***Paul's Final Greetings - PH95-02
Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 4:20-23***

Well, today is the end of our Advanced Bible Doctrine study. We come to the final message on the study of the book of Philippians. Perhaps the most valuable returns on this study will come to you as you secure the studies at the very beginning, and proceed systematically through the book. I think that you will find that this has indeed been an advanced Bible doctrine study in great depth that has fantastic materials in it, and that will take much study; much listening; and, much reviewing for you to absorb.

But today we come to what would seemingly be a very simple part of the book. It's just, "Goodbye." There is a way to close a letter. It was really a very formal way in New Testament times. It was a special procedure (a special technique) just as we have in letter-writing today. Apparently, the apostle Paul picks up the stylus from his amanuensis (his secretary) at this point, and pens these last few words to the letter in his own hand. He's concluding the letter that he has written to the Christians in the city of Philippi – a letter which has dealt with the subject of personal happiness.

In Philippians 4:20, we saw that he began to close the conclusion of the letter with a doxology, which is an expression of praise to God, thereby reflecting one of the things that we will be doing forever in eternity. That's always an interest to us. What are we going to do in heaven forever? Well, the doxology that he pronounces here in Philippians 4:20 says, "Now unto God, our Father be glory forever and ever. Amen." That's one of the things we'll be doing forever; that is, offering the sacrifice of praise without end. Then in Philippians 4:21-23, he brings the letter to a conclusion. He adds the formal New Testament way of bringing a letter to an end. So we'll begin there and tie up the book, or the closing greetings.

In verse 21, we have a specific greeting. He says, "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. The word "greet" is the Greek word "aspazomai." "Aspazomai" is a word that simply means "to salute" or "to welcome." That's a good translation: simply, "to greet." It's used in New Testament times in a very technical way, like we say, "Yours truly." They used this word "aspazomai" to say, "Farewell. Goodbye. Over and out." "Salute" is a good translation. This is in the aorist tense. That means that at the point when this letter arrives in Philippi, Paul says, "Give my greetings to these specific people." This is in the middle voice, but this is one of those words in the Greek language that really has active meaning. So it really means, "You who receive the epistle, please convey my greetings to these people in Philippi." Then it's an imperative. It's actually an apostolic command. He is directing them that they should do this, because he views this as a very important part of this letter – that he send the fraternal Christian greetings to these believers in Philippi.

**Saints**

He sends it to "every." This is the Greek word "pas," and it is in the Greek language in what we call the singular number. Singular indicates to us that he's thinking about these Christians as individuals. Every single individual Christian believer is to be greeted within the community of believers. The people that he's greeting, he calls "saints." That is the "hagios." The word "hagios" was used among the Greeks to refer to someone who was dedicated to the gods. The New Testament uses the word "hagios" to indicate someone who is separated from sin onto God. You must get both parts of that. The word "hagios" indicates separation. That is very important that you understand that. We get words like "holy" and "sanctification" from "hagios." Basically it means separation, but it is separation on the one side *from* something. It is separation from sin. But it is also separation *to* God. So the two must go together. You're separating yourself from sin to God. That's what the word "hagios" means in referring to a single individual. It's the wholly separated person.

So Paul refers, in effect, to every holy one, or to every separated one. This word is used in the Bible in reference to God. He is "hagios." He is holy. He is separated from sin unto absolute righteousness. It is used of people, and it is used of things. So the idea is separated from sin to God in terms of absolute righteousness. So the word "hagios," or "saint," is a very specific kind of person, and that is a Christian person. He identifies who the saint is by the words, "in Christ Jesus." The words "in Christ Jesus" referred to the position that a person has in the grace age who is saved – who is born again. He is separated from eternal death in Adam to eternal life in Christ. That is what makes a person a saint today.

