

**Pastor Paul Bawden**  
**Sunday, January 16, 2011**  
**"God Is Always For Us"**  
**Philippians 1:1-7**

It's easy at times in one's life with the Lord, to have thoughts like these.

God is not really involved in my life. Or God doesn't hear my prayers. Or God seems so distant at times. Or is God really in control of his world as we see precious lives tragically taken in our country recently.

Such thoughts, of course, if not really dealt with immediately can cause a follower of Christ to start to doubt God's promises, or to doubt God's ability.

Those doubt's, if left to germinate in one's mind, may lead to a follower of the Lord becoming spiritually complacent in his or her life.

As a result, the believer in Christ may just float in his life with the Lord. Since the believer feels that there is no evidence of God at work in his life, he just goes through the motions and emotions of Christianity, surviving in the daily grind with no eternal purpose and direction just like the unbeliever.

How then can the believer in Christ deal with thoughts that continue to question who God is and what God does?

**How can a believer keep from sliding into the attitude that God doesn't care, isn't relevant, and I can live life on my own?**

Note how our text today in Philippians 1:1-7 answers these questions.

**I. The believer must always maintain a vibrant personal relationship with Christ as Savior and Lord (Philippians 1:1a).**

**The believer is a bondservant of Christ Jesus – the believer's attitude is one of submission to HIM.**

Note what Paul writes to the Philippians from prison in Rome around A.D. 61.

This is Paul's greeting to the Philippians where he along with Timothy, Silas, and Luke ministered some ten years before in Acts 16. He had received a gift from the Philippian church, brought by Epaphroditus to Paul while he was in the Roman prison. Evidently, the church at Philippi heard of Paul's imprisonment, and sent Epaphroditus to Paul with a gift. Certainly, this must have been a real encouragement to the Apostle Paul.

In New Testament times the person identified himself as the writer of a letter at the beginning of the letter rather than at the end which we do today. That's why Paul mentions his name along with Timothy, who was in the area with Paul.

Paul, then, penned, "Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ Jesus. . . ."

Paul was not enamored with his apostolic position here. He does not use his title as "apostle." He puts himself along with Timothy, his spiritual son in the faith, on the same level – bondservants of Christ Jesus.

The word, bondservants, is the word that is used for slave – doulos.

It is the word that Christ used in Mark 10:44, "and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave (bondservant) of all."

In the verse right above, Mark 10:43, Jesus had taught, "But whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant." The word used for servant there is the word from which we get deacon. It means to carry out a variety of activity, whether small or great.

The word, doulos, used in Mark 10:44, and in our text in Philippians 1:1, is referring more to the believer's attitude toward his Master, Jesus Christ.

**His attitude is to be one of submission to His Lord, to listen to His voice through the Word of God, and seek to follow Him as indicated in the Word of God.**

**Why does a believer sometimes let doubting God in his life cause him to end up not living for the Lord and serving Him wholeheartedly?**

**He forgets what is involved in his relationship with His Lord.**

**All believers in Christ need to be reminded continually that they are bondservants of Jesus Christ. A believer is to be developing a relationship with the Lord where he is learning to trust Him more and leave the circumstances in His hands.**

**Why was Paul always positive in his life amidst the most pressing of circumstances, even here while in prison in Rome?**

**Look at Philippians 1:12 – “Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances (Paul’s imprisonment) have turned out for the progress of the gospel.” Then in Philippians 1:21 – “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”**

**Doesn’t sound like someone imprisoned in Rome, does it?**

Why didn’t Paul not start doubting God and throw in the towel while imprisoned in Rome? And we could add other passages of Scripture such as what Paul told the Corinthians (II Corinthians 3:8-9) He was inflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not despairing; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.

Why could Paul be positive in prison and even in the very challenging times of life?

**He had a dynamic personal and on-going living relationship with his Master, Jesus Christ. Yes, for Paul, life was to live for Christ.**

**The issue in life for Paul was not what he was experiencing, but what God was going to do through Him in the events that were happening to him and for the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

That’s why in that II Corinthians 3:8-9 passage, Paul penned in the next verse, 3:10 –“Always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.”

**Paul’s whole focus in life was not himself, but on Christ and what He wanted to accomplish through Him for the sake of the gospel and the kingdom of God.**

We sometimes sit around and feel sorry for ourselves, start complaining, getting upset with God and with people. May I say this kindly, we act like spiritual wimps at times, and I talk to myself as well.

In that process we fail to see the bigger picture of what God wants to do in us and through us to further His kingdom for His glory.

Paul was excited in the power of the Holy Spirit to be a bondservant of Jesus Christ. Yes, he would eventually lay down his life for his Master, his loving Savior and Sovereign.

