

## Chapter 3: Confidence

### *Philippians 1:19–30*

Despite Paul’s own ability to rejoice in the midst of his suffering, the apostle recognizes that most people struggle to recognize suffering as a cause for rejoicing. Paul has explained that the advance of the gospel of Christ causes him to rejoice, regardless of his personal suffering in prison or from rivals preaching against him in Philippians 1:18. Now, he spends the rest of the first chapter of Philippians filling us in on the reasons behind that surprising attitude. To help us recognize that this is what he is doing, Paul transitions into Philippians 1:19 with the conjunction “for,” a word that gives the *cause* or the *reason* behind what he has just said about rejoicing in the midst of deep suffering.<sup>1</sup> He can rejoice *for* he knows something that he will now explain to us (Phil. 1:19). Paul has posed the riddle of his cruciform mindset, and now he begins the process of explaining how his joy could possibly be real.

In this section, then, Paul reiterates and expands upon his radical perspective on life. He is not ultimately seeking peace, security, and comfort, but only for Christ to be glorified in and through his life. It isn’t that Paul enjoys suffering, since he would far rather depart from his suffering to be with Christ (Phil 1:23). Instead, Paul recognizes the critical role that suffering plays in the life of the believer by confirming the share that we have in Christ. To Paul, suffering does not represent evidence *against* God’s favor toward us. Instead, suffering is proof that God is committed to doing everything necessary for bringing us into glory as he leads us down the same path that Jesus himself walked on his way to the cross.

### **The Paradox of Salvation: Certainty and Unpredictability (Phil. 1:19–20)**

In Philippians 1:19, Paul expresses his confidence that his circumstances of suffering will necessarily “turn out for my *deliverance*.” At first, it sounds as though Paul may have received word that he will soon be released. Nevertheless, this is not what Paul means. Paul speaks about being “delivered” from his suffering by using language that almost sounds as though he is about to be released from prison, but Paul clearly recognizes the genuine possibility that he will be sentenced to die. In fact, Paul insists that dying would not cancel or corrupt the quality of his deliverance, but, “whether by life or by death” (Phil. 1:20), Paul prays only that Christ will be honored in his body. What kind of deliverance does Paul eagerly expect here? And how can Paul be so optimistic and confident about his *deliverance* when that deliverance may bring about either life *or* death?

### Prayer and the Spirit

Paul roots his confidence in the two-sided ministry that he describes in Philippians 1:19: “for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance....” On one side, Paul speaks of the prayers of the Philippians as critical in turning the

trajectory of his circumstances in the direction of his eventual deliverance. On the other side, Paul expresses confidence in the “help” or, more literally, the “*supply* of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”

Paul describes the Holy Spirit as the person of the Godhead who applies the redemptive work accomplished by Jesus Christ to believers. Apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we can receive nothing from God. As the great Puritan John Owen put it, “There never was, nor is, nor ever will be the least particle of holiness in the world, but what flowing from Jesus Christ, is communicated by the Spirit, according to the truth and promise of the gospel.”<sup>2</sup> What God gives to us, he gives to us through the person of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, Paul insists that there is a deep connection between the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his own life and the prayers of the Philippians. Gordon Fee explains that “The grammar assumes the closest kind of relationship between their prayers and the supply of the Spirit.”<sup>3</sup> That is, the supply of the Holy Spirit comes *through* the prayers of believers. In a real way, Paul’s eventual deliverance depends on the Philippians’ prayers.

This doesn’t mean that God is waiting passively to act until the Philippians pray. Paul’s confidence in his deliverance rests ultimately upon the faithfulness of God, which is unshakable. Still, we should not downplay the value of the prayers of the Philippians. Frank Thielman writes, “it is important to recognize that God ordains the prayers of his people as a means through which to accomplish his purposes, including his purposes for the perseverance of Christians in the faith and for their ultimate salvation.”<sup>4</sup> We know that the Holy Spirit teaches us to pray when we do not know how to pray as we ought (Rom. 8:26), and Paul expands on that thought here in his letter to the Philippians to reveal that the Holy Spirit also supplies Paul’s deliverance through prayer. We cannot be fatalists who neglect prayer, but neither can we imagine that God is hindered from working apart from our prayers. Rather, the Holy Spirit is sovereign both to stir up our prayers and also to answer our prayers.

