

Gospel and the glory of our Savior to the unbelieving world, as well as to encourage other believers and believing communities to stand firm for the truth, to raise families that honor the Lord, and to strive to have our local assembly of faith to be itself a shining light for Him and the good news of the Gospel in Yeshua.

One writer, focusing on the community aspect of these verses, writes that Paul

... calls the Christian community to fulfill its mission in the world by cleaning up the conversation in the community. When Christian conversation is laced with complaints and personal attacks, Christians have lost their distinctive quality as the children of God in a world characterized by that same kind of negative tone.¹

16 – holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Messiah I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.

The opening phrase of v. 16, “holding fast the word of life” (λόγον ζωῆς ἐπέχοντες), should be connected back to the ἵνα (“in order that”) clause of v. 15, “in order that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent.” In other words, the opening clause of v. 16 further emphasizes a primary means by which the Philippian believers would “prove themselves to be blameless and innocent” and therefore enabled to be “above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, and would therefore “shine as lights in the world” [even as the stars in the night sky].

Thus, one of the primary means by which all who confess Yeshua to be their Savior are enabled to be true and valiant witnesses of His glory and His saving power, is by “holding fast the word of life.” The Greek verb translated “holding fast,” ἐπέχοντες (*epexontes*), is the present active participle of the verb ἐπέχω (*epexō*), “to maintain a grasp on someone or something.” Moreover, the fact that Paul uses a present participle here makes it clear that he envisions this to be the ongoing, regular characteristic of the believer’s life.

The phrase “word of life” is used by Paul only here, but we also see this same verbiage used by John in the opening of his first epistle:

1 Hansen, G. Walter, *Philippians in Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2009), p. 181.

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life — and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us — what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Yeshua Messiah. (1Jn 1:1–3)

Here, the phrase “the Word of Life” is slightly different in the Greek than the phrase in our Philippians text. For in 1John, the definite article appears twice: τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς (*tau logou tes tzōēs*), thus, if we were to translate it word-for-word it would be: “the Word of the life, i.e., “the Word Who is the very means of eternal life.” Since John opens his Gospel using “the Word” as a description of Yeshua Himself, it seems clear that in his first epistle, the phrase “the Word of the Life” is likewise used to refer specifically to Yeshua.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (Jn 1:1)

Thus, Yeshua is Himself “the Word,” that is, the ultimate revelation of God to mankind, and thus the One Who Himself is the very revelation of God’s redemptive purpose and love as well as the very means by which He would redeem those whom He would save.

In our current verse, however, the phrase “word of life” without the definite articles seems most likely to refer to the Scriptures. For it is the entire written, inspired Bible that ultimately points to “the Word” Who is Yeshua, the eternal and final revelation of God to mankind, Who alone is therefore the “author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2).

Given this understanding of the opening phrase of our verse, we must ask ourselves what Paul intends us to understand by his admonition “holding fast the word of life.” As noted above, the verbiage Paul uses in this phrase seems ultimately to emphasize “to hold tightly, to grasp onto something as greatly desired and/or essential.”

And what is it that Paul teaches us is so essential and so necessary if we are to remain faithful unto the “day of Messiah?” It is the very inspired Scriptures which have been guarded, preserved, and maintained through out earth’s history as the sure and unchangeable foundation for our faith in Yeshua. They are therefore likewise the divinely ordained instructions for a life of faith and for our walking in this

world as the children of God, those who have the ultimate goal to live in such a way so as to give God the glory He so much deserves.

Some commentators on our verse engage in discussions as to whether the phrase means “to hold forth the word of life,” that is, to evangelize the lost, or “to hold onto the word of life,” meaning to immerse oneself in the Scriptures and thus striving to conform one’s life to its inspired teaching and precepts. Note, for instance, that the KJV translates this opening phrase of our verse as: “Holding forth the word of life” which obviously means “to give the word of life to others,” “to broadcast the word of life.”

But there is no need to decide for one interpretation to the exclusion of the other, for the believers who constantly seek to know and apply the Scriptures in all areas of life and who therefore grow spiritually, will likewise be eager to give the gospel of Yeshua to others in obedience to what God has revealed. As Calvin notes:

The reason why they ought to be luminaries is, that they carry the word of life, by which they are enlightened, that they may give light also to others.¹

And Yeshua Himself teaches us:

Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matt 5:16)

The light that shines in us to a watching world is when our lives conform to the truth God has revealed to us, contained as it is in the word of God, the Scriptures.

... *so that in the day of Messiah* – What does Paul mean by the phrase “the day of Messiah” (*ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ, hēmeran Christou*)? It is the day of Yeshua’s return according to His promise, a day when ultimately and finally the deeds of mankind will be judged. Paul speaks of this in his first epistle to the Corinthians, directing his words to those who are truly saved by God’s grace, and who therefore are admonished to live out their faith in obedience to God.

For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Yeshua Messiah. Now if any man builds on

¹ Calvin, *Philippians*, p. 72.

the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1Cor 3:11–15)

Paul himself lived with the expectation of Yeshua's return, and that his service for Yeshua would be evaluated as to whether it was worthy, that is "gold, silver, or precious stones," or lacking, that is "wood, hay, or straw." Of course, the comparison makes clear that serving the Lord as He intends would bring about that which has eternal value, while failing to live and serve in a way the truly honors Him would result in producing that which temporal and without eternal value.

... I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. Here Paul emphasizes his deep desire that He would serve Yeshua as He intends and not for self-glory and self-gain. He uses the metaphor of a race in which the runners seek to finish the course just as they had been trained to do so.