So when Paul says, "Greet the saints individually in Philippi," he is talking about every single Christian in the city of Philippi. Every Christian in the church age is a saint. This is not a select company. Sainthood is not something you achieve by human effort. Sainthood is something that is provided for you as a gift of God. You are not a saint because you are particularly devout or pious. You are a saint because you came to the point where you said, "Hey, I'm a sinner. Therefore, I have a mind that's shot-through with human viewpoint. I cannot come into the presence of a holy God because God says, 'If you come into My heaven, you must have absolute righteousness.' I am not separated from sin unto absolute righteousness. Therefore, I have to have something done for me. I can't do it for myself." Jesus Christ says, "I'll give you My absolute righteousness. I can do that because I died for your sins on the cross. If you'll take my righteousness, I'm glad to give it to you." So you receive the absolute righteousness of Jesus Christ. Then He says, "You are separated from sin unto this absolute righteousness. You're a saint. You are a holy person."

So every believer today is a saint. I care not whether you have the dirtiest mind that Playboy magazine, in its ilk, ever imagined. You're still a saint. I don't care if you're the vilest in practice. You are still a saint. I don't care how useless your life is. You're still a saint. I don't care how many scars you put on your life. I don't care how much resistance to divine viewpoint you've exercised. I don't care how young you are and how far you've gone astray from the things of God, or how old you are and how long you've had to go astray from the things of the Word of God. You're still a saint if you are in Christ.

So the Roman Catholic ideal of sainthood is a totally false, misleading piece of human viewpoint paganism. When the Roman Catholic Church says, "There are certain people in the history of the church that are saints, and we declare who they are on the basis of how good of a life they led," that is a falsehood. Recently, the Roman Catholic Church canonized the first American woman to sainthood. There haven't been too many saints among Americans in the Roman Catholic system. But finally, we made one who did something real fine in some welfare ministering to people who needed it, and was considered by the church to qualify for sainthood. So she has been canonized, and now she is a saint.

Saints are very important in the Roman Catholic system, because when the Roman Catholic Church says that a person is a saint, that means that that person has earned more grace than that individual needs to get into heaven. So you have to earn grace through your works in order to get into heaven under the Roman Catholic system. You do it in this life. If you don't make it here, you get a second shot at it in purgatory to work your way out, and to get yourself up there to where you have earned enough grace such that God says, "Okay, now you're qualified to come into My heaven."

In case you've forgotten, that's what the battle of the Reformation was all about. That's when Martin Luther said: "Wait a minute. That sounds like a good system. That sounds very logical. That sounds like somebody really sat down and thought this through. But that is not what I find in the Word of God, because the Word of God is very clear that, 'The just shall have eternal life by faith.' That means I believe in something that God has said He has done for me, and I accept it. It's got nothing to do with what I earn or what I achieve."

So a saint is somebody in the Roman Catholic system who supposedly has earned more than enough merit to get to heaven. So the church canonizes that person, and then the pope is able to draw on that extra merit, and give it to whomsoever he will through indulgences. That is super arrogation. That is the drawing upon the extra qualities of merit so that, if you will come and say, "I would like to have so many masses said for my departed husband," the church says, "That will cost you $15." You pay your $15. The pope says, "Take from ... this certain saint's excess merit, and apply it to Sam Jones here – 15 bucks worth to help him out of purgatory."

Now, that's the system of sainthood. You can see that that is a travesty. That is paganism by every New Testament standard. It is not something that we should tolerate or be kindly disposed toward. So any time you come up against Roman Catholic sainthood, you should recoil with revulsion, as God does. He vomits at it, and He spews it out of His mouth. And it is about time that we, as Christians, begin taking the position that error and truth cannot interrelate. We live in an ecumenical age where we are so open-minded that our brains have completely fallen out, and we can no longer distinguish between the facts such that we must take a stand for the truth. The things that are non-truth cannot be related. They cannot be compatible. They cannot both be accepted. Therefore, we do not say everything in the Roman Catholic system is just another way of approaching God. It is a way among many to take people straight into hell. Nothing will destroy your eternal relationship to God faster than counting on the excessive merit of some other human being that has been canonized into sainthood.