### Turning Out for My Salvation

Because of Paul’s confidence in the prayers of the Philippians and the supply of the Spirit, he can write with certainty that “this will turn out for my deliverance” (Phil. 1:19). The word translated as “deliverance” here is *sōtērian*, a word that we most commonly translate as “salvation.” (Our word *soteriology* refers to the doctrine of salvation.) In this context, Paul is probably speaking about the possibility of being delivered from his situation, even though this deliverance might come in the form of death or life (Phil. 1:20). Still, he chooses a word that communicates a wider notion of salvation, a word that reaches all the way to “a final eschatological salvation [that] has to do with deliverance from the coming wrath of God on the one hand...and the endowment with the divine glory...on the other.”<sup>5</sup> Understanding the broader meaning of this word helps us to avoid trivial, prosperity-type interpretations of the word “deliverance,” which would twist Paul’s meaning. Paul is not thinking chiefly about getting out of prison, but about the whole cosmic work of salvation that God *has* accomplished through the work of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection—and the work that God *is now* accomplishing through Paul’s chains.

It also helps, then, to realize that Paul is directly quoting Job 13:16 in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) when he writes that “this will turn out for my salvation.”<sup>6</sup> By quoting Job, Paul puts the extent—and significance—of his suffering into focus. Like Job, Paul is suffering deeply for reasons that he will not necessarily understand in this life. Indeed, Job was never given a direct explanation for the reasons behind his suffering, and he did not know in the midst of

his trials that Satan himself had set out to destroy him. Nevertheless, both Job and Paul recognize that, whatever God might be doing in and through their suffering, their circumstances must unfailingly turn out for their deliverance.

### Shame and Glory

Therefore, because of Paul's confidence that the effectual prayers of the Philippians and the supply of the Spirit will cause his situation to turn out for his deliverance, Paul writes that it is his "eager expectation and hope" that he will not be ashamed, but that Christ will be honored in his body, whether in life or in death (Phil. 1:20). The word translated here as "eager expectation" portrays Paul's attitude vividly, meaning "...to watch with head erect or outstretched, to direct attention to anything, to wait for in suspense" with a "constancy in expecting." Paul uses this word in only one other place in the New Testament, when he speaks of the "eager longing" (Rom. 8:19) of creation for the revealing of the sons of God in their eschatological glory. "Hope" in Philippians 1:20 describes confident faith in a way that does not include the sense of uncertainty included in the English word for "hope." While we sometimes say, "I sure hope so!" the New Testament writers instead say, "Our hope is certain." Here, Paul is waiting for his certain deliverance with eager, hope-filled anticipation.

In the rest of the verse, Paul clarifies the nature of this salvation by describing it through different language. So, he insists that he "will not be at all ashamed," and that "with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death." In these statements, Paul contrasts the ideas of being "ashamed" and "honored," words that come straight out of the Psalms. Peter O'Brien observes, "In the Psalter the man of God often prays that he will not be covered with shame before his enemies; instead he desires that he may be vindicated and the Lord exalted (...Ps. 34:26–27; 39:15–17)." Like so many believers across the centuries, Paul praying about his personal situation in the language of the Psalms.

And yet, when Paul says that all this will happen, "whether by life or by death," we are seeing a different meaning than what the Psalmists prayed, since the Psalmists prayed to be delivered from their enemies into physical safety and out of the grips of Sheol. We find no suggestion in the Psalms that deliverance can come through death, and "Indeed, one can argue that the OT phrase 'being put to shame' is often equivalent to 'dying.'" Certainly, the Psalmists were writing within the framework of the old covenant that promised many blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience *in this life*. The earthly blessings and curses of the old covenant, then, were a shadow of the eternal blessings and curses of the new covenant that the Messiah would inaugurate.

