



Here again a real letter from Paul, personal, full of attention and tenderness that Paul sent from prison to the community that had always been the most concerned for his well-being. More than once Paul counted on their material assistance, showing the confidence he had in them. Usually, in order to avoid any suspicion of personal interest, he preferred to earn his living while continuing his mission. In this letter we have the famous page: “Let the same project that was in Christ Jesus be found in you.”

We have just said it is a real letter from Paul. Actually, all in it does not follow, as if fragments of several letters from Paul had been combined. We shall draw attention to it as we proceed: 2:19, 21; 4:1. It may well be a question of two short letters, one where Paul wanted to give his news and to thank, the other a warning, in the same style as the letter to the Galatians.

When Paul’s letters were gathered together, the most important were arranged according to length: Romans, Corinthians, Galatians. Then came those we call “captivity letters.” It is there we have Philippians between Ephesians and Colossians as if the three had been sent from the same prison. Yet there is every reason to think that Philippians was not written when Paul was in Rome, about the year 60 A.D., but several years earlier, more like the year 56 A.D. Perhaps he was at that time imprisoned in Ephesus.

Acts
9:13;
16:1;
16:12

1 • ¹From Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to the saints in Philippi, with their bishops and deacons;

to you all in Christ Jesus:

²May grace and peace be yours from God, our Father, and Christ Jesus the Lord.

³I give thanks to my God, each time I remember you, ⁴and when I pray for you, I pray with joy. ⁵I cannot forget all you shared with me in the service of the gospel, from the first day, until now. ⁶Since God began such a good work, in you, I am certain, that he will complete it in the day of Christ Jesus.

1Cor
1:8;
1Thes
5:24

⁷This is my hope for you, for I carry you all, in my heart: whether I am in prison, or defending and confirming the gospel, you are with me and share the same grace.

⁸God knows, that I love you dearly, with the love of Christ Jesus, ⁹and in my prayers, I ask that your love

may lead you, each day, to a deeper knowledge and clearer discernment, ¹⁰that you may have good criteria for everything. So you may be pure of heart, and come, blameless, to the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of holiness, that comes through Christ Jesus, for the glory and praise of God.

Heb
5:14

Heb
12:11;
Jas 5:18;
Jn 15:8

Christ is my life

• ¹²I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has served to advance the gospel. ¹³Actually the whole praetorian guard, and even those outside the palace, know that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴And what is more, my condition, as prisoner, has encouraged most of our brothers, who are now emboldened, to proclaim the word of God more openly and without fear.

Eph 3:1

¹⁵Some, it is true, are moved by envy and rivalry, but others preach Christ with a good intention. ¹⁶These

• **1.1** *With their bishops and deacons.* In Acts we saw how the apostles used to establish a community, a church, in every city where they proclaimed the Gospel. They did not leave without having established a council of leaders, called *presbyters*, or *elders*, according to Jewish custom. After a few years *bishops*, or *supervisors*, stood out: they may have been the leading members of the council of presbyters. They were not then like today's bishops.

As to the *deacons*, they were in charge of various services in the community. And may have done missionary work in areas that did not yet have a community.

God began such a good work in you, I am certain that he will complete it in the day of Christ Jesus (v. 6). The end for which they long is always the manifestation (2 Thes 1:7), or the visit, or the Day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 1:8). No work is done without the expectation of the day when there will be all that one dreamed about. There is no Christian life where someone is content with looking forward to his retirement or feels fulfilled because he has a country house or because the family is growing up without a problem. Let us stop saying these first Christians still had the "illusion" of an early return of Christ. They wanted to meet him personally and be transfigured by him. That is an illusion only

for those who enclose themselves in oases of peace within a world in crisis.

Knowledge and discernment... (v. 9). A good heart and generosity are not everything in Christian life. We are not saved, we do not reach our true stature, we are not remade as God would like us to be, unless clarity has guided generosity. It is the same for world salvation. God calls us to discover new ways. We need to reflect, to be attentive, what we could call "revision of life," in order to discover what is positive and negative in our daily life, work relationships, social duties, leisure. This reflection, however, is not sufficient: among God's gifts, there is spiritual *knowledge* that gives us a fresh vision of the order of values and of the will of God.

