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WORKER



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

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A HARMONIOUS CONGREGATION (PHIL. 1:1-2)

Kevin W. Rhodes

From its beginning around 51 A.D. the Philippian congregation of God's people had a close relationship with the apostle Paul. The epistle he penned reflects this relationship, but it also demonstrates the bond shared within the congregation, considering how minor the congregational problems mentioned proved to be. Indeed, even in the simplicity of the opening greeting, Paul established the relationships that bound them together in spiritual harmony.

Writing from prison in Rome, Paul opened by introducing himself and Timothy, his fellow worker, as "bondservants of Jesus Christ." A gospel preacher therefore feels bound to serve—not for his own purposes and glory, but to glorify his Lord. Thus, a preacher feels obligated to preach the gospel (1 Cor. 9:16), to serve the souls of others to save the souls of others (Mk. 10:45), and to sacrifice as necessary (Phil. 2:17). A preacher feels obligated to Jesus Christ, because he owes Him everything (Phil. 3:8). When a preacher accepts the work and life of a bond servant, what he does in that work and life should harmonize with the will of his Master, totally and completely, and this, in turn, will help him build harmony in the lives of others.

Interestingly, while people today regularly refer to one another as Christians, the apostle Paul chose to address his audience as "all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi." This places emphasis on the moral compass that should distinguish God's people both spiritually and morally in seeking to be more like God in heart each and every day, for this is the ambition of holiness (1 Pet. 1:16). And yet pure holiness remains impossible apart from a relationship with Christ Jesus whose promised coming as the Messiah

served to provide for our salvation from sin (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 6:11; Gal. 3:26-29). However, Christians still live in the world, in the midst of a foreign society often hostile to morality and to truth. Nevertheless, distinguishing themselves as separate and distinct in a world gone mad should be the goal of saints each and every day (1 Pet. 2:11-12). Seeking holiness in every aspect of life keeps God's children in harmony with God's will and with God Himself, lifting Christians up toward heavenly things while on earth in preparation for ascending to heaven in the end.

Having addressed the essential character expected of all Christians, Paul then emphasized roles in the congregation divinely designed to help Christians in their holiness, beginning with bishops. The work implied by the word "episkopos" involves oversight, but its application extends far beyond popular notions. God gave bishops the responsibility not only of

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Editor

Cody Westbrook



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

I Thank My God Upon Every Remembrance of You (Phil. 1:3-8)

Cody Westbrook

The book of Philippians is filled with great themes that challenge and encourage us. One of its most impressive characteristics is what it reveals to us about the mutual affection that existed between Paul and the Philippian saints. The first section of the book brings this to light with depth and clarity. In Philippians 1:3-8 we are reminded that prayer, joy, and thanksgiving are inextricably intertwined. We learn that Paul's heart was deep and full of affection and appreciation for each member of the church at Philippi, and that he was extremely grateful for their assistance in the progress of the gospel. We learn that the Philippian saints, like Paul, were devoted to the gospel's progress, that they loved him, and that their faithfulness to him and his work was a long-term commitment.

Paul's habit (vss. 3-4) of continual thanksgiving evidences his great appreciation. The Philippian saints were cemented firmly in the deepest part of the apostle's heart. This is evidenced by the fact that he continually thanked God ("I thank" is a present tense verb) for each one of them ("for you all" is comprehensive). They all were such a great cause for joy in his life that each time he took them before the throne of God in prayer he did so with thanksgiving. What an incredible testimony to their Christian character that Paul would remember them in such a way, and to Paul's because he did not forget them! This passage teaches us that it is important to be prayerfully mindful of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We should thank God regularly for the faithful work of everyone in the kingdom. Our love for them will force us to do it! It also teaches us the importance of conducting ourselves in a way worthy of being remembered. We want to be remembered because of the good that we have done, not because of the trouble that we have caused (c.f. Phil. 1:15-16).