The Bible says that sainthood is a status. It is secured entirely by the grace of God. It's a gift. It's not an accomplishment. Believers are brought into sainthood (each one of us) by faith in Christ as Savior. But then, of course, we are called upon to grow in grace, and to live a holy life, which is befitting our saintly position. Here is where a lot of us fail. We are all saints, but we fail to live according to our position. We live far beneath that position. Maybe you're reared in a Christian home, and you reject the rearing of your Christian home. But you are a born again kid. Well, you're a saint, but you're a saint that's dirty all over. You're a saint that needs cleansing for temporal fellowship. You're a saint who is bound up with the stupidity of human viewpoint so that your thinking is all twisted up and all botched up. It doesn't take people (who have any spiritual discernment) very long to just take a look at you, and watch you in operation, and see just how botched up and dirty you are. You're a saint, but you're a tarnished saint. God says there's only one way to get the tarnish off and get polished up. That's by the confession technique.

So 2 Timothy 1:9 tells us that, as saints, we are to forsake sin, and we are to practice godliness: "Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose in grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." It is the grace of God which has called us. It is the grace of God which has made us saints.

So 1 Peter 2:5 calls us a holy priesthood because we are saints. We're "hagios." 1 Peter 2:9 calls us a holy nation as believers, because we have been separated by our new birth unto absolute righteousness. We are "hagios."

Now, having said this, Paul here in verse 21 is saluting (greeting) every separated-unto-God person who is in Christ Jesus (who is born again) in the city of Philippi. While we recognize that Paul is sending fraternal greetings to these people, we should not interpret this as meaning that Paul approves of each one of these people in their living or in their serving. He does not necessarily approve of the life or the service of every Christian in Philippi. He is simply recognizing that they are all saints, and that they have a mutual position in Christ.

However, maximum spiritual camaraderie between those who are saints for Paul can only be with those who are at his spiritual maturity level. You will not find yourself having much fraternal Christian fellowship with those who are inferior to your spiritual development. You don't have any common ground. Nor will you find yourself having much Christian fellowship with believers who have gone on with the Lord beyond you because they have moved ahead of you. There is very limited ground because of the separation between you and themselves. There is limited ground of common interchange of what you have with one another that you can relate yourself to. If somebody really goes on with the Lord and is really positive, and you are the same, you're going to have a lot of camaraderie with that person. But if you are a spiritual dodo, you're not going to have much fellowship with that person.

So the apostle Paul says, "I recognize all of you in Philippi. You are my fellow believers. You are saints with me in Christ, and I greet you on that ground." However that does not mean that he had a close relationship to each one of them, or that he approved what they did. They were brethren; they were holy; and, they were separated, but they were not necessarily, each of them, close to him.

The latter part of verse 21 says, "The brethren who are with me greet you." Paul says, "Not only I greet you, but also the brothers who are with me here in Rome – they send their fraternal greetings to you as fellow Christians. It is true of them, too, that they had relationships (if they knew these Philippians) only to the extent that they had a mutual level of spiritual development. This time, when he says in verse 21, "The brethren who are with me greet you," this is the plural "you," indicating that he's speaking to the Philippian Christians as a whole. He again uses the same word "aspazomai" (we salute you) that he used previously.

**Fellowship with the Saints**

So this is the interesting question of the ground of fellowship with the saints. One of the things that is a common hypocrisy in evangelical Bible circles is the spirit of pretense relative to relationship with other believers. Many Christians today are so absolutely brainwashed by the concept that they must show Christian love, that they deliberately put on a calculated image of being in love that is absolutely fake and false. And it is easily spotted by anybody who has any spiritual discernment. But the average Christian who moves in the average Bible evangelical community church setting is just constantly harassed that he must show love.

Now, that, of course, is a legitimate biblical concept. The Bible very clearly says that your mental attitude love will identify you as being a person who belongs to the family of God; just as your mental attitude hatred will identify you as being a person who does not belong to the family of God, or who is out of fellowship within the family of God. So the great evangelical hypocrisy today is the smiling face and sweet-talk syndrome toward those that we do not actually approve.

Please remember that disapproval of another Christian's views and of another Christian's actions does not mean you hate him. Just because you say, "I don't approve of your views, and I don't approve of your actions," does not mean that I am saying, "I hate you for it." I just don't approve. Limitations of social relationships with another believer is not hatred toward him. Just because you avoid social relationships with someone that you don't hit it off with (you have no camaraderie), does not mean that you hate that person. Don't be brainwashed into thinking that you have to have social relationships with people you don't care to associate with, even if they are Christians. The recognition of another Christian's spiritually bad influence is not hatred.