Remarkably, whatever it is that Paul has in mind regarding the nature of his salvation, he insists that death cannot harm it, and life cannot improve it. His captors cannot corrupt what Paul stands to receive, regardless of the verdict he will receive. This situation will actually turn out for Paul's salvation through the supply of the Spirit (coming through the prayers of the Philippians). Moreover, the Holy Spirit will unfailingly glorify Christ as he keeps Paul from shame. Nevertheless, the precise path that this salvation will take is totally unpredictable, so that Paul's certain salvation could equally come to him through life or through death. The total instability of Paul's circumstances contrasts markedly with the absolute unshakable nature of his ultimate salvation. He refuses to gauge his spiritual progress by looking at his conditions, but he instead refocuses his hope on the unfailing reality of his coming deliverance.

What kind of salvation, then, is Paul talking about? In Philippians 1:21–26, Paul begins a digression—albeit a critical digression!—that explains the nature of this salvation, both in the light of life and the shadow of death.

## The Person of Salvation: Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:21–26)

As in Philippians 1:19, Paul introduces this next section with the word “for,” which tells us that he is again giving us the cause or the reason for what he had just written. To explain the way in which his salvation can be *both* certain and yet *also* unpredictable, he begins with one of his most memorable phrases: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,” (Phil. 1:21). Then, Paul works through the deep tension that we experience as we live in the “time between the times”—the days between the beginning of the new age that dawned at the resurrection of Christ and the completion of the old age that will end at the return of Christ. While everyone who is in Christ is a new creation, so that the old has passed away (2 Cor. 5:17), we nevertheless must continue to endure the dying gasps of the old nature (2 Cor. 4:16), which continues to lead us into even the very sin that we no longer wish to do (Rom. 7:21–24). Until Jesus returns to set us completely free from this body of sin and death, we will continue to wrestle through the tension of our two natures that are at war with each other within us.

And yet, in Christ, our lives are also characterized by something else, too: the constant presence of Christ, whether we die or we live, no matter the nature of our circumstances or the strength of our enemies. For us, to live means Christ (Phil. 1:21), and to die means gain by *being with* Christ (Phil. 1:23).

### To Live is Christ

When Paul says that “to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21), he does not mean “living” in the sense of merely surviving longer in this life. Instead, he is speaking about the *purpose* for which he lives. Living, Paul explains, means that he can continue to apply himself to fruitful labor for the sake of Christ (Phil. 1:22), by the power of Christ, in the knowledge of Christ, and for the glory of Christ. William Hendriksen defines what Paul says here even further:

To determine even more exactly just what the apostle has in mind when he says, “to live (is) Christ,” parallel Pauline passages must be consulted. It means: to derive one’s strength from Christ (Phil. 4:13), to have the mind, the humble disposition of Christ (Phil. 2:5–11), to know Christ with the knowledge of Christian experience (Phil. 3:8), to be covered by Christ’s righteousness (Phil. 3:9), to rejoice in Christ (Phil. 3:1; 4:4), to live for Christ, that is, for his glory (II Cor. 5:15), to rest one’s faith on Christ and to love him in return for his love (Gal. 2:20).<sup>10</sup>

If to live is Christ, then there is nothing for us in life that falls outside of the influence, authority, grace, or glory of Christ.

### To Die is Gain

Death, then, is not “gain” for Paul in the sense of doing something fundamentally different than

he would do if he continued to live. Rather, the chief difference between death and life is that dying would mean departing from the suffering and anguish of this world in order to be directly *with* Christ (Phil. 1:23). Death means all the benefits of serving Christ that Paul enjoys in his life, but without the veil that separates him from Christ, and without the suffering that wearies him.

