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Permit #361

Following the upward call through Philippians ...

Appreciation of the Philippians

Paul wrote the epistle to the Philippian brethren while in prison (presumably in Rome). In jail he had ample opportunity to reflect on his interaction with the congregations he had started and worked with, and his memories of the church at Philippi were happy ones. "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you," he had stated. And he was willing to pray for the brethren in Philippi, saying that he was "always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you." "I am confident," he said, "that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of

Christ Jesus." What a great group of Christians these were, and the apostle was confident that they would be perfected in Christ through the power of God. Conscious as he was that the return of Jesus was in a sense imminent, he knew that God's power would work in these brethren until they either passed from earth or Jesus would come again.

▲ **Close fellowship** — The converts of the gospel of Christ in this Roman garrison town were primarily from the ranks of paganism. Lydia and her household were God-fearing Gentiles, but the jailer most likely was following the customs of the people of his standing in the community. There are many objections that such pagans have that have to be overcome, and the purveyors of such paganism are clever, using every hook and angle to draw people into the worship of their idols. These in Philippi, then, who had come in out of the darkness, were aware the types of argumentation necessary to persuade people of the truthfulness of Christ and the validity of the apostles' doctrine. "For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all," states Paul in earnest tones, "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" (Philippians 1:7). The apostle even regarded his prison time as participating in the grace of God, and noted that the Philippian brethren similarly were partakers of God's grace also.

▲ **Confirmation and defense** — Ultimately, the gospel is an appeal to man's logic. "Come now, and let us *reason* together," says the Lord, "through your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they will be like wool." (Isaiah 1:18). As such, the truthfulness of Jesus' resurrection — upon which the whole gospel depends — has to be confirmed. If only the testimony of reliable witnesses were required, that's what God would have provided. If the added weight of Old Testament prophecies were all that were necessary, that's what God would have provided. But those two alone are not sufficient to persuade the thinkers among men; what were additionally required were the miracles to confirm the testimony of the witnesses. As Paul defended his apostleship and witness to the resurrection of the Christ to the church at Corinth, for example, he averred, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles" (2 Corinthians 12:12).

"And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom," he had noted in his first epistle to the Corinthians, "but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:4,5). The brethren in Philippi had also participated in these types of demonstration for the confirmation of the gospel. This gospel also had to be defended against some intelligent adversaries. Commenting on vigorous opposition from Alexander the coppersmith, Paul recalled, "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me" (2 Timothy 4:16). The apostle was grateful that the Philippian brethren had stood with him through his defenses of the gospel as well.

Paul had accepted the Philippian Christians into his heart, stating it in these terms: "You are in my heart." He loved those men and women!

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