**May we as followers of Jesus Christ always be excited that as the bond-servants of Jesus Christ we can have that daily dynamic relationship with HIM so that we are living for Christ not for ourselves.**

But there is something else in this text to help us not let our doubting cause us to be spectator in the Christian life, but to keep us being participators in the church of Jesus Christ.

To keep our doubts from becoming a reality, or to get one’s life back in focus with his Lord,

## **II. The believer must continually develop the relationship with believers in the body of Christ (Philippians 1:1b–5).**

Note our text as it continues.

“To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers (or bishops) and deacons.”

Now Paul addresses his readers, the believers in the church at Philippi. He calls them saints, for which they are, meaning they are set apart to God as His possession. Note Paul also includes the leadership in the church, the overseers, which are the elders (cf. Titus 1:5 & 7, where the term elder and overseer is used interchangeably). The term overseer stresses the function of the elder who was to be the teacher in the local church along with responsibility for the spiritual life of the local church. The deacon, it seems, was to take care of more the physical and material needs of the people. The church at this time evidently had a plurality in the leadership as Paul addresses elders and deacons.

We need to be reminded that in the body of Christ we are all saints, set apart to God as His possession. We are sanctified – the believer is looked at by God as holy, clothed in Christ’s righteousness.

No matter what happens in the local church, all believers in Christ are saints. This should cause us to praise the Lord, be humbled that we have such an amazing position before the Lord, and then in the power of the Holy Spirit act like saints to the glory of God.

In Philippians 1:2, Paul blesses the Philippian believers with God’s grace and peace, a common greeting by Paul. God’s grace is getting what we don’t deserve – God’s amazing grace. God’s mercy is not getting what we deserve. We deserve judgment, but God gives us His mercy through faith in Jesus Christ.

He continues in Philippians 1:3, by saying that he thanks God for them as he remembers them.

In Philippians 1:4, Paul adds that he prays for the Philippians with joy.

Then in Philippians 1:5, Paul tells them why he thanks God for them and prays for them with JOY.

**“In view of your participation (the word is koinonia – also translated fellowship) in the gospel from the first day until now.”**

**Koinonia is the great word in the New Testament for the relationship that believers have with each other in the local church as each believer has the same life of Christ in the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

This means Paul is grateful to the Lord for the cooperation – the give and take - he had with them in Philippi establishing the church there.

He is also thankful to the Lord for the money that was given to him for ministry at different times, and the gift that Epaphroditus had brought to him now while he was in prison.

Look at Philippians 4:14-18, where you see the grateful heart of the Apostle Paul for the way the Philippians ministered to his spiritual and material well-being.

**“You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.”**

As Paul wrote this letter some 10 years later to the church at Philippi, imprisoned in Rome, he remembered fondly the love and support he experienced while ministering to them.

God used Paul in a mighty way among them. The people responded to him as he shared the gospel of Christ with them. **Their lives were knit together in Christ as he disciplined them and they grew together in Christ.**

**That's why Paul told the Philippians in 1:7 that he felt this way about them because he had them in his heart.**

The relationship of believers in the local biblical church and the church of Jesus Christ world-wide is a one-of-a-kind relationship. Certainly, there is the uniqueness of the family relationship of husband, wife, and children, where Christ is honored on a daily basis. That is the basis for society. The family unit is God's creation.

But, then, there is the uniqueness of the spiritual family of the local church, where believers in Christ are knit together with Christ as their life and head vertically, and then their eternal relationship horizontally.

In the local fellowship of believers, the koinonia, is where believers in Christ are all accepted by Christ, and can accept each other. It's where we learn to give and take, at times ask forgiveness of each other and the Lord. It's where we learn about God's Word and what God wants to do in and through us. It's where we pray for one another and encourage one another. It's where when one suffers, we all suffer. When one rejoices we all rejoice. It's where we can keep each other accountable to one another.

It is to be that relationship where believers stimulate each other to good works as Hebrews 10:23-25 instructs us.

**"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful, and let us consider how to stimulate (stir up) one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."**

Still, in the fellowship of believers, followers of Christ can start to think that God doesn't care, or God doesn't answer prayer, or others don't care about me.

Paul realized that could happen, and that is one of the reasons he wrote letters to the different churches he established, and why He told them that he was praying for them and the Philippians needed to stand firm in one spirit with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.

But its not always that way in the local church.