Paul's confidence (vs. 6) emphasizes his faith in God and in the good work of the Philippian church. God had

said years before through the prophet Isaiah, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11). There is no question that Paul firmly believed God's promise to give the increase (1 Cor. 3:6) in his work and in theirs. Due to past experience Paul remained in a state of confidence that the Lord would bring the Philippians work to completion ("confident" is a perfect participle). In fact, he was so confident that he suggested that their work would continue to bear fruit until the Lord returns. This confidence was built through their faithful co-laboring and it further emphasizes the feeling of closeness that they shared. This passage should be a great source of encouragement to us because, though we may not be able to see the full fruit of our labor today, God has promised to give the increase and we can be confident in His ability to execute.

Paul's rationale (vss. 5, 7-8) for his thankfulness and confidence was the faithful work of the brethren. The church at Philippi had been Paul's partner (fellowship) in the progress of the gospel since their establishment, and this partnership had not always been easy. Paul identified them as partners with him in "bonds," "defense," and "confirmation." Thus, they not only supported him during his imprisonment but likely some of them had suffered for the faith as well. Paul urged them to continue to stand firmly united (1:27) for the cause of Christ in the midst of opposition in the Roman colony that was Philippi. These brethren had proven themselves as steadfast soldiers of the cross and this was the basis for Paul's confidence and thanksgiving. To be sure, they were a source of encouragement for Paul and they should be a source of encouragement for us as well, as we strive to stand firm in a hostile world (1 Cor. 15:58).

The Christians at Philippi were steadfast in their faithfulness to Paul and the work of the gospel. They had

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supported Paul since the beginning and they struggled along beside him. Thus, Paul wanted them to know how thankful he was for each and every one of them. This introductory context sets the stage for the rest of the letter in which Paul will exhort them to strengthen their bond and maintain their focus.

CW

LET LOVE ABOUND (PHIL. 1:9-11)

Mike Vestal

Studying the prayers of Paul is a life transforming experience! Philippians 1:9-11, while brief, packs a great punch as Paul prayed for the church at Philippi. It should be noted that 1:9-11 is one long complex sentence. The apostle continually prayed (present tense) for them; he loved them as they were especially dear to his heart. To have brethren in our minds and hearts is wonderful - to have them also in our prayers is greater still. Notice four great elements in this prayer.

This Prayer Emphasizes Abundant Love (v9)

“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more” (1:9). Out of the “affection of Christ Jesus” (1:8), Paul prayed that their love abound more and more. This is a love that places great value on what is loved - in this case, God and the family of God (cf. 1 Thess. 3:12). God and His people are treasured and prized. It is a love that actively seeks the benefit of those loved (1 Cor. 13:4; Rom. 5:6-8). But more, this love is to “abound.” Of this Greek term’s thirty-nine occurrences, twenty-six of them are used by Paul. It means, “above and beyond, ever increasing and rich.”

This Prayer Emphasizes Spiritual Excellence (1:9-11)

“With knowledge and discernment.” The single preposition “with” suggests a close relationship between the two expressions. “Knowledge” here denotes a full knowledge that comes by personal relationship and experience. The second term has to do with “understanding” and “moral insight.” Love is not merely an emotion; it is accompanied with insight that impacts behavior. Truly biblical love is well educated and wise. “So that you may approve what is excellent,” means to be able to lovingly distinguish not only between right and wrong, but what is best from what is good. Love must display itself in the desire and ability to assess matters in a God-honoring way. “Filled with the fruit of righteousness” (1:11) is the result of such a faith working through love (Gal. 5:6). This is not

on the basis of meritorious works, but on the basis of God’s working in the lives of His loving and submissive servants (Phil. 2:12-13; cf. Col. 1:9-14). Those who display the love for which Paul prayed are characterized by lives of righteousness. They don’t just “bear” fruit - they are “full” of the fruit of righteousness (Gal. 5:22-23).