**Genuineness**

Young people have to do this. Young people have to look at other kids and say, "That kid is a good influence on my life. I'll associate with that person." Or they may say, "That kid is a Christian, but he's a bad influence. I'm not going to have anything to do with him." The same thing is true for adults. There are some adult Christians that are bad influence. You don't hate a person just because you say, "Well, that person is a bad influence. I don't want to get involved with him." It's simply recognizing a reality that you should. Genuineness is the keynote of Christian love. Pretense is the destruction of Christian love, because you recognize that another believer's tastes and priorities do not appeal to you. That doesn't mean you hate him. Some Christians have terrible priorities. Some Christians have lousy tastes. Just because you don't care to go along with it doesn't mean you hate that person.

So while the Word of God says you should not have a mental attitude spirit of bitterness toward any believer (that is standard operating procedure for the Christian life), it does not mean that you must have a smiling face, sweet-talk relationship with those that you do not genuinely find that to be the case with in your experience. Now, if you want to go around and be a fake; smile; sweet-talk; and, show your Christian love by these externals, that's OK too. Just go ahead and do it, but you're not kidding a lot of people by that kind of clown technique, even though this is generally accepted as the procedure that Christians should follow. Genuineness is the keystone of Christian love – not your put-on front.

What Paul is saying here is not some kind of ecumenical greeting which extends just to anybody and to everybody. Not only is he genuine with these people, but his greeting is to those who are in Christ. He is not greeting the Gnostics. He is not greeting the cultists. He is not greeting the Judaizers. He is not greeting the pagans in general. He is addressing just those who are in Christ Jesus. Human beings who are in Adam, even though they are religious, do not have a ground of Christian camaraderie greeting with those who are in Christ. Christians have a limited ground of spiritual fellowship with other Christians who are not functioning on the Word of God, let alone to have any ground of fellowship with non-Christians. When you deal with non-Christians, that's purely a human level of relationship. All you are is God's agent of witness to them. But you have no real ground of Christian camaraderie with them.

**Major Doctrinal Differences**

So Paul is not talking an ecumenical idea when he says, "Greet these people in Philippi." He's speaking to a specific group and he's not just speaking to everybody who is religious. Now, you and I may tolerate divergent tastes in worship and procedures, but we cannot tolerate divergence in major doctrinal differences. We cannot tolerate the Roman Catholic mass and say, "It's alright that you're saying you're sacrificing Christ again, and that you're changing bread and wine into the body and the blood of Christ." We cannot say that it is alright that you appoint saints, and God uses their extra merit to get us humans into heaven under the Roman Catholic system. We cannot accept that and tolerate it. That's a major doctrinal difference.

We cannot go along with the tongues movement, claiming that God the Holy Spirit is doing something which his majesty the devil is doing. That's a grave error and we cannot simply acclimate and say. "That's OK. We can still be related to you Catholics in fraternal camaraderie. We can still be related to you charismatics and Pentecostalists in fraternal camaraderie." No, you can't – not without the destruction to your own spiritual well-being. We cannot even have fellowship with these people if they are genuine Christians if they are outside of sound doctrine. If a group of people is legalistic in their approach to God, they have violated the core of the Christian life, which is God's plan of grace. Therefore, we cannot simply accommodate ourselves to them as if we did not have a difference. So we may greet these people who are in these errors, but we will have very limited Christian fellowship.

**Minor Differences**

Now, when the errors are of little practical importance, then it is something else. I'll tell you that there's nothing more tiresome to me than some character who wants to run around arguing about some points of doctrine that, if you could settle them one way or another, it wouldn't change anything in what you're doing. Maybe you believe that the antichrist is a Jew. Maybe you think he's a gentile. There are Christians who would say, "Well, I'm not going to go to that church. I think he's a gentile. You think he's a Jew." And they shove off. They do this on limited and unlimited atonement. Asininity in the extreme direction has no practical effect upon the functioning of the Word of God, or upon the practice of the Christian life.