Life and death, then, are essentially two sides of the same coin that bears the image of Christ in every part. To underscore Christ as the link between how Paul sees both life and death, he even makes a bit of a play on words between the word for “gain” (*kerdos*) in Philippians 1:21 and the word he uses for “fruitful” labor (*karpos*) in the next verse (Phil. 1:22), only nine words later.<sup>11</sup> The fact that the words sound so similar emphasizes the fact that Christ whom we serve remains the same, whether in life or in death. The difference in our experience is merely a matter of degree: to live is Christ, but to die is *more* Christ.

### Convinced of the Necessity

In Philippians 1:25, Paul writes, “Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith.” In saying this, Paul is not suggesting that he *knows* whether he will remain and continue with them (that is, keep living). Instead, Paul is saying that *if* God permits him to continue living, he knows that he will spend any time he receives toward their progress and joy in faith: “the stress falls not so much on the fact that Paul will remain...but on his conviction (*pepoithōs*) that to remain is in the best interests of the Philippians.”<sup>12</sup>

Importantly, the word for “convinced” here, *pepoithōs*, is the same word that Paul used back in Philippians 1:6: “And I am *sure* (*pepoithōs*) of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Furthermore, the word for “progress” (“...for your *progress* and joy in the faith,” Phil. 1:25) is the word *prokopēn*, the same word Paul had used in Philippians 1:12 when we spoke about the “advance” of the gospel. In all these passages, Paul uses *pepoithōs*, a word of certainty, to address the guaranteed progress that God will accomplish to complete the good work that he began in them for the progress (*prokopēn*) of the gospel. If Paul is freed from his imprisonment and finds the opportunity to come to them, the Philippians will “have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again” (Phil. 1:26).

If God has determined that to send Paul to the Philippians to complete God’s good work in them for the advancement of the gospel, then nothing whatsoever could keep Paul from ministering in their midst, since Paul’s life would therefore be deemed “more necessary on your account” (Phil. 1:24). If, on the other hand, Paul dies, then the Philippians can be comforted in knowing that God has other plans for bringing to completion his good work in them. Just as Paul saw the gospel advance through his chains (Phil. 1:12), so also the Philippians will see the gospel advanced even through Paul’s death.

Paul feels “hard pressed” between these two options, and which God will choose for him he “cannot tell” (Phil. 1:23)—that is, he does not know, and he does not need to know at this point. Either way, through death or through life, the gospel will advance.<sup>13</sup>

### Christ is Salvation

We are now able to see exactly the nature of the salvation (or, “deliverance”) that Paul has been describing: Christ *himself* is that salvation. If we are given life, then salvation means living in, through, and for Christ. If God calls us home, then we can depart this world in order to be *with*

Christ in our Lord's immediate presence. So, when Paul speaks of salvation here, he does not *only* have in mind the forgiveness of sins, being declared righteous, or being progressively made holy through work of sanctification, although salvation is not *less* than those things. Moreover, Paul certainly does not lead us to believe that we are to live in constant, joyful victory, health, and prosperity—at least, not in this life. Rather, for Paul, salvation is Christ, and Christ is salvation. When we stop measuring life by the yardstick of our happiness, health, and wealth, and we instead measure life according to whether we have Christ, then radical confidence suddenly becomes possible.

Think through how Paul came understand this profound, counterintuitive principle, though. He did not come to treasure Christ in this way by sloppy, directionless living. Rather, he gave himself to studying, preaching, and teaching the Scriptures. He was devoted to prayer. He lived to see the churches he planted thriving in the gospel. Because his whole life was Christ, God graciously taught him to love nothing—not even his own life—more than Christ.

The question that faces us in this passage, then, is not so much whether we would have Paul's attitude if we ourselves were in chains for Christ, but rather this: Are our lives characterized by Christ? For us, does living mean *Christ*, or does living mean that we will spend our time and energy pursuing something else? If you were to fill in the blanks, "To live is \_\_\_\_\_, and to die is \_\_\_\_\_," what would accurately describe you right now?<sup>14</sup> If your answer is not Paul's answer, then why not?

