

29–30 For to you it has been granted for Messiah’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

Paul continues to unfold the truths he has already emphasized in the previous context, namely, that his current imprisonment has been used of the Lord not only to evangelize the entire praetorian guard but also to proclaim the “good news” of Yeshua’s saving work to other prisoners as well (v. 13). In addition, Paul is confident that many other believers have been strengthened in their faith and resolve to stand firm for the Lord, as they witness Paul’s testimony of remaining strong in the faith (v. 14). Likewise, in v. 28, he emphasizes that when those who are the opponents of believers witness the strength of their faith and their resolve and ability to remain committed to Yeshua, it proves to them that God is faithful and that apart from faith in Him, they are bound for destruction.

Now Paul reminds the believers in Philippi and us as well, that our eternal salvation is not something which we earned by our “good works” but is entirely a gift of God’s grace.

For to you it has been granted...— Paul’s words are clear that the ability to “believe in Him” and also to “suffer for His sake,” are the result of God’s grace, for the Greek word translated “granted” is ἐχαρίσθη (*exaristhē*), the aorist form of the verb χαρίζομαι (*charizomai*) meaning “to give freely as a favor, give graciously.”¹ This verb is cognate to the noun χάρις (*xaris*), “grace” and when used to denote the “grace of God,” emphasizes the unmerited favor and love He grants to those He draws to Himself for eternal salvation.

What is grace (χάρις, *xaris*)? While the Greek word, like our English word “grace,” can have the sense of “graciousness” or “kindness,” when used in biblical contexts which speak of God’s grace in the saving of sinners, the word is best defined succinctly as “unmerited favor.” That which is “earned” or “achieved” cannot be considered as having received it “by grace.” For something that is “earned” is owed and something that is “achieved” is likewise received as obligatory. But grace cannot be earned or awarded, for by definition grace is that which is freely given, i.e., a gift, as Paul makes clear in our text.

He speaks directly to this in his Epistle to the Ephesian in 2:8.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; (Eph 2:8)

1 BDAG, “χαρίζομαι,” p. 1078.

The important question which must be asked when seeking to understand Paul's point in Eph 2:8 is this: to what does the word "that" refer in the phrase "and that not of yourselves"? In Greek, a demonstrative such as the word "that" (οὗτος, *houtos*) must agree in number and gender with the word it modifies. In Eph 2:8, however, both of the nouns "grace" (χάριτι, *chariti*) and "faith" (πίστεως, *pisteōs*) are feminine nouns. However, the demonstrative "that" is in the neuter gender. The best explanation of Paul's words here is that the neuter demonstrative can be used to refer back to an entire clause or to the previous context in general.¹

Further, in the English translation of "it is the gift of God," the English words "it is" are not actually written in the Greek but, as often, are expected to be supplied as an ellipsis. If we were to translate the entire verse woodenly it would be: "For by the grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of you, the gift of God."

Thus, the correct understanding of the grammar is this: Paul is stating that the cause of our salvation is the grace of God and that we receive His salvation by faith, and neither His grace nor our faith is something which begins with ourselves. Both His grace as well as the faith to receive His gracious offer of salvation are gifts which He gives.

And that is precisely what Paul is emphasizing in his letter to the Philippians. Our coming to faith in Yeshua, or having Him as our Redeemer, our Savior, our Lord and King, is all a gift of His grace and nothing we earned or deserved.

...*for Messiah's sake* – The Greek (ὕπὲρ Χριστοῦ) has engendered numerous interpretations within this context, but it seems clear that the emphasis Paul expects us to see is that it is entirely by the work of Yeshua in His death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession that all who are divinely called to be His are granted initial faith resulting in salvation, but also are given the ability to persevere in that faith until the end. Thus, all that we have and all that we are as we grow to become more and more like our Savior, is the result of Yeshua's saving work, brought to us by the work of the Spirit, and all of this is ultimately for the glory and praise of God.