After you've settled it either way, how do you present the gospel to the unbeliever – to the mass of humanity? There is no difference. Yet, this is an inanity of separation. It doesn't make any difference. These are not grounds on which you separate yourself before the Lord. These are only carnal grounds of separation. I don't care how sincere you are. It makes no difference. Sincerity is not the issue that counts with God.

So Paul is not expressing here an ecumenical movement when he greets these people, but he is tolerant of believers who have a difference of opinion. He would not be tolerant of believers who said you can be saved by your legalistic works. Now, that is a major issue. That does make a big difference relative to eternity.

So we may greet even believers like this, but we cannot go around with the evangelical hypocrisy that will produce a togetherness without Christ and His Word. That's what most churches want. They want togetherness. That's the big thing. They don't want to leave anybody out. Everybody is together. And they have it, but what they have is without Christ and without His Word.

So a spirit of antagonism to doctrine is not a new thing. It is very widespread today; perhaps more than ever before. An excellent book is one by Harold O. J. Brown entitled The Protest of a Troubled Protestant. I'd like to read to you a quote that he has that very well puts together the things that we've been saying. One of the things that he recognizes as the problem within Christian churches relative to fellowship is that churches have a snide attitude toward doctrine. Here's what he says on page 101:

"A characteristic of the church in our day (of the whole church, and of each individual church) is the avoidance of doctrine. In churches and in church related schools, both Sunday schools and the regular schools and colleges maintained by the churches, there is a growing reluctance to teach anything specific and definite about the Christian faith. This reluctance is not shared by the so-called cults.

"Groups like the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses do not appeal because their teachings are simple; easy to accept; and, in line with the modern mentality. None of these things is true. Much of their effectiveness in making proselytes comes from the fact that they have a distinct doctrine of which they are not ashamed. In general, they do not try to veil the points at which their doctrine clashes with modern assumptions, but rather adopt the attitude, 'That's what teaching is. If you feel that you can't accept it, then don't, but the responsibility for the consequences is yours.'

"Protestant churches, on the other hand, tend to apologize for their doctrines – to push them into the background. How often the preacher or teacher is heard to say, "That is what the church is taught, but, of course, we do not expect you to accept it if you find it difficult."

And yet we go around with a smiling face and the sweet-talk syndrome with people who are violating critical features of doctrine. That is the issue that is before us today. It is the issue that, when we are going to be greeting people as comrades in the Lord, it has to be upon the basis of sound doctrine. That is exactly what the apostle Paul is saying here.

On page 36, Mr. Brown says again, "How can a worship service be a synchronistic fusion of doctrine and non-doctrine? In order to explain this, it is necessary to remind ourselves what doctrine is – derived from the Latin 'docere,' meaning 'to teach.' It means simply teaching or body of teachings. The fact that both 'doctrine' and its derivatives 'doctrinaire' as well as the synonym, 'dogma,' and its derivative, 'dogmatic,' from the Greek 'dokein' (to think) have acquired a generally derogatory significance in common usage is an important symptom of the intellectual malaise of our day.

"It is nowhere more disastrous than in the Christian church, which exists in order to teach. See Christ's great commission to His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). Christians are properly alarmed by the abandonment of certain historic Christian doctrines by their churches. For example: the virgin birth; the Second Coming of Christ; and, even the physical resurrection of Christ are all under attack in several major confessions, not excluding Roman Catholicism itself. They should be more alarmed by the fact that doctrine itself is being abandoned."

So this business of greeting other Christians is greeting upon the ground of truth. It's not just because you're a Christian. I can have mental attitude love toward you as a believer at the same time I can reject your priorities; I can reject what you stand for; I can reject some of your doctrinal positions; I can reject your social relationships; and I don't care for many things that you're engaged in, but I can still have relationships and camaraderie with you in the work of the Lord. None of those things are required. As long as you are upon sound doctrine, we have a common ground of Christian fellowship.

