

That in All Circumstances I will Magnify Christ!

Phil 1:18b-26 (text)

16 February 2020, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro (18b, 19a, 20b)

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

My father was biology teacher in schools and at teachers' training college. But his career reached a high with his research on dust mites.

Of course, dust mites are small creatures of the spider family! And they're so small you almost cannot see them with the naked eye!

But my dad used an electron microscope to study them and take pictures of them!

And you know what?

With that microscope my dad was able to magnify not just the dust mite itself, but even its one hindleg so that it became as big as the screen of your cell phone – but not just the mite's one hind leg; no, even the bristles on its hindleg!

Yes, with the help of the electron microscope, my dad *magnified*, by 7,500 times, just the bristles on the mite's hindleg!¹

Magnify!

Well, the Apostle Paul says he wants to *magnify Christ!*

Question: "But is it then not so that Christ is *already* great? Is He not *already* magnified?"

Of course, He is! I mean, He who created the universe – yes, He who rose from the dead, how can He *not* be great, and powerful and strong!?

But here's the problem: people don't *see* Christ, because most people don't read His Word!

So, here is the Christian's calling – to *magnify* Christ *before the eyes* of unbelievers; and even of believers!

Do *you* do that?

Do *I* do that?

Do *we* magnify Christ at home in the sight of our family members?

Do we make Christ great at our work place or even here within our church family?

Well, the Apostle Paul says he wants to magnify Christ! But he is afraid that he might perhaps fail! Yes, although Paul has seen the risen Christ there on the road to Damascus – and although Paul is convinced that Jesus *is* who He *said* He is – yet, in the back of Paul's mind, there is this nagging fear: "What if, instead of *magnifying* Christ, I *deny* Him!?" "Yes, what if I did what Peter once did!?" "What if I'm put to shame!?"²

¹ Cf. Van Huyssteen, Johan Abraham. 1974. 'n Taksonomiese studie van die Erythraeoidea and Calyptostomatoidea (Acari, Paraitenini) van die Ethiopiese wyk. Proeskrif aangebied vir die graad Doctor Scientiae aan die Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys. Plate XVII (between pp. 224 and 225).

² Cf. v.18b-20 (especially v.20b), "**Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, ²⁰according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death**" (Emphasis mine).

You ask, “But why did Paul have such an inner struggle?” “Why did he doubt that he would be able to magnify Christ?”

My brother & sister, remember: as Paul writes these words, he is sitting in jail. Soon his court case is coming up – a court in which he will have to defend Christ before Jews & Romans – Jews who once despised Christ and killed Him; and Romans who thought Christ’s teaching was foolishness!

So, what if, when push comes to shove (or sword to neck), Paul breaks down and says, “O, I can’t do this, for I don’t want to suffer the pain of being killed!”?

Well, thankfully (and by God’s grace), Paul’s positive thoughts have won, for he says (in v.19 & 20) that it is his eager expectation and hope that he will not be ashamed, but that the court case *will* turn out for his salvation (i.e. that, in that court, he *will* succeed in magnifying Christ before the eyes/minds of Jews and Romans, and so his faith *will* be upheld and his eternal salvation *will* be intact [and proved to be real])!

My brother & sister, it’s the Christian’s calling (also yours & mine) to magnify Christ in the sight of all!

And whilst you & I may not be killed in doing this, we may get mocked and ostracised – or even side-tracked by wealth, possessions and greed!

So, here’s a very valid question: How will you & I get the strength to magnify Christ and not deny Him and so be put to shame?

Well, we’ll get such strength in the same three ways in which the Apostle Paul got his...

- Through Prayer Support
- Through Christ’s Spirit
- Through Being Absolutely Christ-Focused

Through Prayer Support (19b)

Here’s what Paul, in God’s strength, says (in v.18-19), “...*I will rejoice, ¹⁹for I know that through your prayers this will turn out for my deliverance/salvation*”

“Yes, I will succeed in doing two things at the same time: 1) magnifying Christ and, in so doing, 2) give proof of my ultimate salvation!” “But, dear Philippians, I do need your supplication (urgent petitioning)!”³

My brother & sister, Paul often used to ask the churches for their prayers that he would be kept safe⁴ and that he would do his apostolic work unhindered,⁵ and that he would proclaim the Gospel clearly and fearlessly!⁶

³ The Greek word indicates more than just prayer, for it is the word *déēsis* (δέησις) “...that which is asked with urgency based on presumed need—‘request, plea, prayer.’ μή φοβοῦ, Ζαχαρία, διότι εισηκούσθη ἡ δέησις σου ‘do not be afraid, Zechariah! (God) has heard your prayer’ Lk 1:13” (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 407). New York: United Bible Societies).