This Prayer Emphasizes the “Big Picture” (v10)

Such love and knowledge impacts both the here and the hereafter; it affects both now and then. “And so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ” (1:10; cf. 1 Thess. 3:12-13). Sometimes we fail to see the big picture of loving and knowing Jesus. It certainly makes a difference in our own lives from day to day, but it also positively affects others. We impact eternity through our love and knowledge of Christ! “Pure” carries with it the idea of complete sincerity, without any “mixed motives” (2 Cor. 1:12; 2:17). “Blameless” here is not the ordinary Greek word so translated; the term here means “not offending,” or “not causing to stumble” (1 Cor. 10:32). Paul would later speak in this letter of some proclaiming Christ out of envy and rivalry (1:15); his prayer indicates that such “mixed motives” would cease due to greater love and knowledge of God and of one another. Our lives have been so refined by God and His greatness they are pure and holy. Our lives that had been so full of sin have been transformed by Jesus they become “blameless” in the sense they can be scrutinized by others to the light of God’s word without finding any legitimate source of stumbling. How we live now indeed impacts eternity!

This Prayer Emphasizes a Means and a Goal (v11)

The means to righteousness is Jesus; without Christ a righteous life is simply impossible. Jesus is absolutely necessary for both salvation (becoming righteous) and for sanctification (being filled with the fruit of righteousness as Christians). Were it not for His sacrifice, no one could be righteous in God’s eyes. Were it not for His grace and strength, no Christian could live a pure and blameless life. This in no way diminishes the necessity of our knowing, loving and obeying God’s will. Rather, it motivates and encourages it (Heb. 5:8-9)! The goal of the prayer and its content is the glory and praise of God. And this ever must be the goal - God’s glory and praise (cf. Eph. 3:14-21).

Conclusion

You can tell a great deal about a Christian by their emphasis upon prayer as well as by the content of their prayers. What does your praying say about you?

CW



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CHRIST IS PREACHED, SO I REJOICE! (PHIL. 1:12-18)

Stephen Wiggins

In this passage the apostle Paul informed the Philippian brethren as to his welfare. The congregation would have been concerned over Paul's well being after hearing of his arrest and deportation to Rome. The apostle had earlier arrived in Philippi, on his second missionary journey, and established the cause of Christ in that city (Acts 16:12-40). The congregation had later helped financially subsidize Paul's preaching efforts by sending funds of support (Phil. 4:15-16). How was their missionary faring? Had the spread of the gospel been impeded since Paul's arrest? The apostle answered by informing the Philippian brethren that he viewed his circumstances in Rome in a very positive way.

Paul assured his readers that the things that had befallen him in no way hindered the proclamation of the truth. In fact, just the opposite had transpired. The apostle's arrest and extradition to Rome only served to further the progress of the gospel (v. 12). God's providential hand was at work in using Paul to proclaim the saving message to those whom he would have never had the opportunity to preach as a free man. When the Roman authorities arrested the apostle, he preached to the Jewish mob that had sought to murder him; the Jewish Sanhedrin; the Governor Felix; the Governor Festus; King Agrippa (Acts 21-26); and, the Roman Emperor (2 Tim. 4:16-17).

Another example of how Paul's imprisonment in

Rome advanced the spread of the gospel is that the whole palace guard knew the apostle was in chains for the cause of Christianity (v. 13). At a time when most would have been depressed and discouraged over being arrested and restrained with chains Paul was overflowing with joy because Christ was still being preached amid adversity—"Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yea, and I will continue to rejoice" (v. 18). Paul was shackled but the gospel was not! At the changing of the guards Paul simply saw more potential converts for the Lord Jesus Christ. What an impeccable attitude from the grand apostle!

Paul's wonderful example led to influencing a majority of brethren "to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly" (v.14). These brethren were encouraged to proclaim Christ out of good will and love for God and truth, knowing that Paul himself was "set for the defense of the gospel" (vv. 15-16). One should never underestimate their positive influence for good in the kingdom of God. In today's world we can do the same thing Paul did. No matter what circumstances arise in our lives we can remain loyal and faithful to God. A righteous example and a willing mind to preach the precious good news of Christ will do wonders in spreading the borders of God's kingdom.