...*not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake* – Even as faith is a gift of God, so is the strength and ability to persevere in the faith. Granted, such perseverance in the faith is a cooperative work between the renewed child of God and the work of the Spirit as the believer submits to the Lord, gains strength from Him, and grows in spiritual

1 See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, pp. 334–35; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 342–43.

ability to glorify Him in all aspects of one's life.

What Paul is not teaching us here is that we should expect suffering and even look for it, thinking that the more we suffer, the more we are becoming like our Messiah. Or even that when believers do not suffer, their genuine faith is suspect. It surely is true that the fallen world in which we live may bring sufferings, as Paul teaches us in Rom 8:18–19.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. (Rom 8:18–19)

What Paul is teaching us here in Philippians, however, is that in this world we may face suffering directly related to our evident faith in Yeshua, and that if and when we do, we have the promise that the Lord will enable us to remain faithful and to persevere through the suffering as victorious in His grace and strength. Such ability to persevere under suffering will likewise be an evident testimony to others of the strength and grace He gives, even as the Lord has sustained Paul in his current situation of suffering.

... *experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me* – It is interesting to contemplate the strong possibility that Paul has in mind athletic contests since he uses the Greek word ἀγῶν (*agōn*). This term originally indicated a place or arena of an athletic contest, as well as the contest itself, and any kind of struggle or conflict which resulted.¹ The same arenas were likewise used for the torture of martyrs. We see this use of *agōn* described in 4 Maccabees, describing the suffering (*agōn*) of Jewish martyrs under the Syrian tyrant, Antiochus, as likened to the contest (*agōn*) of athletes.

Truly divine was the contest (*agōn*) in which they were engaged. On that day virtue was the umpire and the test to which they were put was a test of endurance. The prize for victory was incorruption in the long-lasting life. The first to enter the contest was Eleazar, but the mother of the seven sons competed also, and the brothers as well took part. The tyrant was the adversary and the world and the life of men

1 Hansen, G. Walter, *Philippians in Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2009), p. 102, quoting Stauffer, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1964), 1.135.

were the spectators. Piety won the victory and crowned her own contestants.¹

Thus, Paul encourages the believers in Philippi not to see his suffering in prison as something to bring them fear or causing them to be unsettled in their faith. Just the opposite! For as they receive Paul's own testimony of God's sustaining power even in the very difficult circumstances he was enduring, they should be strengthened to know that if they likewise were to suffer for their faith in Yeshua, they, like Paul, would be sustained by God's power. As such, they would likewise be granted the opportunity to give God glory, for only by His grace and power could they endure even as Paul endured, presenting them a sure demonstration of God's faithfulness.

The lesson we learn from these final verses of our chapter is this: we who are in Messiah Yeshua need never fear the future. For even when the days seem to be more and more darkened against the light of God's saving grace and power, we know for certain that He will sustain us by His grace and omnipotence, and nothing that is set against us will have success.

No trial has overtaken you that is not faced by others. And God is faithful: He will not let you be tried beyond what you are able to bear, but with the trial will also provide a way out so that you may be able to endure it. (1Cor 10:13, NET Bible)

The Greek words translated by the NET Bible as "trial" (*πειρασμός*, *peirasmos*) or "tried" (*πειράζω*, *peirazō*) may also carry the sense of "temptation" or "to tempt" as most of the English Bibles translate them. Surely the Greek *peirasmos* and *peirazō* can be understood as describing "temptation" as well as "testing" and this is because the two concepts are surely similar, for very often a person that comes under strong temptation is having their faith tested as to whether it is genuine.

My point is this: even as Paul showed himself to bear up under severe testing, so he proved to his readers the genuine nature of his faith in Yeshua. And even as he was an example to the Philippian believers as well as believers in other regions who heard of his imprisonment, so we, by the strength God gives, will be enabled to face whatever trials come upon us, knowing that God will never abandon those who are His, but will give them strength to persevere as they trust in Him.