⁴ See e.g. Rom. 15:30–31a; 2 Cor. 1:10–11; 2 Thess. 3:2; cf. Philem. 22

⁵ See e.g. Rom. 15:31b–32; 2 Thess. 3:1; cf. 1 Thess. 5:25

⁶ See e.g. Col. 4:2–4 ***Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.***

Also, Eph. 6:18-20 (especially v.19), ***With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*** (NASB; Emphasis mine).

So, now again, he asks the Philippian brothers & sisters to urgently pray for him!
However, this time there's a difference!

You see, this time Paul does not just ask them to pray for his *safe-keeping* – not even that he will *speak the Gospel fearlessly and clearly*. No, this time he also asks them to pray that this whole trial will turn out for *his salvation* – i.e. for his *ultimate* salvation!⁷ After all, in Paul's mind, if he denies Christ in this trial, then what will that say for his ultimate salvation!?

So, in a way, what Paul asks is that the Philippians should pray for him that, through this trial and his magnifying of Christ, the certainty of his ultimate salvation will shine through!

Question: But is it then possible for Christians to, *with their prayers*, have an influence in someone's eternal salvation? Is it not so that God alone – and in His sovereignty – grants salvation to whomever *He* wants!? Has Paul himself not acknowledged that when he once said that, “***God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden***”? (cf. Rm 9:18).⁸

Yes, Paul did say that, and it is indeed true: it *is* God alone who sovereignly makes the decision as to whom to save!

However, here is one thing the Bible also teaches, i.e. that *God ordains the prayers of His people as a means through which to accomplish His purposes*. So, God does use our prayers for His purposes: for the *perseverance* of Christians in the faith; and for their *ultimate salvation*!

My brother & sister, have you ever prayed for someone's ultimate salvation – e.g. that your children would be right with God?

I think you have! For I have yet to find a Christian mother and father who have not prayed such a prayer for their child – even before the child was born!

But, here's another question: Have you ever prayed for the perseverance & ultimate salvation of *someone else* in our church (even of all members in our church)?

Perhaps you say, “But, Pastor, have you then forgotten about the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints?” “Pastor, God will help them persevere without me praying for them!”

Well, has it ever occurred to you that, even though the Apostle Paul, for one, firmly believed in the perseverance of the saints,⁹ he nevertheless, *prayed* for the saints' ultimate salvation, and also asked them to pray for him!?

⁷ For the richness in meaning of the Greek word *sōtēria* (σωτηρία “salvation”) cf. Fee, “Our difficulties stem from the LXX translator's use of *sōtēria* (“salvation”) to express what Job could expect from God were he to appear before him. In every other instance in Paul *sōtēria* denotes eschatological salvation, that is, God's final salvation of his people already brought present through Christ and the Spirit. But here it is controlled in part by its sense in Job, which has to do neither with final salvation nor with deliverance from prison (although Paul clearly expects the latter). Rather Paul's concern is altogether on Christ's being magnified, however the trial turns out. Christ's being thus magnified would be Paul's vindication (not to mention his gospel's). In its own way such vindication by God would thus mean “salvation” for him as well” (Fee, G. D. (1999). *Philippians* (Vol. 11, pp. 65–75). Westmont, IL: IVP Academic).

⁸ Emphasis mine

⁹ Cf. Phil 1:4-6 (especially v.6), “***In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.***”

Indeed, for Paul “perseverance of the saints” did not mean “take it easy in your Christian walk or in your prayer support!”¹⁰

So, are we allowed to pray for our own salvation and for someone else’s?

Yes, for God has not only ordained *who will be saved*, but also *our prayers* for those who will be saved.