## The Partnership of Salvation: Fellowship in Suffering (Phil. 1:27–30)

It is surprising to observe that Paul does not ask the Philippians to *do* anything until this point in the letter in Philippians 1:27. Up to now, Paul has been expressing the nature of his relationship with them (Phil. 1:1–11), the advancement of the gospel despite his precarious situation (Phil. 1:12–18), and his confidence that to live is Christ and to die is gain (Phil. 1:19–26). Here, Paul will take what he has written about himself and apply it to the situation in the church at Philippi.

### Gospel Citizenship

The word "only" at the beginning of this section in Philippians 1:27 is awkwardly emphatic in the Greek, signaling that Paul has a singular message to deliver. Paul does not, then, launch into "a series of exhortations but only one, and it is crucial."<sup>15</sup> He does not layer subtleties on top of nuances, but he instead focuses on one overarching message: *Only live worthily of your gospel citizenship.*

Philippians 1:27 is a verse where the historical background helps to illuminate Paul's message to the Philippians. In 42 BC, Octavian (who later became the emperor of Rome) reclassified the city of Philippi as a Roman colony after a significant military victory near the city. Through this new classification, the citizens of Philippi received the honor of Roman citizenship.<sup>16</sup> After that point, the Philippians were no longer considered the *subjects* of Rome, but they held the legal status and dignity of Roman citizens. On the basis of this new citizenship, the Philippians were urged to live in the manner that cultured, civilized, free Romans ought to live.

Since the people of Philippi treasured their valuable Roman citizenship, Paul likewise exhorts the Philippians to live worthily of their *gospel* citizenship. This word for *citizenship* (*politeuesthe*) is closely related to the noun *politeuma* that Paul uses in Philippians 3:20: "But our *citizenship* is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." The ESV's translation of Philippians 1:27, "Only let your *manner of life* be worthy of the gospel of Christ" does not literally convey the citizenship nature

of their lives, but this paraphrase brings out the *implications* of their citizenship. Citizenship confers benefits (e.g., the right to assemble, speak, vote, etc.), but citizenship also gives responsibilities (e.g., to obey the laws, to seek the good of the city, etc.). To be a Roman citizen carried one set of privileges and responsibilities; to be a citizen of heaven carries another. Furthermore, their gospel citizenship often conflicted with their Roman citizenship, as when the Roman emperor insisted that he was Lord (*kurios*). In such cases, the gospel citizenship of Christians carried the responsibility of confessing that Jesus—not Caesar—is Lord (*kurios*; Phil. 1:2, 2:7).<sup>17</sup>

### Unity

But while living worthily of gospel citizenship can never require *less* than confessing the exclusive Lordship of Jesus Christ (among other things), gospel citizenship also requires *more*. Specifically, Paul exhorts the Philippians to live worthily of their gospel citizenship in the way of unity, and he gives three examples to illustrate his point. First, Paul urges the Philippians to stand firm in one Spirit (Phil. 1:27). It is possible that Paul uses the word “spirit” to refer to a general likemindedness among believers, in the same vein of thinking that Paul gets at when he speaks of them striving together “in one mind” later in this verse. If so, Paul would be speaking of some kind of *esprit de corps*, or a general feeling of common purpose.

But, Gordon Fee offers four solid reasons for thinking rather that Paul is speaking here about *the* Spirit—the Holy Spirit. Some of these reasons get into fairly technical grammatical considerations, but it is worth noting that (1) the word for “spirit” is never used in the New Testament to speak of unity between multiple people, and (2) Paul uses the language of “in one Spirit” in Ephesians 2:18 and 1 Corinthians 12:13 explicitly to describe the Holy Spirit, “precisely in passages where the emphasis is on the believers’ common experience of the one Spirit as the basis for unity.”<sup>18</sup> The Philippians cannot stand together on the strength of their own spirit of likemindedness, but only through the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.