1 4 Maccabees 17.11–15, quoted from Charlesworth, James H. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Doubleday, 1985), 2.562–63,

Chapter Two

commentary

Paul now goes on in his letter to encourage and exhort the Philippian community to strive for unity and not to be divided against each other. For disunity is often fostered in times of testing.

In these verses, Paul describes attitudes and behavior—selfish ambition, vain conceit, regarding oneself as better than others, looking out for one’s personal interests—that foment tension and strife in the community.¹

Ultimately, as always, Paul points his readers and us to a different standard, the life of Yeshua Himself. As we seek more and more to have the mind of our Messiah Yeshua, we will be enabled to be unified under His guidance and example, and to be one in the Spirit.

1–2 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Messiah, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Messiah... – When Paul begins with “if,” he is not suggesting that the following things he lists might not exist. Rather, the sense is that surely the believers to whom he writes have experienced “encouragement in Messiah, expression of true love and caring for one another, the fellowship of the Spirit, and life-to-life caring for each other,” and thus they both know and are able to preserve their unity. To do so they must commit themselves to living as God intends them to live, submitting to His ways, seeking to glorify Him by living out their faith through the strength He gives.

The opening “Therefore” clearly links back to the previous context and Paul’s exhortation to live out the grace and salvation that God has granted His people, having called us into His family and united us together in Yeshua. The gift of faith He has given us is the very means by which we are enabled to take hold of His strength, wisdom, and

1 Garland, David E., *Philippians in Expositors Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 2006), 12.213.

mercy in order to live faithfully unto Him no matter what situations may come our way. And this includes striving for unity and not giving into the impulses of the flesh. Indeed, to bear each other's burdens is the very command of Yeshua.

Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Messiah. (Gal 6:2)

Paul begins by emphasizing the importance of encouragement in Messiah. The word "encouragement" (*παράκλησις, paraklēsis*) is one of those terms that is somewhat difficult to know precisely what its intended meaning is in any given context. This is because the word can carry a number of different nuances. It can express "encouragement, exhortation, to appeal, request, or to comfort, give consolation."¹ It seems best in this context to understand the word "encouragement" to mean "comfort," or that which dispels fear and dismay. This is because the emphasis is upon "encouragement in Messiah." Note 2Cor 1:5.

For just as the sufferings of Messiah are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Messiah. (2Cor 1:5)

This means to be strengthened, encouraged, comforted even in times of trial and suffering, knowing that what the Lord has promised, He will always do. There is no need to be overcome with fear regarding the future. He will enable all who are His to persevere and give them the strength to do so as they rely upon Him. Surely He has promised never to leave or to forsake those who are His.

Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU." (Heb 13:5)

For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst. (Matt 18:20)

... *if there is any consolation of love*, – Since Paul begins with "encouragement in Messiah," it seem best to understand the phrase "consolation of love" to be referring to God's love for all who are His as demonstrated by the love of Yeshua in giving Himself for all those whom the Father has given to Him (cf. Jn 6:37).

1 BDAG, "παράκλησις," p. 766.

Surely there is no greater expression of God's love than in the giving of His own Son, Yeshua, to save sinners and to bring them into the family of God for eternity.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Messiah died for us. (Rom 5:8)

We who belong to Him because of His love in giving His life for us, ought likewise to love each other, for in doing so we demonstrate our love for Him.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1Jn 4:11)

... *if there is any fellowship of the Spirit*, – The word “fellowship” (*κοινωνία, koinōnia*) is often understood to mean “fellowship” as the NASB translates it here, meaning to be together, talk together, etc. But the primary aspect of the word is that of “sharing in” or “participating in” something (usually with someone else).¹ Thus, the fellowship that Paul is describing here undoubtedly involves sharing together the essential aspects of life in Yeshua. It incorporates the work of the Spirit, not only gifting every member of the community to serve the Lord and each other, but also to recognize the essential aspect of encouraging each other, coming to the aid of each other, and striving for unity with each other.

1 Gordon Fee, *Philippians in IVP NT Commentary* (IVP, 1999), p. 84.