Look, is this not in sync with what our Lord Jesus Himself once said? You see, on the one hand He said, “... *your Father knows what you need before you ask Him...*,”¹¹ yet, on the other hand, our Lord also told two parables on how we should persist in prayer and not lose heart!¹²

And so, Paul asks the Philippian church to keep him in their supplication, for what does he want to do?

Well, in his frail human body & spirit, he wants to magnify Christ!

Will you & I pray this prayer for one another – i.e. that we will not deny Christ, but that you & I will magnify Him even when we get mocked, ridiculed, ostracised or tempted; and that by magnifying Christ our ultimate salvation will shine forth!?

But look, this also means that you & I will have the openness to share some of our deep needs with a brother and sister, and ask them to also pray for us!

Prayer Support – the first way through which we’ll get strength to magnify Christ!
What’s the second way?

Through Christ’s Spirit (19c-20a)

My brother & sister, Paul mentions a second way through which he will find the strength not to deny Christ in the hour of trial, but to magnify Him – that is: through the provision of Christ’s Spirit!

And this provision of the Spirit is closely linked to the prayers of the Philippians for Paul!

Question: Did Paul then not already have the Spirit of Christ?

Of course, he had – already since that day when he was on route to Damascus and Christ changed his life!

So, but can one then get the Spirit of Christ again although you already have Him?

My brother & sister, all believers have the Holy Spirit all the time, but at times, they may have the Spirit in greater measure!

1 Cor 1:8-9, ***He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** ⁹ *God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.*

1 Thess 5:23-24 ***May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** ²⁴ *The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.*

Jude v.24-25 (especially v.24), ***To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—*** ²⁵ *to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.* (Emphasis mine).

¹⁰ Look, is that not why he says about his own perseverance (in 1 Cor 9:26-27), ***“Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. ²⁷ No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize”***? (1 Cor 9:26-27; Emphasis mine). Also cf., “Whether the prize here is salvation, as some interpreters believe, or the glory that Paul will receive at the final day, as others hold, the statement shows that Paul refused to use his assurance that he would persevere to the end as an excuse to relax his efforts in the service of Christ and the gospel” (Thielman, F. (1995). *Philippians* (pp. 74–89). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House).

¹¹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (1984). (Mt 6:8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹² Cf. Lk 11:5-13 and Lk 18:1-8

I mean, at the time when Stephen was martyred, was he not *full of the Holy Spirit!*?¹³
The same when Paul confronted the magician called Elymas, we read that Paul was *filled with the Holy Spirit!*¹⁴

And, again the same happened with Paul and Barnabas when they left Antioch in Pisidia where they had been persecuted. Yet, we read that they were *filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit!*¹⁵

My brother & sister, see? The Holy Spirit already lived in these persons, but each received an unusual abundance of the Spirit's filling during a special time of testing!
And *now* – now here where Paul sits in jail in Rome, and desires to soon magnify Christ before angry accusers and an indifferent judge?

Well, *now* it is his *earnest expectation and hope* (v.20a) that he will again experience such a measure of the Holy Spirit's filling!

And *Paul was confident that, as the Philippians prayed, a fresh abundance of the Spirit which was in Jesus Christ and had been sent by Him, would be poured into his heart, assuring him of his ultimate salvation, whether he should live or be killed for his faith!*¹⁶

My brother & sister, how does this point (point 2) apply to you & me?

Well, does it not move you & me to, in similar way, pray for our fellow believers – especially in times of trial – that God will fill them with His Spirit so that they may stand firm and be strengthened in their faith!?

So, I pray for a persecuted Christian brother/sister in Burkina Faso, or Nigeria, or Kenya or Syria or Pakistan or China who is magnifying Christ by his/her words and kind actions to their persecutors!

Or I pray for a brother/sister, who despite work colleagues' ridicule and unfair treatment (and the threat of losing his/her job), hangs in there and magnifies Christ day in and day out!

Or the lonely brother/sister whom we might not have seen for a while in church, but who daily battles not to become despondent!

Or the brother/sister who is grappling with the sins & hardships of their adult child – yet trying to magnify Christ before the eyes of that child!

Or the sister/brother who suffers from a serious illness or persisting frailty – that they will be so filled with the Spirit of Christ that they will magnify Him in the sight of unbelieving doctors & nurses!