Second, Paul uses an athletic image, instructing the Philippians to “strive together” with one mind, “side by side for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 2:27). We actually get our word “athlete” from the word Paul uses here, and it communicates the idea of struggling and fighting “like gladiators” in competition.<sup>19</sup> While the word “spirit” may not have referred to any kind of likemindedness, Paul now directly speaks about the need for the Philippians to strive together “with one mind.” Rather than allowing each person’s individual plans, hopes, and desires to pull the church in several different directions, Paul urges the Philippians to recognize their common mission and to strive together toward that end with singularity of mind.

Third, Paul encourages the Philippians not to be frightened in any way by their opponents (Phil. 1:28). He goes on to say that “this” (that is, their unity in the Spirit) will function as a sign for their opponents. This does not mean that their opponents will necessarily recognize the significance of the sign, but that the *Philippians* would perceive their unity in the Spirit as a sign “that God will destroy those who persecute his people.”<sup>20</sup> The supernatural unity that the Philippians experience as they strive together for the gospel stands as proof that God is working toward their eventual deliverance, even in their darkest hours.

Paul had spoken earlier in this letter of the “partnership” (Phil. 1:5) in the gospel that he shares with the Philippians, and the nature of that partnership is starting to come into focus. Their *koinōnia* with Paul was not only financial support (Phil. 4:14–18) and prayer (Phil. 1:19), but also a single-

minded striving together in the Spirit with complete confidence that God was at work in their midst.

### The Grace of Suffering

Finally, Paul identifies the primary element of their mutual partnership: shared *suffering*. While Paul has so far spoken of his *own* suffering, he now speaks of the Philippians suffering: “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him *but also suffer for his sake*, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have” (Phil. 1:29–30). Paul has written extensively about the way in which he rejoices over the gospel’s advance through his suffering, and now he urges the Philippians to look upon their suffering in the same way.

Shockingly, Paul goes beyond telling the Philippians simply that suffering is unavoidable. Instead, he goes much further by saying that their suffering is something that is “graced” or “gifted” (*echaristhē*, from “grace,” *charis*; cf. Phil. 1:2) to them. Moisés Silva writes,

Paul’s description of suffering as a gift, *humin echaristhē* (to you it has been granted), is lexically unique in the [New Testament]. It is also startling. Believers find it difficult enough to accept the inevitability of suffering; we feel we are making spiritual progress if we resign ourselves to the fact that grief cannot be avoided. But here the apostle challenges the Philippians’ theology and asks them to understand their afflictions not merely as inevitable but as a manifestation of God’s gracious dealings with them.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, Paul includes suffering in the same category as faith: not only were the Philippians granted the grace of *faith* in Christ, but they were also granted the grace of *suffering* for Christ’s sake (Phil. 1:29). Believers must enter into the same kind of suffering, for the same purposes, that Paul himself has endured during his time in prison.

The call to follow Jesus is a call not only to believe, but to *suffer* for his sake. Ultimately, this means that suffering is a *gift* of grace. Not only does our suffering for the sake of Christ confirm of our future salvation, but through suffering, “we become identified with Christ’s suffering (3:10), a suffering that was redemptive and issued in the resurrection.”<sup>22</sup> Paul calls suffering a gift because we cannot expect to be raised up with Christ if we do not first suffer with Christ—that is, the gift of resurrection demands the prerequisite gift of suffering.

### Confidence

With this, Paul brings us around full circle to the theme on which he opened this passage: *confidence*. Paul’s confidence that “this will turn out for my deliverance” (Phil. 1:19) is not a statement of what God will do *in spite* of his suffering, but a statement of his confidence in what God can do *through* his suffering. Suffering is not an obstacle to be avoided, but suffering rather provides us with internal confirmation of our inclusion in the body of Christ. When we suffer for the sake of Christ, we share in the sufferings of other Christians (Phil. 1:30) and of Jesus Christ himself (Phil. 3:10). Just as God uses the proclamation of God’s word, church membership, the sacraments, and the internal witness of the Spirit in order to confirm our share in Christ’s eternal kingdom, so also God uses our suffering for the same purpose.