• 12. Paul is not only persecuted by the Jews: even in the Church "false brothers," delighted he is in prison, see in this situation the possibility of increasing their own importance. The problem is one for all times: the great names of the apostolate have spent half of their energy in limiting the harm caused by rivals or by powerful groups in the Church. Paul, however, is gifted with wisdom: he sees that even if many do for personal interest what they believe they are doing for God, he knows how to turn it to account.

latter are moved by love and realize that I am here to defend the gospel. ¹⁷The others announce Christ to challenge me. They do not act with a pure intention but think they are making my prison more unbearable. ¹⁸But, in any case, whether they are sincere or showing off, Christ is proclaimed and, because of this, I rejoice and have no regrets.

¹⁹I know that all this will be a grace for me, because of your prayers, and the help given by the Spirit of Christ. ²⁰I am hopeful, even certain, that I shall not be ashamed. I feel as assured now, as before, that Christ will be exalted through my person, whether I live or die.

²¹For to me, living is for Christ, and dying is even better. ²²But if I am to go on living, I shall be able to enjoy fruitful labor. Which shall I choose?

²³So I feel torn between the two. I desire greatly to leave this life and to be with Christ, which will be better by far, ²⁴but it is necessary for you that I remain in this life. ²⁵And because I am convinced of this, I know that I will stay, and remain with you, for your progress and happiness in the faith. ²⁶I will surely come to you again, and

give you more reason for being proud of belonging to Christ Jesus.

Stand firm in faith

• ²⁷Try, then, to adjust your lives according to the gospel of Christ. May I see it when I come to you, and if I cannot come, may I at least hear that you stand firm in the same spirit, striving to uphold the faith of the gospel with one heart. ²⁸Do not be afraid of your opponents. This will be a sign, that they are defeated and you are saved, that is, saved by God. ²⁹For, through Christ, you have been granted, not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for him. ³⁰And you now share the same struggle that you saw I had, and that I continue to have, as you know.

Imitate the humility of Jesus

2 • ¹If I may advise you, in the name of Christ, and if you can hear it, as the voice of love; if we share the same Spirit, and are capable of mercy and compassion, then I beg of you, ²make me very happy: have one love, one spirit, one feeling, ³do nothing through rivalry or vain conceit. On the contrary, let each of you gently

I am hopeful, even certain, that I shall not be ashamed (v. 20). Paul's concern is that his trial and his appearances should serve to reveal Christ's message to the authorities.

For to me, living is for Christ (v. 21). It is quite trendy to say that Christians should "understand the world" and be "fully human." This is true in a certain way, but it does not say everything. God's love increases in us through the gift of ourselves to persons and to tasks that he entrusts to us, but as the love of God grows, the desire of Christ and eternity takes root with it: this desire makes us like strangers in the world.

Paul would like to see his friends but not for that will he linger over fraternal meals in which his friends would try to provide him with a warm atmosphere. His deep desire is for what he still lacks: to meet Christ in his glory (see 2 Cor 4:16 and Phil 3:10).

I desire greatly to leave this life and to be with Christ (v. 23). St. Paul teaches that those

who say that a person ceases to exist at the time of death and only recovers life in the resurrection at the end of times are wrong. See 2 Corinthians 5:8 also.

• 27. See how throughout this paragraph Paul invites the Philippians to fully share his own struggle: he is in prison, but they must remain in the front line of the battle. What does he expect? First that their community be a true one. Unity is a decisive sign for those who see us from the outside. *Uphold the faith of the gospel with one heart*. Whether there be a persecution or not, people from the outside will try to divide us.

• 2.1 Unity is often supported by a shared feeling of being the best, or the strongest, or having to contend with another group: in that way many religious groups maintain their strength, their discipline and the efforts and sacrifices

1:4

1Cor
6:20

Gal 2:20

2Cor
5:61Thes
2:19;
2Cor
1:14Eph 4:3;
Col 2:52Thes
1:42Cor
13:13;
10:11Cor
1:10;
Rom
12:3;
Jn 13:14

consider the others, as more important than yourselves. ⁴Do not seek your own interest, but, rather, that of others. ⁵Your attitude should be the same as Jesus Christ had:

⁶Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped,

⁷but emptied himself, taking on the nature of a servant, made in human likeness, and, in his appearance, found, as a man,

⁸He humbled himself by being obedient, to death, death on the cross.