Well, that was point 2: *Through a special provision of the Spirit of Christ!*

¹³ Lk 7:55 *But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.* ⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

¹⁴ Cf. Acts 13:9-10, *Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said,* ¹⁰ "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?"

¹⁵ Acts 13:49-52 (especially v.52), *The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.* ⁵⁰ *But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.* ⁵¹ *So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.* ⁵² *And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit* (Emphasis mine).

¹⁶ My adaptation of the words of Henry Barclay Swete (apud Thielman, *ibid*), "He was confident that, as his converts prayed, a fresh abundance of the Spirit which was in Jesus Christ and had been sent by Him would be poured into his heart, making for his final salvation whether the present captivity should result in life or death."

Here's the third thing that will help us magnify Christ...

Through Being Absolutely Christ-Focused (20c-26)

My brother & sister, what would have to happen in someone's life before he/she would be able to say with all his/her heart, "Whether it is through my *living* or through my *dying*, I *will* magnify Christ – I *will* make Him great; I *will* be an "advertisement" for Christ to all those around me!"?

Well, would it not be the same as that which brought the Apostle Paul to say the same? And what was that?

Well, that we will be absolutely Christ-focused!

You see was it not because Paul was absolutely Christ-focused that he was able to say, "Look, I might soon be executed for my faith in Christ – that's a distinct possibility!"?

"And I honestly do not know what I would prefer! Would I rather want to die and, *through dying for my Lord*, magnify Him before the eyes of my accusers, or would I rather want to live and, *through my living*, continue to magnify Christ to the Philippians?"

See Paul's Christ-focused heart?

There was no selfish agenda in Paul's willingness to die or to live, for if he would die, he would do that unselfishly to magnify ("advertise") Christ; and if he would continue to live, he would unselfishly continue to magnify/proclaim Christ to the churches!

Another question: Do you think that it is only now, now when Paul looks death in the eye, that he has suddenly become Christ-focused?

No, my brother & sister, the Apostle Paul was Christ-focused from the day Christ grabbed him there on that road to Damascus!

After all, it was that personal encounter with the Risen Lord (when Christ called Paul) which caused him to walk kilometre after kilometre on at least three missionary journeys! You don't do such a thing if you're not Christ-focused! And, especially, you don't suffer ridicule, stoning, flogging, persecution, imprisonment and hunger and shipwreck – and that over nearly two decades if you're not Christ-focused!

So, it was not here in his Roman prison that Paul suddenly became Christ-focused! No, he was that from day one!

Look, did he not even say as much, already in his first letter to the Corinthians, when he wrote (in 1 Cor 2:2), "***For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified***"?¹⁷

See why Paul was able to magnify Christ?

He was Christ-focused, and his Christ-focused heart allowed him to look at life & death differently!

And you know what?

After the time described by our text, the Apostle Paul was given both life *and* death – yes, both things between which he found it so hard to choose!

- You see, he found life, for he was freed for a while! So, he used the God-given time to magnify Christ to his churches!
- Then, a few years later, Paul found death, too, when (according to church tradition) he got executed by beheading in Rome!

¹⁷ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (1 Co 2:2). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

How mind-blowing! In God's time, Paul then got the opportunity to use both (yes, living and dying) to magnify Christ!

My brother & sister, granted, you & I have not been called to be a full-time apostle like Paul!

We have been called to live here in New Zealand and to be in the job market to feed our families and help run this country's economy with our taxes!
Yet, it's not as if we're absolved from magnifying Christ in all these things!

My dad knew how to magnify dust-mites 7,500 times so that other researchers could see and learn!

Do you & I magnify Christ – are you & I living “advertisements” for Christ – in...

- our family?
- our marriages?
- in our church family? Can the brothers/sisters see Christ in you/me?
- How about at work?
- Or to strangers?
- Or with our finances and giving?

How will we do it? How will we magnify Christ?

Well, as our text says...

- through prayer (and asking for prayer support)
- through a special measure of Christ's Spirit living in us
- through being/staying Christ-focused

How does one get all these?

Through spending time with Christ (being close to Him) by immersing oneself in His Word!

AMEN (2,655 words excluding footnotes)