Jesus spoke about this issue bluntly, saying,



“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matt. 5:10–12)

And also:

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” (John 15:18–20)

Finally, we should also remember what the author of the letter to the Hebrews reminded us:

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb. 12:7–11)

In this light, suffering is not a problem that we must explain away, and much less does suffering suggest God’s displeasure with us. On the contrary, the fact that we do experience suffering, persecution, and discipline serves rather as the strongest possible evidence of our gracious inclusion in the family of God. Properly understood, it is the *absence*, and not the *presence* of suffering that should cause us to question whether we might be “illegitimate children and not sons” (Heb. 12:8).

Our confidence in our eternal inheritance, then, arises not out of a life filled with riches, health, prosperity, pleasure, safety, and comfort, but from a life where we share in Christ’s suffering for his sake. This doesn’t mean that we should manufacture problems for ourselves, but that when persecutions arise, we should recognize the importance of suffering as a confirmation of our *koinōnia* with Christ and with his church.

## Discussion Questions

1. When you pray for deliverance in your own life, where are you putting your hope? Do you pray for God to build your faith in his unshakable salvation, or will you be disappointed if God does not give you success and comfort in this life? What part of Paul’s confidence in his own “deliverance” might you meditate upon prayerfully to grow in this area?

2. What constitutes life for you? That is, where do you find your greatest pleasure, hope, and exhilaration? What constitutes gain to you? That is, where are you willing to make significant investments of time, energy, and resources for the sake of what you might receive as a return? What would happen if you lost the things that you are living for?

3. How does your gospel citizenship clash with the benefits and responsibilities of the citizenship you enjoy in your country? Your school or workplace? Your home? What practical steps do you need to step out of conformity with your worldly citizenships in order to grow in conformity with your gospel citizenship?

4. Are you frustrated with God over some part of your suffering? Because of that suffering, in what ways do you question his love for you? What might change if you instead saw your temporary suffering in this life as evidence of his eternal love for you? How might God be using your suffering and discipline for your eternal benefit?

## Notes

1. BDAG, “γάρ,” 189–90.
2. John Owen, *The Holy Spirit: His Gifts and Power* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2007), 248.
3. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 132.
4. Thielman, *Philippians*, 81.
5. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 109–10.
6. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 108–09.
7. *Thayer’s Lexicon*, “ἀποκαταδοκία,” <<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G603&t=KJV>>
8. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 114.
9. Silva, *Philippians*, 72.
10. Hendriksen, *Philippians*, 76.
11. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 125.
12. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 139.
13. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 127–28.
14. Ellsworth, *Opening up Philippians*, 28–29.
15. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 145.
16. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 25–26, 161–62. Fee has a very helpful treatment of the significance of citizenship through this section, and I have drawn much from his work here.
17. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 157.
18. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 163–66. The other two reasons: (1) Paul’s pattern of usage for the phrase “stand firm” (1 Cor. 16:13; Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 3:8) always introduces a dative of sphere (which supports “Holy Spirit”) rather than a dative of manner (which would support “likemindedness”); and (2) in Philippians 2:1–4, Paul uses the same words from Philippians 1:27 for “spirit” and “mind” again, where “spirit” clearly means “Holy Spirit,” and “mind” clearly refers to being likeminded. If “mind” is used in the same way only a few verses later, then we should likely take “Spirit” in the same way too, as a reference to the Holy Spirit.
19. Hendriksen, *Philippians*, 86–87.

20. Thielman, *Philippians*, 94.
21. Silva, *Philippians*, 83.
22. Thielman, *Philippians*, 94–95.