⁹That is why God exalted him and gave him the name which outshines all names,

¹⁰so, that, at the name of Jesus all knees should bend in heaven, on earth and among the dead,

¹¹and all tongues proclaim, that Christ Jesus is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

• ¹²Therefore, my dearest friends, as you always obeyed me while I was with you, even more, now, that I am far from you, continue working out your salvation “with fear and trembling.” ¹³It is God who makes you, not only wish but also, carry out what pleases him. ¹⁴Do everything without grumbling, ¹⁵so, that, without fault or blame, you will be children of God, without reproach, among a crooked and perverse generation. You are a light among them, like stars in the universe, ¹⁶holding to the word of life. I shall feel proud of you, on the day of Christ, on seeing that my effort and labor have not been in vain. ¹⁷And if I am being poured out, as a libation over the sacrifice, and the offering of your faith, I rejoice and continue to share your joy; ¹⁸and, you, likewise should rejoice and share my joy.

Paul's messengers

• ¹⁹The Lord Jesus lets me hope that I may soon send you Timothy,

needed for this. All that is also found in Christian groups, but it should not be, for we have another spirit (Lk 9:55). With us, unity will follow from much humility and understanding of others. Here, Paul gives the secret of Christian co-existence: look for what is humble and do *nothing through rivalry or vain conceit* (v. 3).

In a hymn which is a sort of creed, Paul proposes the example of Christ: his path from God to man, from rich to poor, from first to last, from master to servant.

The Lord Jesus desired to identify with the most humble, the most afflicted, the most despised. Such were Jesus' attitudes and they must be those of his followers, the Christians. A desire to identify with the most humble and to share with them is the motivation for a truly evangelical life.

In this we must differ from the majority of people who are mainly interested in their personal or family fulfillment. Their ambitions are legitimate, and who among us does not share them at least partly? Yet they have been devalued by Christ by the simple fact that he took the opposite way.

He did not regard equality with God (v. 6): the mystery of God's Son who became a mortal man and gave up God's glory, although he

could have preserved it even in his human life. Since Christ was to be the New Man, glorified by God and placed above everything, his being subject to misery and limitations was a way of being reduced to nothingness.

God exalted him (v. 9). The humiliation and obedience of Christ were the condition for receiving his glory. *He gave him the name* (of God), that is, he made him fully enjoy in his human nature the divine Power (or name).

• ¹². *Continue working out your salvation "with fear and trembling"*. It is not a matter of being afraid of God. Paul has just urged his readers to rejoice, since they no longer have *the spirit of slaves to make them fearful, but the spirit of sons and daughters* (Rom 8:15).

Paul, in fact, has just recalled Christ's sacrifice and he draws this conclusion: take your life very seriously (this is the meaning of fear and trembling: as does the one who carefully carries a precious load). Be aware that God is at work in you through these good desires that come to you. Live in the presence of God.

• ¹⁹. Paul usually deals with personal matters at the end of his letters. Here he seems to interrupt the subject of his letter that he will take

Jn 1:1;
Col 1:15;
Heb 1:3

2Cor 8:9;
Mt 20:28;
Gal 4:4

Rom
5:19;
Heb 5:8

Mt 23:12;
Jn 10:17;
Eph 1:20;
Acts
5:41;
Eph 4:10

Is 45:23;
Rom
10:9;
Acts
2:36

2Cor
7:15

Eph 2:10;
3:20;
Heb 13:2

Dt 32:5;
Mt 5:14;
1P 4:4

2Tim
4:6;
Rom
12:1;
15:6

and have news of you. With this, I will feel encouraged. ²⁰For I have no one so concerned for you as he is. ²¹Most follow their own interest, not those of Christ Jesus. ²²But Timothy has proved himself, as you know. Like a son at the side of his father, he has been with me at the service of the gospel. ²³Because of that, I hope to send him to you as soon as I see how things work out for me. ²⁴Nevertheless, the Lord lets me think that I, myself, shall be coming soon.

^{4:18} ²⁵I judged it necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, who worked and fought at my side, and whom you sent, to help me in my great need. ²⁶In fact, he missed you very much and was still more worried, because you had heard of his sickness. ²⁷He was, indeed, sick, and almost died, but God took pity on him, and on me, sparing me greater sorrow. ²⁸And so, I am eager to send him to you, so that,

on seeing him, you will be glad and I will be at peace. ²⁹Receive him, then, with joy, as is fitting in the Lord. Consider highly persons like him, ³⁰who almost died for the work of Christ; he risked his life to serve me, on your behalf, when you could not help me.

^{1Cor}
^{16:16}

Do not turn back to the Jewish law

3 ¹Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.

^{1:4;}
^{2Cor}
^{13:11}

- It is not a burden for me to write, again, the same things, and for you, it is safer. ²Beware of the dogs, beware of the bad workers; beware of the circumcised. ³We are the true circumcised people, since we serve according to the Spirit of God, and our confidence is in Christ Jesus, rather than in our merits.