But in our text, as well as in other Pauline texts, his reference to being able "to glory" does not mean that he is seeking to take credit or "glory" unto himself, for Paul repeatedly makes it known that whatever success came from his labors in the gospel, the glory belongs to Yeshua.

For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Messiah has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Messiah. (Rom 15:18–19)

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. (1Cor 15:10)

The kind of "boasting" or "reason for glory" to which Paul refers is that which causes others to give all praise and glory to Yeshua. Indeed, he teaches us that no one has a place to boast or take self-glory before the Lord.

but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Messiah Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD." (1Cor 1:27–31)

It is clear, then, that in our text Paul is not exhorting the Philippian believers to maintain and grow in their faith in Yeshua in order that he might take the credit. Rather, he is encouraging them to persevere in their faith because in doing so they would give to God the glory He alone deserves. Indeed, the only boasting that Paul teaches to be righteous is boasting in the Lord, that is, giving Him all the glory.

It is good that the NASB has chosen the verb "to glory" in our verse as the proper, contextually correct translation of the Greek *καυχᾶσθαι* (*kauxaomai*), for though this word can carry the sense of "to boast," in our modern English, "boasting" generally carries the sense of claiming for oneself that which others should applaud. This, of course, is not what Paul is stating in our text, that as the Philippian believers persevere in their faith in Yeshua, somehow Paul would receive some of the credit! Clearly not. Paul is very clear that all glory must go to God and to His Messiah, Yeshua, for the salvation of lost sinners.

What Paul does state is his desire that his labors in the gospel and deep desire to help others would form strong communities of faith in Philippi which would not fail but would remain living testimonies of God's grace in Yeshua. Paul's desire is that through the grace of God and the power of the Spirit, the believers in Philippi would stand in the day of Yeshua as trophies of God's grace and the power of the gospel, centered in the work of Yeshua, which Paul was privileged to bring to them as one sent forth by Yeshua Himself. We may note this perspective of Paul clearly set forth in his first epistle to the Thessalonians.

For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Yeshua at His coming?
For you are our glory and joy. (1Thess 2:19–20)

Surely the basis for Paul's desire and goal to give all glory to Yeshua is the sovereignty of God in bringing sinners to faith in Yeshua, as he writes in his epistle to the Ephesians.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Messiah, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Yeshua Messiah to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:3–6)

This clear posture of Paul in regard to his ministry for Yeshua ought to be the pattern for all who labor in the kingdom of God. Those whose duty and privilege it is to teach and shepherd those within the believing community ought to have this as our highest goal and purpose: to give all honor and glory to the One Who alone is able to grant the gift of faith and bring lost sinners onto Himself, securing their eternal life with Him. That He deems to use us as His servants in the glorious work of redemption is indeed our reward.

This is clearly what Paul means when he openly desires that he has not “run in vain nor toiled in vain.” His hope and life-purpose is that Yeshua should receive unmeasured glory and praise from those among whom he has labored.

17– But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.

The language Paul uses here is based upon the “drink offering” as noted in the Torah, in which a libation or the fruit of the vine was to be poured out beside the altar upon which sacrifices were done, as a sign of joy and thanksgiving, that is, as praise to God for His acceptance of the sacrifice and its meaning.

The fact that Paul uses the present tense (*σπένδομαι, spendomai*), “being poured out,” may indicate that he has prepared himself for the last days of his life and is therefore anticipating that his labors on behalf of the Philippians (as well as others) were coming to a close. Or it may be that we should understand his words here simply to reflect his willingness to undergo persecution for the sake of the gospel and his ability to have been a tool in God’s hands to bring the truth regarding Yeshua to the Philippian community which he addresses here.

...upon the sacrifice and service of your faith – Here it appears that Paul pictures the believing community in Philippi as “priests” who are

offering up “sacrifices of praise,” and that Paul is rejoicing in adding the “drink offering” of his joy and rejoicing in regard not only to the final day of salvation which they will experience, but also the joy of their current willingness to live out their faith as those redeemed by Yeshua’s sacrificial death, resurrection and intercession for them. Thus their response to God in faith produced the “drink offering” of Paul’s own ministry which he gladly “poured out” as a “thank offering” to God for the unspeakable gift of His grace in Yeshua.

The use of this terminology reveals Paul’s humility about his own importance. In the ritual, the sacrifice was primary; the drink offering was secondary. If Paul placed himself in the position of the drink offering, he saw their gift as the primary matter and his own circumstances as secondary.¹

18 – You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.

Having stated in the previous verse that he is rejoicing in spite of his current circumstances, Paul now urges the believers at Philippi to likewise rejoice with him. The NASB adds the words “*I urge you*” to emphasize the nature of the imperative (command) which Paul uses, for he is urging them with a loving command “to rejoice” in the Lord even as he is rejoicing. This emphasizes the sober yet wonderful promise of God to those who are His, that even in times of suffering He is in control and will cause all things to work together for the good of those who are called to love Him, who are called and redeemed according to His purpose (cf. Rom 8:28).

For even in the most dire of circumstance, all who are truly His by faith in Yeshua are enabled by the power of the Ruach to have inner peace and even to rejoice regardless of what they may face in the “ups and downs” of life. Paul has already expressed this in 1:20–21.

... according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Messiah will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Messiah and to die is gain. (1:20-21)

1 Meleck, Richard. *Philippians in New American Commentary* (Broadman, 1991), p. 115.