But now the reality of human nature sets in. Paul informed his readers that a minority of brethren were preaching Christ but doing it from insincere motives. They did so motivated by envy, rivalry, and selfish ambition "supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains" (vv. 15, 17). Some preaching brethren had a competitive spirit. Thus, while they were proclaiming Christ, they were doing so with less than worthy motives—jealousy and self-centeredness. A lesson here should be learned. Preaching brethren should never be envious of one another. We should never wish to see the demise of another's success when preaching the gospel. Who preaches more gospel meetings, speaks on more lectureships, or baptizes more converts should never enter our minds. Rather, like Paul, we should rejoice when the Lord's work is being accomplished, no matter who does it.

As Paul contemplated the fact that Christ was proclaimed, even from unworthy motives, he could declare that the only thing that mattered was that Christ was preached and therein he rejoiced.

Some have difficulty with the statement that Paul could rejoice when Christ is proclaimed from inappropriate motives. Others have misapplied Paul's statement supposing the apostle is giving credence to false teachers

who are preaching Jesus though not his plan of salvation. In view of this please note the following observations.

First, the preaching brethren Paul referenced here were “preaching Christ.” To preach Christ is to preach the word of God, the gospel, which includes the kingdom/church of Christ, Christ’s authority, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins (cf. Acts 8:4, 5, 12, 35-40). There is no indication that these brethren were not preaching the whole counsel of God or else Paul would have reproved them.

Second, whereas Paul approved of the *doctrine* of these men he did not approve of their *motives* for preaching. This is why he could rejoice that Christ was being proclaimed. The apostle never uttered one word of approval for their disreputable motives. He only commended them for proclaiming Christ and the saving message of gospel truth.

Third, it must be appreciated that these preaching brothers the apostle here alludes to were not the Judaizing teachers that he will later reference in chapter 3 of this epistle where he called them “dogs,” “evil workers,” and mutilators of the flesh because they were binding circumcision on the Gentile converts, (cf. Acts 15:1-7). Those false teachers were preaching “another gospel” and rested under God’s condemnation (Gal. 1:6-9).

Fourth, the whole passage under discussion here underscores what was truly important to Paul—that Christ, the Redeemer and Savior of mankind, was being proclaimed to sinful humanity!

CW

TO LIVE IS CHRIST AND TO DIE IS GAIN (PHIL. 1:19-26)

Randy Robinson

From the day Paul obeyed the gospel until the day he died, his identity was inextricably intertwined with his Lord. Luke recorded that once Paul had regained his strength from his three-day fast, he immediately began to preach in the synagogues that “Christ...is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20). This transformation was so sudden and so unexpected that it shocked “all that heard him” (v.21) because he had so vigorously persecuted these people mere days before. But, Paul was determined not to be “disobedient to the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19), that is, the Lord Himself

appearing unto him, and therefore he threw himself into his new pursuit, preaching the gospel of Christ with the same fervor and intensity that he had previously demonstrated in trying to stop the growth of the church.

Despite being beaten and jailed by Philippian magistrates when he and Silas had gone there to preach (Acts 16:19-24), Paul dearly loved the Philippian brethren that dwelt there and was encouraged by their faithfulness as well as their generosity. The Philippian epistle reflects that. He thanked God for the traits that the Philippian brethren had demonstrated and he eagerly shared with them the results of his imprisonment—that despite being a Roman prisoner, the borders of the Lord’s kingdom had grown, both by his own efforts as well as by other brethren who had become bolder as a result of his influence.

Regardless of what ultimately happened to him, Paul was determined that Christ would be magnified. Paul’s exemplary conduct since he had been rescued from a Jewish mob by Claudius Lysias outside the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 21:30-33) and having remained in Roman custody since then indeed had magnified the Lord. Paul had maintained the whole time he had been a prisoner that he had been attacked by the Jews for preaching Jesus as the Christ and that the Romans had kept him imprisoned in order to maintain favor with the Jews. Paul’s loyalty to the Lord did not and would not waver and he would glorify Christ by his life or his death (Phil. 1:20).

Then Paul made one of the most infamous and profound statements recorded in all of the New Testament—“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (v.21). This statement was not a usurpation of authority or a pretentious boast, but rather reflected the single-minded purpose of Paul’s ministry. As long as he was alive his life would consist of proclaiming the message of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. He was so committed to this mission that only death would be a greater outcome.