There have been figures tossed out that by George Barna and others that 70-75% of Christian youth leave the church after high school. One article I read suggested that:

**\*\*Intellectual skepticism is one of the major reasons they walk away.**

**\*\*Most Christian students are not equipped to resist rabidly anti-Christian college professors who are intent on converting their students to atheism.**

**\*\*College professors are five times more likely to identify themselves as atheists than the general public.**

**\*\*More than half of all college professors view evangelical Christian students unfavorably**

**\*\*The "new atheists" — Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens — are writing books and are growing in popularity.**

Then another writer was summarizing the observations of William Wilberforce, the member of the British Parliament, in his book "Real Christianity," written in 1797. Wilberforce worked so hard to abolish slavery. Here's what Wilberforce had to say about young people walking away from the church. Of course these observations are not true of everyone

**1. Students who walk away from the faith succumb to temptations they haven't faced before.** Many

students may have been exposed to the temptations of alcohol and sex in high school, but in college, being away from home and parents makes the challenges more difficult to withstand. As one student recently said to me, "I didn't know it was possible to go to college and *not* drink!" Parents and youth workers must work diligently to remind students of the dangers of alcohol abuse and promiscuous sex, while also casting a better vision for what college can and should be. It *is* possible to find a caring community on campus that fosters a healthy social life, but it requires intentionality. Help students to make the needed college connections before they head off to college. Visit [www.liveabove.com](http://www.liveabove.com) to see a listing of ministries available on campuses across the country.

**2. Students who walk away from the faith didn't learn to think.** The problem that Wilberforce diagnosed over 200 years ago is still with us today. Many students lack critical thinking skills, failing to take what knowledge is at their disposal to form their own beliefs and convictions. We must continually create space for students to wrestle with the big questions of life. College should not be the first time that students engage in abstract or deep thinking, but for many students it is. Critical thinking and Christian discernment are spiritual disciplines that need to be developed. Like anything worthwhile in life, the developmental process takes time and is difficult. A youth group devoted to these activities may not draw the biggest crowds, but if we are serious about preparing students for life after high school, helping student to "learn to think" will be a mark of our ministries.

**3. Students who walk away from the faith are consumed with the demands of making a living and the desire for success.** It is so easy to get caught up in the world's definition of success, and it's often difficult to understand how faith relates to day-to-day choices and career decisions. In contemporary American culture, the chief end of man is often expressed as: "He who dies with the most toys wins!" The student who mentioned that he didn't realize that it was possible to go to college and not drink could easily add: "I didn't realize it was possible to go to college and *not* follow the American Dream!" The temptation to live a life based on material possessions and upward mobility is pervasive, and many students find it too difficult to live a counter-cultural life based on following Christ. The attitude becomes: "You can't follow Jesus in the 'real world.'" Once again, community is essential to withstand the challenge. College students need to be surrounded by other people who live life differently than the world around them. Teenagers need to be continually exposed to examples of what it looks like to be in the world but not of it. For Christians, calling is more important than career.

**4. Students who walk away from the faith see right through the charade of those who profess the faith but don't live the life.** It was true in Wilberforce's day, it is true in our day and it will be true until Jesus returns: the problem for most people who walk away from the faith is not Christ, but Christians. Students who are contemplating leaving the faith are longing not to be around perfect people, but to be around people who are perfectly honest about their own shortcomings and desire to change. Honesty must always trump superficiality.

Wilberforce's words remind us that the problem of students leaving the faith after high school is not *new*, and the reasons for why students drift away are unlikely to change. Learning from the past can help us in the present to ensure that our ministries are addressing the central challenges students face. If Wilberforce's timeless diagnosis is correct, youth ministries that focus on community, discernment, calling and honesty will prepare students for life after high school.

**5. I would add a fifth area to these thoughts,** which can include youth as well adults. A believer may have had a bad experience with a local church, or something has happened in the family which causes a person to not attend church, or a person just feels left out by a church family.

But there is the bottom line in this discussion to keep adults and youth from falling into the trap of letting thoughts take over in one's mind that God does not care, or God is not relevant in one's life, or others don't care for me.

### **III. The believer should always keep in mind who God is and what He wants to do in and through him. (Philippians 1:6).**

This is what the classic verse in Philippians 1:6 is all about.

**"For I am confident of this very thing, that He (referring to God) who began a good work in you, will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."**

Yes, the believer must nurture his daily relationship with his Lord, submitting to Him in all that he thinks, says, and does. The believer must obey the Lord.

Yes the believer must keep in fellowship with other believers, praying for one another, encouraging one another, and be accountable to one another.

But such will soon become common place in one's life when one starts to forgot who the biblical God really is, what the biblical God is doing in his life, and continually wants to do in his life.

**Don't miss that this verse reads that "He who began a good work in you."**

What does that mean?

**(1)The "He" has to refer to the biblical God.**

**The biblical God is the Author of the believer's salvation. The personal, eternal, almighty, all knowing, all powerful, all present, loving, gracious, yet righteous, and just God is the Author of our salvation.**

The text goes on.

**(2) Began a good work in you.**

What is the good work that God has done for the believer in Him?

That good work started at the time of the believer's accepting Christ as personal Savior – That good work is the salvation God gave to the believer in Christ.