Verse 22 gives general greetings: "All the saints greet you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household." "All" is that Greek word "pas" again. This time it's plural, so it refers to the Christians in general who are in Rome. Again, the words "saints" means "the separated ones," and again the word "greet" is "aspazomai," and it means "to salute." "You" means the Philippians as a group. That "you" is plural. All the saints greet you (plural).

Then he adds an interesting word, "malista," and "malista" is the word for "chiefly" here. We would translate it, perhaps, as "most of all" or "especially." It is what we call the superlative degree of the word "mala" which means "very much." All the saints here in Rome greet you, and especially a certain group of saints. Who? "Those who are of Caesar's household." That is the word "kaisar." The word for "household" is "oikos." That is the Greek word for "house."

This term "Caesar's household" ("kaisar oikos") is a technical term. It is a term that has a very specific meaning. It does not mean, "Hey, the family of Caesar is sending you greetings. Some of the members of Caesar's family have become Christians, and they're sending you greetings." That isn't what it means by the "household of Caesar." This was a technical term in New Testament times for the imperial civil service. These people were all over the Roman world. They were the palace officials; they were the secretaries; they were the tax agents; they were the revenue agents; they were the administrators; and, they were the staff. Some of them were free, and some of them were very educated slaves, but they were all in what was called "Caesar's household." So in New Testament times, if you spoke about Caesar's household (this word "oikos"), it was understood that you were talking about the imperial civil service.

So this is interesting, isn't it? Here, someplace maybe around 68 A.D., Christianity has infiltrated (while Paul is still alive) into the Roman bureaucracy. It has infiltrated into the very center of the Roman government. Here Christ is ruling some of these people who are helping to rule the world. That was a powerful place to be – in the Roman bureaucracy, in the midst of this pagan empire. And the people he is speaking of here are part of the churches in Rome. There were several synagogues, incidentally, in Rome. I think there were something like six or seven, and about three or four of those synagogues went completely Christian. Many of those Jews served in Caesar's household on the imperial staff. They're included in this greeting.

So here we have the expression of particular fraternal greetings to these Philippians Christians from people they don't even know. But they do know the doctrine of the unity of Christ's body. So Paul says, "I send you especially greeting from members of the bureaucracy of the Roman Empire." Paul is writing, you remember, in the reign of Nero.

Nero was a very vicious Roman emperor. He ruled from 54 to 68 A.D. He was dominated by his mother, so he had her poisoned in 59 A.D. His wife bugged him, so in 62 A.D., he had her killed. He was a spendthrift who didn't mind resorting to violence to replenish the state treasury. The Roman Senate hated him with a vengeance. A great fire broke out in Rome in 64 A.D., and he blamed the Christians for it, though there was much evidence that he was responsible for it. He was the first of the persecuting emperors. It was during his reign that the apostle Paul had his first trial and was judged not guilty. About a year later, Paul was brought back again to prison; at the second trial he was judged guilty; and, and under the reign of Nero, Paul died. A revolt of the army brought Nero down, and as he tried to escape, he was assassinated.

The Christians in the Roman Empire were only persecuted periodically by people like Nero before 250 A.D – only periodically, and in scattered local provinces. But in 250 A.D., under the Emperor Decius, the formal policy of empire-wide persecution of Christians began. Decius issued the edict in 250 A.D. that Christians had to perform an annual sacrifice to the Emperor. They were given a certificate to that effect that was valid for one year. The reason for this was that the Roman Empire was in decline now. Remember that Rome fell in 467 A.D. That was the end of the line for the great mighty Roman Empire.

But the worst persecution came under Emperor Diocletian. He tried to stop the decline of the empire with government regulations. There's a new idea for you. So this was the context of the Roman Empire under Diocletian. So in 303 A.D., he issued an edict to restore national spiritual unity. He said, "The trouble with this empire is that we don't have the old spiritual values we once had." He saw that by this time, the people who were the core of this problem, in his view, were these Christians. They had infiltrated all over the imperial household. He said, "I'm going to stop that." He ordered the cessation of all meetings of Christians. He ordered the destruction of Christian meeting places. He ordered the deposing of any church officials in the government. He ordered the imprisonment of those who persisted in a Christian testimony. He ordered the burning of copies of Scripture. He later added the requirements of sacrificing to a pagan god, or to face execution.

