

# SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER    ISA.55:10    FOR THE EATER  
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES  
FROM

**THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY**

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## INTERPRETATION OF PHILIPPIANS 1:6

The major problem in the interpretation of Phil. 1:6 is found in the words, "**will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.**" The word *perform* means to do, to carry out. If anyone performs a process *until* a certain time it means that he keeps on doing it up to that point. However, such an idea completely reverses the meaning of the Greek word *epiteleo*, making it to say the exact opposite of what the Holy Spirit intended. This word means to bring through to an end, and it is not right for a translator to cause the Apostle Paul to say in English what he did not say in the Greek.

The Revisers (ERV and ARV) recognized this contradiction and sought to more accurately render the word *epiteleo* by translating it "will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ," but in so doing they set up an incongruous statement since the words "will perfect" (verb) are not compatible with the word *until* (*achris*.) One does not perfect a thing until a certain time. I challenge anyone to construct a single sensible sentence in which the words *perfect* (verb) and *until* are used together unless they are cast in the negative.

In his *King James II Version*, Mr. Jay Green attempts to give a more honest rendering of *epiteleo* by translating it, "**will finish it until the day of Jesus Christ.**" But this is a poor use of words as *finish* is also incompatible with *until*. If I ask the contractor when my building will be finished he may answer, "I will finish it next week." If so, he has made himself plain. But if he answers, "I will finish it until next week," his words will not make sense and I will demand a clearer answer.

In Philippians 1:6 we are face to face with the inexorable fact that the word "until" (*achris*) does occur, and that its appearance here gives *epiteleo* a somewhat special meaning not found in any other occurrence.

All the facts concerning *epiteleo* can be easily assembled by anyone who will make the search. The root of this word, which is the real clue to its meaning, is *teleo*. This is found 26 times in the New Testament where it is translated finish 8 times, fulfill 7, accomplish 4, pay 2, perform, expire, go over and make an end one time each. The student will note the idea of finishing or ending in all these translations.

All the recognized authorities define the verb *teleo* by using such terms as "to make an end" (Cremer); "to bring to a close" (AbbottSmith). In fact the verb *teleo* and the noun *telos*, from which it is derived, so obviously mean the exact opposite of continuing and continuance that it is of no value to belabor this actuality. Just remember that when Jesus Christ said, "It is finished" (John 19:30), He used the word *teleo*.

In the word *epiteleo* we have *teleo* (finish) with the prefix *epi* ( on) before it. This prefix is used before so many other words that we can tell from this usage that it is usually an accelerative contribution. And of this we can be sure, a prefix or a suffix does not change the meaning of the root. It may change its force or direction but never its meaning. In *epiteleo* the prefix adds an emphatic note; just as in *epignosis*, *gnosis* means knowledge and *epignosis* means exact and full knowledge. Since *teleo* means to finish or to end, there is no possible way that *epiteleo* can mean continuance. Yet this is what we have in most translations of Phil 1:6, and this leads me to borrow the words of James (3:10) and say, "My brethren these things ought not so to be."

As to the actual meaning of *epiteleo* the authorities are practically unanimous:

\*Young: "to make an end of, complete," In his *Critical Comments* he renders it "will end it fully"

\*Bullinger: "to bring through to an end."

\*Arndt and Gingrich: "end, bring to an end, finish:'

\*Abbott-Smith: "to complete, accomplish, execute, make an end:'

\*Thayer: "to bring to an end, accomplish, perfect, execute, complete,"

Liddell-Scott: "to complete, finish, accomplish:'

\*Bagster's Analytical: "to bring to an end:'

\*Strong: "to fulfill completely; by implication, to terminate:'

\*Vine: "to bring through to an end:'

In the *telos* family of words (that is words that contain this root) there are twenty-six members. These words are found 249 times in the New Testament. If an examination is made of every occurrence, it will be found that there is no idea of continuance in any of them. They all denote cessation, accomplishment, and bringing to an end. This is to be expected since this is what the root means.

