

... will perfect it until the day of Messiah Yeshua. – The word “perfect” translates the Greek ἐπιτελέω (*epiteleō*) which is made up of the preposition *epi* and the verb *teleō*, meaning “to complete.” The added preposition gives the sense of “to complete something according to a plan or objective.”¹ Thus, by writing that God would “perfect it,” that is, the work that He had begun, means that God has a plan and that He will bring His plan to fruition and completion—nothing can stand in His way of bringing about His holy will.

The phrase “until the day of Messiah Yeshua” (ἄχρι ἡμέρας Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ) could better be understood as “at the day of Messiah Yeshua,”² that is, the completion of God’s plan of salvation for all whom He has given to Yeshua will commence at the time of Yeshua’s return, when He comes to rule the earth and to bring earth’s history to its ordained conclusion.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. (1Thess 4:16–17)

7 – For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me.

For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all – Paul begins this verse with a word (καθώς, *kathōs*) which has as its basic meaning “just as.” However, when *kathōs* begins a sentence it carries the sense of “since” or “in so far as.” Thus, Paul uses this to connect his words in this verse back to the previous context in which he gives thanks to the community at Philippi for their “participation in the gospel from the first day until now” (v. 5). It is because of their living out their faith in Yeshua, shown not only by their steadfast life of caring for each other but also by their willingness to aid Paul in the work Yeshua had given Him to do, that Paul is confident of their eternal standing in God’s grace (v. 6). Moreover, it is that God always completes what He has begun that forms the basis for Paul’s confidence regarding the genuine

1 BDAG, “ἐπιτελέω,” p. 383.

2 See Hellerman, *EGGNT–Philippians*, p. 25.

faith possessed by the Philippian believers. Their life of faithfulness assures Paul that he is “right” (δικαιος, *dikaïos*) in his assessment of the believing community in Philippi.

Once again we see from Paul’s words here that it is the life that progresses in godly obedience and holiness that is the mark of true faith and the life that it produces. All too often it is the case that people separate “confession of faith” from “a life of faith.” But the genuine “root” inevitably brings forth “genuine fruit.” Where there is no consistent spiritual fruit in a person’s life, there remains a question whether the true “root” of salvation exists.

But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. (Rom 6:22)

Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness... Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. (Heb 12:9–10, 14)

but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; (1Pet 1:15)

The NASB translation of the phrase “it is only right for me to feel this way about you all” could be a bit misleading based upon the translations “to feel this way about you all.” Granted, in typical modern English idiom, “to feel this way” involves the general sense of one’s perception and understanding of a particular situation. But the next phrase in our verse makes it clear that Paul is describing what he has come to know and rejoice in, based upon the service the Philippian community has rendered to him as well as to one another. They have shown the reality of their faith through their faithful service to the Lord and this is not simply something Paul “feels” but that he knows with surety.

...because I have you in my heart – Here Paul describes that his assurance of their standing in faith is based upon what he knows to be true, for in the semitic mindset, the heart is the place where one’s thoughts reside as well as the source for the motivation which fuels one’s actions. Here are a few verses which clearly show that in biblical language, the heart is viewed as the place where one’s thoughts and knowledge reside

as well as the source from which one's actions proceed.

All the earth was seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart. (1Ki 10:24)

The Torah of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip. (Ps 37:31)

Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life. (Prov 4:23)

Thus, for Paul to state "I have you in my heart" does not negate the close companionship he enjoyed with them while he was with them, but it emphasizes that true companionship rests upon what is true and right, not merely on one's emotions or desires in a given moment. Indeed, that Paul can state that he has them in his heart indicates his true thankfulness and joy in the vital role they were fulfilling in enabling him to serve the Lord, even as he was in prison.

Whatever the conditions were of the prison in which Paul was confined when he wrote his letter to the community in Philippi, we know for certain that prisons in ancient Rome did not provide food and other necessities for the prisoners. Thus a prisoner such as Paul relied entirely upon family and friends to bring food, clothing and other necessities during his incarceration.

Surely the Lord urges His people to care for one another, and this includes those who have been instrumental in teaching and leading the community in the ways of God's truth and holiness. It is a very real expression of love and gratitude when those who labor in the word and teaching are shown to be appreciated by the kindness extended to them. And Paul, in the dire situation in which he resided, must have felt gratitude beyond his ability to fully express.

... since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. – Not only was Paul grateful for the kindness shown him while in the darkness of prison, but he also points out the fact that the Philippian community of believers accepted and cared for him even though he was rejected by many others. For he was rejected on account of his open confession of Yeshua and his obedience to the Lord in welcoming both Jews and Gentiles as having an equal standing before God through the redemption purchased by Yeshua in His death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession.