**At that time of the believer's accepting Christ as personal Savior, the biblical God invested His entire eternal life in the believer.**

That eternal investment was based upon Christ dying on the cross for him to pay the penalty for his sin, being buried, rising again from the dead, ascending into heaven to be his Savior, his intercessor, and coming Savior and King.

**As Peter says, "The believer is a partaker of the divine nature." That's why Paul said here in Philippians, as we have mentioned, "For me to live is Christ to die is gain."**

Here Paul is probably thinking back to the time the Philippians accepted Christ as personal Savior, yes, perhaps thinking about the first time they came to prayer by the riverside in Philippi when Lydia and others accepted Christ as personal Savior. Hearing now from Epaphroditus that the Philippians still remember him and are going on with the Lord, he wants them to know that God began a good work in them when they accepted Christ as personal Savior.

**When did you accept Christ as personal Savior?** At the time you accepted Christ as personal Savior, God began a good work in you. He invested His very life in you through Jesus Christ. Christ in you is the hope of glory. You and I who have accepted Christ have that eternal treasure in earthen vessels. We have the anchor of the soul in Jesus Christ.

**But it was for the Philippians and is for us who believe in Christ more than a one time experience of receiving the life of God, of being born from above by the Holy Spirit.**

For the text goes on:

**"will perfect it (bring to completion) until the day of Christ Jesus."**

**Since God has invested His life in the believer, as his heavenly Father, He desires that the life of Himself that He has given to the believer at the time of accepting Christ as personal Savior will continue to mature, displaying more of Jesus Christ in his life each day. That's why Paul gives this wonderful prayer in Philippians 1:8-11, which we will consider next week.**

**That's why God is always there in our lives encouraging and supporting the believer in His life. He wants the believer to come to maturity in Christ (to come to completeness in Him in this life).**

Certainly, God knows we will have doubts. He knows we will feel like He is not listening to our prayers. He knows that our challenges in life are really going to test our faith. He even knows that there are going to be prodigal sons and daughters.

But God does not change, He is always there wanting us to look to Him and take HIM at His word, and not base our lives on how we feel but what God says in His word.

**GOD IS WORKING IN US EVEN THOUGH WE MAY THINK HE IS NOT CONCERNED ABOUT US.**

**We don't respond in repentance and faith, when we start doubting God or thinking that He is not really with us, because we only deal with surface issues in our lives.**

We may have roots of bitterness in our lives, insecurity or worry, self-centeredness, or frustration, sometimes there may be immoral thoughts, some even get into an immoral life-style. But, what can happen is that we can let these drive us from God rather than to bring us to God asking for His forgiveness and grace.

**But the bottom line in all that's going on in our lives with God many times is that we reject God in His holiness and His willingness to provide us His grace and forgiveness. We blame God for what is happening in our lives, rather than looking to God and responding to His love, grace and forgiveness.**

**When we recognize that the issue in our lives is our relationship with God, and come to Him in confession of sin, He restores us to fellowship with Him. Then we experience again the power of God working in us to complete in us what He started when we accepted Christ as personal Savior.**

**God always loves us regardless of what we are experiencing. We just have to continue to realize that in the midst of our doubts and negative thinking about God that HE is still there with us. Then when these areas in our lives lead to sin we need to confess that sin to the Lord, thank Him for His forgiveness and move on in fellowship with Him.**

**What does the Philippians 1:6 say?**

**"HE WHO HAS BEGUN A GOOD WORK IN YOU WILL BRING IT TO COMPLETION UNTIL THE DAY OF JESUS CHRIST."**

The day of Jesus Christ has to refer to the coming of Jesus Christ for His church, or until the believer enters into the presence of His Lord. There is the "Day of the Lord" in the Bible (I Thessalonians 5:2; Joel 2:21ff), which refers to the tribulation time through the millennium to the great white throne judgment to the destruction of the old heavens and earth. Then there is the "Day of God" (II Peter 3:12), which is the day of eternity, the new heavens and earth.

**But God continues to work in the life of the believer in Him who submits to Him, keeps a vital relationship in the local church, and is open to His continual leading in his life through the direction of the Spirit of God through the Word of God. Even when the believer wanders away from God, God is still working to bring that person to the realization that he needs to get back in fellowship with the Lord.**

**Yes, our God has been called the "Hound of Heaven." (By English Poet, Francis Thompson – 1859-1907).**

**I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways**

**Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.  
Up vistaed hopes I sped;  
And shot, precipitated,  
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,  
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.  
But with unhurrying chase,  
And unperturbed pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
They beat - and a Voice beat  
More instant than the Feet -  
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me'.**

**May we not run from God, but run to Him for His wisdom, guidance, and forgiveness  
in our lives!!**

**Let's always remember regardless of what we are experiencing. . .**

**GOD IS ALWAYS FOR US!! Praise His NAME!!!**