As an example of this we might take the root *cardi* (Gk. *kardi*) which is found in so many English words, and which everyone knows indicates the heart. No prefixes or suffixes ever change its meaning, neither does any other word with which it may be combined. Thus we have *cardiogram*, *electrocardiogram*, *cardiologic*, *cardiophobia*, and *cardiospasm*, But no matter what comes before it or follows it, it always means the heart.

What would the reader think if he came upon a doctor who twisted this word around until it meant the liver? He would probably put him down as an ignorant quack - which I also am inclined to do when I come upon someone who claims to be a practitioner of the truth, but who takes a Greek word that everyone knows means to end or to finish and twists it around until it means continuance.

Since in this passage the word *achris* (until) regulates the exact meaning of *epiteleio*, deliberate attempts have been made to alter the obvious meaning of this term. This word means until, that is, up to a declared limit, just as it does in the preceding passage (1:5).

When any matter, process, or work is brought to a full end until a certain time, then it is most evident that it has been suspended, and this is exactly what *epiteleio* signifies in this passage. In view of this I would freely translate Philippians 1:6: **"Having come to this settled and firm persuasion concerning this very thing, namely that the One having begun a good work in you will be suspending it until the day of Christ Jesus."** If any should prefer the wording "will be bringing it to a full end" in place of "will be suspending it" he can have his choice. Both statements are the same.

The future tense here has bothered some, and it has been used by others to claim a continuing work of God. The future tense here is correct. At Acts 28:28 a declaration was made that introduced a new dispensation, but the old one had to be closed out. There was a transitional period of several years that followed Paul's declaration.

The translation set forth above is true to the Greek and it is also true to the truth. The statement has to do with that dispensation (administration) of God that prevailed from the resurrection of Jesus Christ until Paul's announcement in Acts 28:28, the thirty three years of the Acts period. Read its constitution in Mark 16:15-20 and note how many of these signs have been brought to a full end.

Consider the twelve apostles. These men were destined to sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19: 28). This is an explicit promise from the lips of our Lord which if it is not fulfilled to the letter then no other words of His are dependable. Others were promised rule over ten cities or five cities. It is most evident that from the moment that He called these to follow Him that they were in the school of Jesus Christ, being trained for the service they would perform, a training that continued through the entire Acts period. And yet not one of these men has reached this goal. That good work that God began among them has been brought to a full end until the day of Jesus Christ.

According to one of the most important parables of the kingdom of God, and yet the most ignored and neglected, the progress of the kingdom of God was to be in five stages: 1, the blade; 2, the ear; 3, the full grain in the ear; 4, the ripened grain; and, 5, the harvest. Mark 4:26-29. The first two stages of these are already history. In the 33 years of the Acts period the blade stage and the ear stage were manifest realities. The kingdom was no longer proclaimed as coming; it was already there, even if only in its preliminary stages. And yet it never advanced to the "full grain in the ear," when "**Jesus shall reign where'er the sun does his successive journeys run.**" If we ask, "What happened?" the answer is found in Philippians 1:6. That good work that God began among them has been suspended until the day of Jesus Christ.

Consider the Apostle Paul, a man who possessed divine powers that were so great that men are inclined to think that he never possessed them at all.

Read Romans 15:17-19, and consider his miracles of healing in Acts 28:8-9. And yet after Acts 28:28 he was forced to confess that he had left his helper and traveling companion, Trophimus, "at Miletum sick" (2 Tim. 4:20). This plain, honest statement is very near to the final inspired word he ever wrote. The good work that God had been doing through him was also suspended.

This explains more fully his apologetic note in Phil. 1:7, in which he justifies what he has just said concerning them. Translators have not yet been able to decide whether he said, "I have you in my heart," or "Ye have me in your heart." Nevertheless we know what he meant. This statement means far more in the Greek than it does in the English. We have been prone here to make "the heart" the seat of affections and have Paul expressing either his love for them or their love for him. In Greek thought the heart is the seat of the personality, standing for the collective life of the person, which is influenced by everything that affects the life. He is telling them that he is in the same boat they are, or that they are in this together. See also Phil. 1:30.

However, let no one push this to an extreme and say that I believe that everything that God was doing in the Acts period came to an end. This is not true. In the Greek of Phil. 1: 10 they were directed to be "testing the things that carry through." And this we do.

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