The "defense of the gospel" means to be willing to stand for the truth of the gospel and to be able to show others why the "gospel," the "good

news of salvation in Yeshua," is divinely revealed in the Scriptures and thus to proclaim it as the only means by which a sinner may be given eternal life and unending fellowship with the Creator Himself. We will encounter this phrase again in v. 16. The word "defense" translates the Greek ἀπολογία (*apologia*) from which our English word "apologetics" is derived. Biblical apologetics is the field of study in which logical arguments are formulated to show the trustworthiness of the Scriptures and the message of salvation they embody.

Here we see the coupling of divine sovereignty in salvation combined with the means or method by which God has ordained His sovereign plan in saving sinners to succeed. And this method is the necessity to have the gospel proclaimed to the world by those He has saved. Surely, in one sense, the gospel needs no "defense," for it embodies the very heart of God's truth. Yet He has ordained that the life-giving message of the Gospel be taken to others through human agency strengthened and energized by the Spirit Who indwells all believers. Even as Paul considered himself to be a servant of God to "defend the gospel," so all who are born from above and given a new life in Messiah are servants of the Lord to bear the good news of the gospel to a lost world.

But what does Paul mean, secondly, when he writes of the "confirmation of the Gospel?" The Greek word translated "confirmation" is βεβαιώσις (*Bebaiōsis*), and is found only here and in Heb 6:16. In the Greek phrase of our text, "the defense and confirmation of the gospel" (ἐν τῇ ἀπολογία καὶ βεβαιώσει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου), there is only one definite article (τῇ, *tē*) governing both "defense" and "confirmation." This construction in the Greek indicates that Paul intends his readers to see that the two terms are to be understood as forming a single unity.¹

But what does Paul mean by the phrase "confirmation of the gospel?" What does it mean to "confirm" the gospel? First, Paul does not intend us to understand his words to mean that the gospel message is dependent upon mankind affirming it, for the gospel is confirmed as true whether a person receives it or rejects it. As Calvin notes:

Here, however, some one will inquire, whether the confirmation of the gospel depends on the steadfastness of men. I answer, that the truth of God is in itself too firm to require that it should have support from any other quarter; for though we should all of us be found liars, God, nevertheless, remains true. (Romans 3:4.)²

1 See Hellerman, *EGGNT-Philippians*, p. 27.

2 Calvin, *Philippians*, p. 29.

What Paul teaches us here, in speaking both of defending and confirming the gospel, is that there is both a positive and a negative confirmation and they are united, meaning that both function together to proclaim the gospel as God intends. The defense (*ἀπολογία* (*apologia*) of the gospel is the negative part in the sense of removing obstacles that are thrown up against the gospel, as for instance, showing proof of the historicity of the biblical accounts to answer those who claim the Bible to be fiction. The confirmation *βεβαίωσις* (*Bebaiōsis*) is the positive part, showing how one's life is changed and one is enabled to fulfill life's greatest objective, that is, to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. It is the testimony of a changed life, a life that honors God, that confirms the power of the gospel.

... *you all are partakers of grace with me.* – Here we see an excellent example of the equality of all who are “in Messiah,” for Paul refers to the believers in Philippi as “partakers of grace with me.” The Greek word translated “partakers” is *συγκοινωνός* (*sunkoinōnos*) which is the preposition *sun*, “with, to associate with, to accompany” and *koinonia*, “fellowship, having mutual interest, close relationship.” In using this term, Paul puts the Philippian believers and himself as having equal standing before God: equal in His love, equal in the gospel, and equal partakers of the gift of God's grace. While within the body of Messiah there are a variety of gifts and ministries, even the celebrated Apostle teaches us here that we are all equal in sharing the gracious gift of God's grace and salvation.

8 – For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Messiah Yeshua.

When Paul states that “God is my witness,” he is emphasizing that what he is about to affirm is absolutely true and he is unveiling his true thoughts and desires for his readers. We see him using similar language in Rom 1:9–10.

For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. (Rom 1:9–10)

Here Paul is a true model for all who are in any leadership position within a local assembly of believers, for he has those to whom he

ministers always in his thinking, his desires, and most importantly, in his prayers, as we will see in the following verses. Paul states “how I long for you all,” using the Greek word ἐπιποθέω (*epipothēō*) which is the common verb ποθέω (*pothēō*), “to have strong desire, strive after”¹ but is even strengthened by the addition of the preposition ἐπί (*epi*). It is used by Paul 7 times of the 9 times it is found in the Apostolic Scriptures,² highlighting once again his constant desire to serve those God had given him the opportunity to lead and teach.

...with the affection of Messiah Yeshua – Here we see that Paul attributes his own love for the believers to whom he ministers as that which is modeled by Yeshua Himself, Who enables the believers to love in truth. The common idiom in the Hebrew is likewise followed by the Greek, for the Hebrew verb רחם (*racham*) carries the sense of “to love, to show pity to someone, to be merciful to someone,” and the related noun רֶחֶם (*rechem*) means “womb” or “lap.” In the Greek, σπλάγχχον (*sp-lanxnon*) has the sense of “the inward parts of the body, entrails” which gave rise in the KJV Bible to the translation “bowels of compassion.”

