and following that is the judgment seat of Christ. When believers have been gentle toward others, they can expect a like treatment from the Lord when they are judged. Thus their gentleness toward others is a blessing to themselves. Furthermore, gentleness begets gentleness. A gentle person is more likely to be treated gently by others.

4:6 — "Be careful for nothing" - Christians are not to be full of cares and worries, that is, they are not to be anxious. Worry takes away the peace of God; it reveals a lack of faith. Worry is distrust in the care of God.

"Prayer . . . supplication . . . requests" — Christians are to take everything to the Lord in prayer, asking for supplies and requesting specific things. They are not to worry, but they are to pray. True prayer removes worry.

"With thanksgiving" — Christians are to pray with thanksgiving. They should be thankful that they can pray, and they should be thankful that God will answer (cf. 1 John 5:14-15). A person who prays with thanksgiving is a person who has faith in the Lord. It is a great blessing for a Christian to be able to pray, and an even greater blessing to have such confidence that he or she can pray with thanksgiving.

4:7 — "Peace of God" - This is another blessing that Christians have when they pray with thanksgiving. This is not peace with God that comes through justification, but the peace of God that comes through sanctification. The peace of God comes to those who confidently put their trust in Him when everything about them seems to be in disarray and full of uncertainty. This is an inner peace that the Holy Spirit gives to those who walk in obedience (Gal. 5:22).

"Keep" — The peace of God will "guard" the heart and mind of a believer.

### **C. Stimulate Proper Thoughts — 4:8-9**

4:8 — "Think on these things" - The Christians are to control their minds to dwell only on good thoughts. When their minds dwell only on good thoughts, there will be no room for sinful thoughts. Actually, their thoughts are to be controlled by Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). Christ's control of a believer's thought-life is carefully delineated in this verse. Christians are to think on "true" things, on "honest" or honorable things, on "just" or right things, on "pure" or holy things, on "lovely" or attractive things, on "good" or commendable things, on virtuous or excellent things, and on praiseworthy things.

4:9 — "Do" - Christians must not stop with right thoughts, but they must put those thoughts into practice.

"The God of peace" — When believers pray with thanksgiving, they receive the "peace of God" (v. 7); but when they think right thoughts and practice them, they receive the "God of peace."

## **II. Paul's Appreciation for Provisions — 4:10-20**

### **A. Spoke of His Contentment — 4:10-13**

4:10 — Paul rejoiced in the Lord because of the gift that the believers at Philippi had sent to him.

In other words, he was touched by their demonstration of love, but he gave the Lord credit for it all - he "rejoiced in the Lord" (cf. 3:1; 4:4). Paul practiced what he preached.

"Careful" — Could be translated "thoughtful." When the church at Philippi had the opportunity to help Paul, they were thoughtful of Paul's needs and helped him.

4:11 — Paul was content in any circumstance, whether it was easy or difficult. Paul had learned how to be content; it did not come naturally. His contentment apparently came as a result of the joy and peace which God had put in his heart (vv. 4, 7). Christians can be content when they realize they brought nothing into the world and can take nothing out of it (1 Tim. 6:7); when they refuse to love money and possessions (Mt. 6:19-21; 1 Tim. 6:10); when they realize the things of this world do not bring lasting happiness but will eventually pass away (Lk. 12:15; 1 Jn. 2:15-17); and when they put God first in all things (Mt. 6:33).

4:12 — Paul had learned to be content in poverty and in prosperity. People who have not learned to be content always want more, even when they are prosperous.

4:13 — The Lord strengthens all believers to do all things well, even to be content in difficult circumstances. Christ is the One who sustains the believers; they must totally rely upon Him and not upon themselves or others for their strength.

### **B. Saluted Their Generosity — 4:14-18**

The Philippian church supplied Paul's needs while he was in prison. This was a blessing to Paul (v. 10).

4:14 — They were commended by Paul for helping him.

4:15 — They had done this before, early in his European ministry, shortly after he had started the church in Philippi. In fact, they were the only church that had done this.

4:16 — They had sent him gifts several times.

4:17 — Paul was more interested in their spiritual benefits from giving him a gift than he was in his physical comfort from receiving their gifts.

"Gift . . . fruit . . . account" — These are terms used in the world of finances. "Gift" is the principle; "fruit" is the interest; and "account" is the credit that accrues from the gift.

4:18 — Their gift was a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God, acceptable (Rom. 12:1) and well-pleasing to Him (Heb. 13:16).

### **C. Stated God's Supply — 4:19-20**

4:19 — God has promised to supply the needs of all believers. When they share their resources with others, as the Philippian believers had done with Paul, God will in turn supply their needs. God will not let a generous person go away empty-handed. God's riches are limitless in Heaven ("in glory") and He will draw from that supply to meet his or her needs.

4:20 — God deserves all the glory for all His provisions and for all His blessings to all believers. He deserves to be praised both by the receiver and by the giver.

### **III. Paul's Closing Remarks — 4:21-23**

4:21 — Paul gave his salutation to all the saints (believers) in Philippi.

4:21-22 — Paul sent greetings from all those with him and from those in Caesar's household. Paul had evidently won many of the servants and soldiers of Caesar to the Lord while he was in prison.

4:23 — Paul gave his benediction of grace. The grace of the Lord is not only necessary for salvation, but also for sanctification.