What a remarkable perspective! Presumably every Christian wants to go to Heaven—some day. However, the vast majority of Christians are perfectly content to live a lengthy and productive life here on Earth before spending eternity in Heaven. Yet, Paul was ready, then and there, to “depart and to be with Christ” (v.23). In fact, Paul regarded this as a “strait betwixt two,” or a dilemma. He wanted to be with the Lord, but at the same time, he was cognizant of the need that his brethren had for him to remain on Earth in order that he could continue to preach to them and to write the inspired epistles that would motivate and edify brethren until the end of time (v.24).

One could certainly see why Paul might want to relinquish his earthly life. No one suffered for the Lord's cause more than Paul. He once listed a litany of adversities that he had suffered throughout his ministry (2 Cor. 11:23-28). Furthermore, he continued to suffer even after publishing that list! Indeed, Paul did suffer and yet he never felt sorry for himself nor solicited sympathy from others. Therefore, perhaps it is no surprise that Paul had "a desire to depart." However, we suggest that Paul's state of mind was not based merely on a desire to escape earthly trials, but rather on his deep and abiding love for his Master. Knowing he would ultimately spend eternity in the presence of his Lord, he could tell his beloved Philippian brethren, "...I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith" (Phil. 1:25). May we pattern our lives after his great example.

CW

PAUL'S PLEA (PHIL. 1:27-30)

Dave Rogers

It must have given Paul great joy to write to the Philippian church: His letter to them offers a portrait of a congregation that was commendably mature in the faith, even as they confronted the prospect of persecution because of it. As he reflected on this church's growth and faithfulness from his confinement in Rome (Acts 28:30), Paul had reason to be truly grateful for the blessings afforded by his Roman citizenship (cf. Acts 16:37; 22:25; 28:19). Since Philippi was a Roman colony rather than merely a conquered possession, it is likely that at least some of the saints there shared with Paul in the benefits of Roman citizenship. As a colony, the city's population would tend to view themselves mainly as Romans, rather than Philippians or Macedonians (cf. Acts 16:21), and they possessed a deeply ingrained image of their duty as representatives of Rome and a strong sense of responsibility as members of the ROMAN community, albeit in Macedonia. This shared understanding of what it meant to be a "citizen" undergirds Paul's words to this congregation.

Paul chose a singularly "political" word in verse 27 to describe the kind of living he wanted these Christians to pursue; *politeuomai* ("conversation" in the KJV, "manner of life" in most other English translations, and the root of our word "polity") actually expresses the idea of "live as a CITIZEN should." This imagery – coupled with the words of Phil. 3:20 – would resonate with near-deafening

forcefulness in the minds of the Philippian saints as a parallel to their civic self-image as "Romans." What Paul wanted to hear about these Christians was that their manner of living marked them out as HEAVENLY citizens on earth as vividly and visibly as the Philippian population's attitudes and outlook showed their status as ROMANS in Greece. He encouraged them to live and act so that they would be notable for living honest and upright lives that would bring no stain of shame against their heavenly "nationality."

Note that the combination of "spirit" and "mind" in verse 27 touches on both intellect and attitude, reason and emotion; Paul was urging the Christians at Philippi to "compete together" as fellow-athletes on the same "team," laboring together for their common goal. In their dedication to the truth of the gospel, they also needed the shared emotional bond of being "teammates" in the kingdom. The need for unity of conviction and attitude in their efforts is underscored by Paul's reference to the adversaries they faced (verse 28) and the conflict in which they shared with him (verse 30). Paul does not identify their opposition here, but it is reasonable to suppose that Philippi's pagan society would not react positively to the gospel message. It is equally true, however, that Paul was imprisoned at Rome because of Jewish resistance to the gospel (cf. Acts 25:7-11). Since it appears that there was no synagogue in Philippi (Acts 16:13), the "adversaries" probably were pagans, and their antagonism could have been rooted in the Christians' refusal to worship Roman deities.