Now, this broke loose one of the worst persecutions because it was well-organized. It was systematic. It was now empire-wide. Wherever you were, if you were a Christian in the Roman Empire, you were now under the edict that Diocletian had put out. You could face loss of property; exile; imprisonment; execution; or, being sent to a labor camp. This was the longest, the most brutal, and the best organized of the persecutions of the Roman Empire up to that time. A great many Christians were martyrs, but there were also many "lapsi," these who recanted and took back their faith in Christ, and made a public declaration that they didn't believe in Him anymore. There were also many "tradetories." These were people who turned over copies of Scripture for destruction.

These two groups of people had a lot of trouble after Constantine made Christianity an accepted legal religion. Then these people started flocking back to the churches, and the believers who had faced the lions and had on their bodies the marks of their suffering for Jesus Christ said, "Just a minute, you clowns. You're ready to come back in here, but we're not sure we're ready to accept you, because when the chips were down, you did not stand with us." These people who gave up copies of Scripture, and these people who recanted found themselves in a very difficult position in the Christian community. They didn't just get the smiling-face and sweet-talk treatment when they decided that they were going to return.

Well, this didn't crush Christianity, as you know. They became stronger. Finally, under Emperor Constantine and the edict of Milan in 313 A.D., Christianity was given legal toleration. In 380 A.D., under Emperor Theodosius I, Christianity was made the state religion. In 395 A.D., Christianity became the only religion tolerated in the Roman Empire.

Well, this entry into Caesar's house had tremendous ramifications from Paul's time right into the time that Christianity took over the Roman Empire. But this was not without bad effects upon Christianity. It had some good effects because the Roman government, after Constantine's edict, restored church property. But one of the bad things it did was the Roman Treasury now subsidized local churches. It exempted the clergy from serving in public office. It banned occult activities (soothsaying). And it set the day of the sun as the official day of worship in the Roman Empire (our Sunday). It was Constantine who called for the church council, the conference of Nicaea, which straightened out a lot of basic doctrinal understanding.

The emperor renounced the pagan title of Pontifex Maximus. That was the high priest of the pagan cult. The emperor carried that title. The Pope took it instead. The School of Philosophy in Athens was closed down. And unregenerated pagans streamed into Christianity. All you had to do was come and say, "Baptize me." The church said, "OK, you're in," and the person said, "I'm a Christian." It became too much trouble to immerse, so they started sprinkling them. So they just gave the old sprinkle job, and they could run them through quickly. Constantine was for Christianity, and he meant business.

Well, the whole picture changed. Christianity had a great influence on the Roman Empire. It increased the dignity of women. It stopped the gladiator shows. Slaves were given better treatments. Roman legislation became more just under Christianity. Missionary work expanded rapidly. The result was "Christian Europe" and its Western civilization. The truth of the matter is that Europe became Christian, but most Europeans did not become Christian. Instead, the monstrosity which the Revelation calls the harlot church developed, the Roman Catholic Church, out of this amalgamation of true Christianity with paganism, once the pressure of persecution was taken off. But the influence of Christians was undoubtedly great upon the Roman Empire. It started right here where Paul could say, "I'm sending you greetings from Caesar's imperial civil service – people who are in the family of God."

We have a concept in America that we, too, are Christians. I want to straighten out, before we conclude our study of the book of Philippians, that there is no such thing as a Christian nation. There cannot be. Government cannot produce Christian conduct. It can only legislate conduct which is compatible to Christian principles. You cannot legislate people's attitudes toward what is right and what is wrong. The idea of a Christian nation legislating morals is foolishness.