^{Rom}
^{16:17;}
^{Gal}
^{6:12}

^{Col}
^{2:11;}
^{Jer}
^{4:4;}
^{2Cor}
^{11:21}

⁴I, myself, do not lack those human qualities in which people have confidence. If some of them seem to be accredited with such qualities, how

up again in 3:1. Paul announces two visits to the Christians of Philippi.

Timothy is Paul's assistant; he is entrusted with several missions to the communities. It seems that Timothy did not have much authority and could be easily humiliated by those who disliked Paul's direction.

As to Epaphroditus, he was a Christian from Philippi who had left his family, spent his money and faced risks in order to go and visit Paul. The community of believers must pay attention to its most committed members, who have little means, in order to assist them. The Church sometimes presents as examples, militants from the working class or peasants who were quite forgotten by their brothers and sisters in the faith during their lives.

- **3.1** The discourse of Paul seems to be interrupted here. Paul begins a violent argument against ill-converted Jews who keep repeating that one must first be faithful to the laws and customs of the Old Testament in order to be a good Christian.

Beware of the dogs...! (v. 2) Paul applies to the Jews, proud of being the chosen people, the very insults that they reserved for non-Jews. Jews were sealed by the circumcision, but they mocked people of other religions who incised their skin (1 K 18:28).

Through what Paul says concerning his faithfulness to Judaism, we know something of his past. He was born in Tarsus to a Jewish family who had left their country and had settled there, in "Greek" territory, where they dedicated themselves to business. His parents were wealthy and well thought of since they had the dignity and the rights of Roman citizens (see Acts 22:28). Along with Greek culture, Paul received religious education from Scripture and the Jewish people. He saw firsthand the pagan feasts and sacrifices, but was proud of belonging to God's people, of being circumcised and instructed in God's promises to his race. His parents sent him to Jerusalem to study Scripture and the law with the great masters of his time (see Acts 22:3).

He was a model of strict Pharisee. He did not meet Christ but did meet the early Christians. Because he was faithful to the religion of his ancestors, he believed it was necessary to persecute, imprison and even kill those preaching a new doctrine and deceiving (so he thought) the people, since they proclaimed a false, defeated and crucified Messiah.

At times, Paul must have had doubts (Acts 26:14), and increasingly so, when he felt duty bound to increase repression. The Pharisees were against the death penalty. To hesitate or go backwards was to recognize that God had taken another road than the one where he him-

Gen 17:10; Acts 23:6; Gal 1:14
 much more am I! ⁵I was circumcised when eight days old. I was born of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin; I am a Hebrew, born of Hebrews. With regard to the law, I am a Pharisee, ⁶and such was my zeal for the law that I persecuted the Church. As for being righteous according to the law, I was blameless.

Mt 5:20; Rom 10:3; Gal 2:16
⁷But once I found Christ, all those things that I might have considered as profit, I reckoned as loss. ⁸Still more, everything seems to me, as nothing, compared with the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have let everything fall away, and I now consider all as garbage, if, instead, I may gain Christ. ⁹May I be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, that comes from the law, but with the righteousness that God gives, to those who believe.

2Cor 4:11; 2Tim 2:11
¹⁰May I know him, and experience the power of his resurrection, and share in his sufferings, and become like him, in his death, ¹¹and attain, through this, God willing, the resurrection from the dead!

Jn 4:10
¹²I do not believe I have already reached the goal, nor do I consider myself perfect, but I press on till I conquer Christ Jesus, as I have already been conquered by him. ¹³No, broth-

Lk 9:62; 1Cor 9:25

ers and sisters, I do not claim to have claimed the prize yet. I say only this: forgetting what is behind me, I race forward, and run toward the goal, ¹⁴my eyes on the prize, to which God has called us from above, in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵Let all of us who claim to be perfect, have the same way of thinking, but if there is something on which you differ, God will make it clear to you. ¹⁶Meanwhile, let us go forward, from the point we have each attained.

¹⁷Unite in imitating me, brothers and sisters, and look at those who walk in our way of life. ¹⁸For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. I have said it to you many times, and now I repeat it with tears: ¹⁹they are heading for ruin; their belly is their god, and they feel proud of what should be their shame. They only think of earthly things.

²⁰For us, our citizenship is in heaven, from where we await the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lord.

²¹He will transfigure our lowly body, making it like his own body, radiant in glory, through the power which is his, to submit everything to himself.