No matter who their "troublers" were, Paul emphasizes to these Christians that their refusal to be terrified would serve as a "proof" of both their persecutors' failure and their own identity; just as Roman citizens disdained to fear the threats of lesser kingdoms, so these Christians refused to fear their adversaries' bluster. Because these Christians were continuing to be Christians, their enemies were failing to achieve their goal, and because they wouldn't turn away from their faith, their actions were vindicating the reality of their heavenly citizenship. The message of their continued conviction foretold their adversaries' impending doom because it proved that they could not be cowed into renouncing the Christ for the sake of comfort or conformity.

In acknowledging the Philippians' persecution for their faith, Paul sought to align their perspective with his own; in verse 29 he essentially said that Christ has bestowed them "honor upon honor" in allowing them to prove their commitment through suffering (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 3:14). Like Paul himself, they

were engaged in the best of all causes – they had seen his sufferings at first hand when he was with them (cf. Acts 16:19-40), and now knew that his imprisonment at Rome was for the sake of the gospel as well. In their willingness to suffer shamelessly as Christians (cf. 1 Pet. 4:16), they were following in his own footsteps (1 Cor. 11:1) and were proving themselves to be ideal examples of heavenly citizenship on earth. His “plea” was simple and very relatable for these brethren; prove your heavenly citizenship through your Christian conduct.

CW



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overseeing the assembly, but of overseeing the flock (Acts 20:28). Therefore, bishops must remain ever aware of the spiritual problems and needs of the individual Christians in the congregation (1 Thess. 5:14-15). Bishops must then constantly look out for toxic relationships, dangerous precedents, and insidious error (Titus 1:9-11). Bishops must keep a keen eye on any signs of impending apostasy on an individual basis to be able to come to that person’s spiritual aid before they drift too far away (Gal. 6:1).

Paul’s inclusion of deacons in conjunction with the bishops in this greeting shows the significance he placed upon the role, using a word signifying serving others, being active in the work, and completing orders. Deacons serve in whatever roles benefit the congregation and its work (1 Tim. 3:13), having first established the character to accept their responsibilities with grace and humility so as to ease the work of the bishops and aiding the congregation in seeking holiness (Acts 6:1-4). Thus, when deacons take their role in a congregation seriously, the work of the church can blossom as people grow from wanting to be served to learning to love serving, because they see it all

around them.

The simple and oft-repeated greeting Paul includes in this epistle (as well as others) communicates far more than a general greeting. It unites the roles and responsibilities of Christians with the blessings and leadership of the Godhead in making what we do meaningful. By combining “grace” and “peace,” the respective greetings of Gentiles and Jews, into one, the apostle Paul expressed the harmony possible when we leave behind human differences to accept divine distinctions (Gal. 3:28). More than that, these blessings, previously taken as physical in character, now have a spiritual quality directly related to being children of God and behaving as such (Eph. 2:8; Phil. 4:7; Rom. 8:15). Harmony in a congregation relates directly to how every member submits to the authority of the Lord, loves Jesus for the salvation made possible by His sacrifice, and commits to Christ living within (Col. 3:17; John. 15:13; 14:15; Gal. 2:20). Without what God has done through Jesus, there is no grace to save us and there is no peace for us, “[b]ut thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57).

The spiritual harmony described throughout the rest of the book of Philippians testifies to the implications of Paul’s greeting. More than any other epistle, the book of Philippians presents a congregation of Christians seeking righteousness together, overcoming problems together, reaching the lost together, and moving toward maturity together. However, these behaviors will not happen unless the preacher, the elders, the deacons, and the members share a mutual commitment to be what God expects so as to enjoy the blessings God wants to bestow. A congregation achieves spiritual harmony through spiritual people actively fulfilling spiritual responsibilities from a spiritual heart with a spiritual purpose. The apostle Paul emphasized all of these things to the Philippians throughout his epistle, but from the very opening of the book he demonstrated that none of this occurs magically. It come to life when God’s people seek harmony by serving in harmony--in harmony with one another, in harmony with God’s Word, and in harmony with God Himself.

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