No nation can ignore the laws of God in its legislation, but you cannot produce a Christian nation. You cannot ignore the laws of God in legislation. Every now and then, somebody will say, "Well, the law does not recognize the Bible." Some states have no capital punishment. The American Civil Liberties Union, and the Texas Civil Liberties Union have all these pompous declarations about why capital punishment is a horrendous thing. If you say to somebody, "But you don't discuss what God has said in the Bible," they'll say to you, "Well, the law doesn't deal with the Bible." That's as asinine as saying, "I've just bought myself a brand new Cadillac made by GM, and I don't care what GM says about how this car's run, I'm not going to read the manual. I'm going to make my own rules from now on. It runs on water. You put water in the oil container. That's cheaper." You make all your rules. When somebody says, "But look what the GM manual says," you say, "Get out of here. We don't recognize the GM manual."

That's what our government does. That's what these lawyers do. They're idiots. It is as if under the guise of declaring civil liberties, they can ignore the laws of God. No, you can't make a Christian nation. You cannot legislate morality into people. But if you, as a nation, ignore the divine institutions, and you pretend that just because you choose to ignore that God is out there, and that he has made certain things as the way we operate and function as human beings, you cannot then think that He's going to back off and say, "Well, that's all right. Forget it." Preachers do that, but God doesn't. If He has said it, it's going to be in effect.

So the United States certainly can recognize the existence and the absolute authority of God. It can cultivate a gratitude toward Him. It can recognize Sunday as a rest day. It can get churches the right to organize and to function freely. It can get a tax deduction for church contributions. It can make church ministries tax exempt. It should provide a climate in which churches are free to evangelize, to teach, and to fulfill their works of mercy. But the United States cannot be a Christian nation. It cannot be a nation whose God is the Lord. We like to say that. No nation can have God as its Lord because there is no nation which is capable of making that choice. Only a few within the nation can choose to make God my Lord in my civil relationships within my nation. That's true separation of church and state.

So the final verse (his final words) says, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." Grace is God's plan of divine favor of understanding. The Lord is the Lord Jesus Christ. "With you all" is not really what it says in the Greek. The Greek says, "with your spirit." The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your human spirit, because the human spirit is the depository of all divine viewpoint which the grace of God supplies through doctrine. Grace is ministered to the Christians' human spirit to carry them on to that super grace happiness that Paul has been writing about. The word "amen" is not at the end of the book, though indeed it is a fitting and closing word.

I think it's great that Paul, as he is closing the book, ends up on that high note of grace. Please remember that grace is God's plan to provide eternal blessing for sinners in heaven. It's entirely the work of God. There's no human contribution. God is free to express His love on the basis of the cross of Jesus Christ, apart from the merit or demerit of the sinner. Grace in no way jeopardizes the essence of God. What He does for man is consistent with His own being. Legalism is the antithesis of grace because it involves man earning blessing. Human works always intrude into God's plan of grace, and it neutralizes it. The sinner always wants to incorporate some human talents; some human ability; some gimmick; or, some public relations program into God's plan. But grace rejects all human tampering of the old sin nature. Man's works and God's works are mutually exclusive. That's what Paul is saying here: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" – what God can do for your human spirit in orienting you to His thinking. This is the greatest thing that God can give us. The greatest thing in the world is for the grace plan of God to transform you and me into the image of His Son, and that's what He's doing.

What Adam lost for us, Jesus has more than regained. Grace sanctifies us in our position; in our experience; and, ultimately in a resurrected sinless body. How do you get into this plan? At the point of salvation. When you receive Jesus Christ, you receive about three dozen irrevocable blessings that you can never lose. But remember that the maximum enjoyment of this grace to which Paul commits the Philippians is only received by those who have the capacity to receive it. You're not born with this capacity. It is something you've developed in. The great threat to this capacity is reversionism: sliding backwards in your spiritual life; developing inverted vision and inverted loyalties; sinking into spiritual insanity; and, being happy in accommodation to your own negative attitudes. You're happy with the fact that you have prostituted the grace of God, and that you have accommodated to the errors of your old sin nature.

So the greatest relationship between you and God is grace rapport, and the greatest relationship between us as believers is grace rapport. That is the true ground of Christian fellowship and of Christian love. It's not just mental attitude "agape" love. That ends up being experiential "phileo" emotional love. Friendships are made or broken with God and with people on the basis of this grace to which he is committed. This is a great book. May God be praised for what He has taught us in it over these many months.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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