But perhaps the best explanation of these terms is the picture of a mother cuddling her baby in her lap with arms wrapped around the infant. While the words used in the biblical texts were common and should not be taken too far as to their various meanings, that Paul would speak of the “affection of Messiah Yeshua” undoubtedly emphasizes the nurturing, careful attendance, and close relationship that occurs between the maturing believer and Yeshua. It is love that is pure and not self-serving, and this is the love that Paul expresses to the believers in Philippi. Indeed, it is this self-giving love for which all in the body of Messiah should strive to know and to give to one another. It is love and affection that is wedded with truth and knowledge as well as a firm resolve to bring about that which is pleasing to the Lord in everyone’s life. And of course, Yeshua our Messiah is the ultimate example and eternal pattern of such love.

1 BDAG, p. 839.

2 Cf. Rom 1:11; 2Cor 5:2; 9:14; Phil 1:8; 2:26; 1 Thess 3:6; 2Tim 1:4; James 4:5; 1 Pet. 2:2.

9–10 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Messiah;

Paul now gives the core request for the Philippian believers as he prays for them. Of all the things that might have been considered most important for them, it is interesting to consider what does not head the list. He does not pray that their assembly will grow in numbers, nor that they would be granted protection from those who might stand against them. Not that these requests would be unworthy of his prayers, but they simply do not hold “first position” in Paul’s mind.

The primary request of the apostle for those to whom he ministers is that their “love may abound more and more” (*ἡ ἀγάπη ὑμῶν ἔτι μᾶλλον καὶ μᾶλλον περισσεύη*). The first question to be asked is this: is the love for which Paul prays their love for God or their love for one another? The obvious answer is that these are inextricably bound together, for when our love for God grows and abounds, then surely we will be far better equipped to love one another with an unfailing love that enables true growth in our spiritual lives and in our outreach to the world.

Interestingly, Paul uses similar language in 1Thess 3:11–12.

Now may our God and Father Himself and Yeshua our Lord direct our way to you; and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; (1Thess 3:11–12)

It seems quite clear that Paul has the same perspective here in his epistle to the Philippian believers as he did when admonishing the community in Thessalonica, that the love which abounds is manifested in loving actions toward one another. Gordon Fee notes this in his commentary on Philipians.

Many years earlier, where an existing love also needed some further prodding, Paul prayed similarly for the Thessalonians that their “love [might] increase and overflow” (1 Thess 3:12). In that case he specified the direction of the love for which he prayed: “for each other and for everyone else.” The linguistic and contextual similarities between these two prayers suggest a similar direction to the love for which he now prays that their love for one another abound all the more, a concern

that is expressly picked up in 2:2 (“that you have the same love [for one another]”).¹

...*in real knowledge and all discernment* – That the NASB translates “real knowledge” signals the fact that the Greek word Paul uses here is *ἐπίγνωσις* (*epignōsis*) which carries the meaning of “full knowledge” or “genuine knowledge.” The love that our Savior intends for us to have and to show for one another within the body of Messiah is that which is based upon a genuine knowledge of His word and wisdom regarding the manner in which we express this love to one another. Surely as we grow more and more to know and appreciate the love of God given to us in Messiah Yeshua, we will be enabled to love others as He intends. Such love will be used by Him to strengthen our bonds of unity and thus to be a far greater light to the world that lives in darkness.

... *so that you may approve the things that are excellent* – The two primary aspects of Paul’s prayer for the Philippian community is first, that in being able to “approve the things that are excellent,” they will individually allow the leading of the Ruach together with the knowledge of the Scriptures, to make good choices in how they express their love to one another. The word “approve” translates *δοκιμάζειν* (*dokimazein*), which means “to test or examine, to prove by testing,” a word used of testing metals. This means that as we seek to love one another within our local community of faith, we must also be accepting of advice and counsel. If we are willing to work together, we will take advice from others that will enable us to discern the best way to love one another so that we all grow in our lives of faith.

... *in order to be sincere and blameless* – This is the second aspect of Paul’s prayer, that the Philippian believers would become more and more conformed to the very person of Messiah, so that they would become the very people He desires them to be. Paul’s goal for the Philippians is

that they may be people of sincerity, honesty, and cleanness of mind who live lives that are transparent before God and other people.²

1 Fee, Gordan. *Philippians in The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1995), p. 98.

2 Martin, Ralph. *Philippians in The Word Bible Commentary*, vol 43 (Zondervan, 2004), p. 32.

...until the day of Messiah; – The primary goal for all believers is to persevere until that day when Yeshua returns. It is the return of Messiah to take all believers, from every era since the creation of the world, to be with Him for all eternity, that must strengthen our resolve to serve Him in spirit and in truth. As we have our eyes fixed on His return, we are given the courage and the strength to carry on the mission He has given each of us to do in regard to our respective communities, families, and friends.