Agree with one another and be happy

4 • ¹Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for,

self had been the defender of God's cause. Worse still: with Jesus, never more would he be the just man but rather the pardoned sinner. When Jesus forcefully entered into Paul's life, it was a matter of *losing all* and Paul from then on accepted to regard as garbage all that he had been proud of.

Forgetting what is behind me (v. 13). Paul only wanted to "forget." Forget his merits and his gains (in the judgment of others) so as to receive more fully the free grace of God; forget what he already knew of God and be available for new experiences.

The greatest thing for Christians is not to perform miracles, or to speak in tongues, but to know Christ and meet him as a living person. *May I know him and experience the power of his resurrection* (v. 10). All of us would like to feel the presence of God and to see him in some

way, but the way to experience his power that transfigures us is by sharing in Christ's sufferings (2 Cor 1:3-5).

All of us who claim to be perfect (v. 15). See what was said in 1 Corinthians 2:6. Paul speaks ironically again about those who believe they belong to a superior class of Christians, while he would not dare consider himself to be perfect (v. 12).

Finally, he insists on the resurrection. Because we know that our bodies (or persons) will be raised and that the universe will be renewed, we must put passing things in their place: food, wine, sex—all must stop being the idols that enslave us.

• **4.1** Once again the theme is interrupted; this passage seems to be the continuation of 2:19-3:1.

2Thes 3:7; 1Cor 4:16

Mt 6:19; Col 3:2

Eph 2:6; Heb 12:22

Rom 8:19; 1Cor 15:51; Tit 2:13

1Thes 2:19

you, my glory and crown, be steadfast in the Lord. ²I beg Evodia and Syntyche to agree with each other, in the Lord. ³And you, Sycyus, my true companion, I beg you to help them. Do not forget that they have labored with me in the service of the gospel, together with Clement, and my other fellow-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord, always! I say it again: rejoice, ⁵and may everyone experience your gentle and understanding heart. The Lord is near: ⁶do not be anxious about anything. In everything, resort to prayer and supplication, together, with thanksgiving, and bring your requests before God. ⁷Then, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, brothers and sisters, fill your minds with whatever is truthful, holy, just, pure, lovely and noble. Be mindful of whatever deserves praise and admiration. ⁹Put into practice what you have learned from me, what I passed on to you, what you heard from me or saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you.

Paul's thankfulness

- ¹⁰I rejoice in the Lord because of your concern for me. You were indeed

concerned for me before, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹I do not say this because of being in want; I have learned to manage with what I have. ¹²I know what it is to be in want and what it is to have plenty. I am trained for both: to be hungry or satisfied, to have much or little. ¹³I can do all things in him who strengthens me.

¹⁴However, you did right in sharing my trials. ¹⁵You Philippians, remember that, in the beginning, when we first preached the gospel, after I left Macedonia, you, alone, opened for me a debit and credit account, ¹⁶and when I was in Thessalonica, twice you sent me what I needed.

¹⁷It is not your gift that I value, but rather, the interest increasing in your own account. ¹⁸Now, I have enough, and more than enough, with everything Epaphroditus brought me, on your behalf, and which I received as "fragrant offerings pleasing to God."

¹⁹God, himself, will provide you with everything you need, according to his riches, and show you his generosity in Christ Jesus. ²⁰Glory to God, our Father, for ever and ever: Amen.

²¹Greet all who believe in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters with me greet you. ²²All the believers here greet you, especially those from Caesar's household. ²³The grace of Christ Jesus, the Lord, be with your spirit.

Dn 12:1;
Rev
20:12

3:1;
1Cor
16:22

Rom
13:11;
Eph
6:18;
Lk 18:1

Jn
14:27;
Col 3:15

Rom
12:2

Heb
13:5

2Cor
12:9;
Col 1:29

Acts
16:2

Acts
17:1

1Cor
9:11;
Phil
2:17;
Gen
8:21;
Heb
13:16

1:13

The Book of Life (v. 3) is a common Jewish term meaning those who will be saved (Rev 20:12).

Fill your minds with whatever is truthful, holy, just, pure, lovely and noble (v. 8). Paul continuously repeats that it is not enough to avoid what is forbidden. Let us discover this free and open attitude of a believer who knows that God speaks to him in a thousand ways through others. How many examples before our eyes

each day! What great, noble and true things there are in this world about which we speak negatively! Let us accept what is good, wherever we find it, even among unbelievers.

- 10. Paul thanks the Church of Philippi for their help. He, who is so jealous of his independence and anxious not to seem to take advantage of others under the pretext of religion, accepts what his real friends give him.