

Know the Word
The Book of Philippians
Lesson 1

Introduction

Many of Paul's epistles were called forth by the need to set things right in a given church, to oppose false teaching, or to correct lax practice. But Philippians is comparatively different: it is a letter to a church of Paul's own foundation with which he is well pleased. He does oppose false teaching and makes some comments on the opponents he and the Philippian church faced, but the main thrust of the letter is taken up with more enjoyable matters. Outstanding in this letter is the hymn in 2:6-11 where Paul brings the clear message about the greatness of Christ and His condescension in taking a lowly place to bring salvation. The letter is an encouragement to Christians then and now.

Philippians is Paul's joy letter. The church in that Macedonian city had been a great encouragement to Paul. The Philippian believers had enjoyed a very special relationship with Paul, so he wrote them a personal expansion of his love and affection. They had brought him great joy (4:1). The concept of rejoicing or joy appears sixteen times in four chapters, and the pages radiate this positive message, culminating in the exhortation to "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (4:4). Let us look at the background of this city before we study Paul's letter.

History of the City of Philippi

Originally the city was named Krenides, which means fountains. Philip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great, at the outset of expanding his Macedonian empire annexed the adjoining territory in which the city of Krenides was located. After expanding and fortifying the city, he renamed it Philippi after himself.

Alexander the Great proceeded to conquer the Mediterranean world. In doing so he spread the Hellenistic culture and the Greek language throughout that vast area. God used his spreading of the Greek language to make it possible for the apostles like Paul to proclaim the gospel from the east into the west and

into Europe. The Greek language became the language in which the New Testament was written.

The Romans conquered the Macedonian empire about two hundred years later. By then the gold in the mines around Philippi had been depleted. Philippi had therefore been deserted. In 42 B.C. Philippi was defeated by the Romans and was made a Roman colony where retired army veterans were given a grant of land as a reward for their years of service and were settled there.

Being a Roman colony, the citizens of Philippi were mostly Roman citizens. They dressed in Roman attire, used Roman coins, and spoke Latin, which was the official language of the city.

Map of Philippi



The Start of the Church of Philippi

- The Spirit led Paul to establish the church of Philippi on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:6-12)
- Acts 16:12 states that Philippi, a Roman colony, was the leading city of the district of Macedonia.
- Few Jews lived in Philippi. Thus there was no synagogue where Paul could begin to preach the gospel of Jesus as he had customarily done in the eastern cities of Galatia on his first missionary journey.
- On the Sabbath Paul and his co-workers left the city and walked to the banks of a river (Acts 16:13).
- There they suspected they would find a place of prayer where the few Jews in the area gathered for prayer on the Sabbath.
- They spoke to the women who had gathered there. One of them was a proselyte named Lydia (Acts 16:14), who was a worshipper of the Lord God. She was a woman of some means and wealth.
- She and her household were then baptized. She urged Paul and his companions to stay at her house, which then became the headquarters for Paul's mission work and the church in Philippi.
- Sometime later with the incident of Paul casting a demon of divination from a slave girl, he and Silas were imprisoned (Acts 16:16-24).
- Paul and Silas shared the gospel with their jailer. The jailer and his household believed and were baptized (Acts 16:26-34).
- With the conversion of Lydia and the Roman jailer and their households the church of Philippi came into being. From this small beginning the church grew in numbers. It was the first church Paul established in Europe.

Writer of the Letter to the Philippians

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, Philippians 1:1. Paul is the stated author of Philippians, and few have questioned his authorship. It was written to the Christians in the Roman colony of Philippi and to all believers everywhere.

The Setting of Philippians (A.D. 62)

- Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians during a time of imprisonment.
- Scholars have debated Paul's location when he wrote Philippians. Caesarea, Ephesus, and Rome have been the three most commonly proposed locations.
- However it has been held traditionally that this particular time of imprisonment was in Rome. There is a reference in this letter to the "praetorium" (1:13), which is understood to refer to the palace guard, which was centred in Rome. This would fit the situation in Philippians, as would the reference to "those who belong to Caesar's household" who send greetings through Paul (4:22).
- While under house arrest in Rome, Paul was able to conduct a limited ministry. He was able to receive visitors, such as the Jewish leaders of the synagogue in Rome (cf. Acts 28:16-29), and to minister to those who came to him. He was also able to minister to the needs of the churches by means of letters which he was free to write.

Occasion for the Writing of the Letter to the Philippians

- While under house arrest in Rome, Paul received a visitor named Epaphroditus. He was a member of the church in Philippi. On behalf of the congregation he had brought a gift to support Paul's needs (4:18b).
- Epaphroditus assisted Paul in his work and in the process he became seriously ill and nearly died.
- Paul was intent on sending Epaphroditus back to the Philippians, who had heard of his serious illness. Epaphroditus could then report Paul's circumstances to the Philippians (2:25-30).
- Paul took the opportunity of Epaphroditus' return to write his letter to the Philippians.

Paul wrote with these reasons in mind:

- a) He wanted to acknowledge the gifts that they had sent to him (4:10, 14-18)
- b) He wanted to inform them about his circumstances in Rome and about his trial and to take away their concern that his imprisonment might have been a set-back for the gospel (1:12-26). He wished to tell them of

his plan to send Timothy to them, and subsequently to come himself (2:19-24).

- c) He felt it was necessary to explain why he was sending Epaphroditus back to them, when apparently they had intended that he should remain with the apostle and minister to him (2:25-30).
 - d) News brought to him indicated the dangers of divisions and party spirit among the Philippian Christians, and he wanted to exhort them to live and act and witness in the unity of the Spirit (1:27-28; 2:1-11; 4:2f)
 - e) He was also made aware of the danger of their being influenced by the Judaizers and he wanted to remind them and demonstrate to them that legalism was a basic contradiction of the gospel (3:3-11), and also to warn them of the danger of a false perfectionism (3:12-16).
 - f) Finally, his writing provided an opportunity for him to encourage the Philippian Christians to suffer bravely with joy in their hearts, to live in single-mindedness and to trust their lives to their Lord in all things and under all circumstances (1:27-30; 2:12-18; 3:17-21; 4:4-9)
-

Literary Features

- Philippians follows many of the same conventions as the other Pauline epistles. The salutation, thanksgiving, prayer, body, series of moral exhortations, greeting, and benediction are all readily identifiable.
- Paul is writing to people who help provide the prayer support and financial assistance necessary for his ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles.
- To fulfill his end of the partnership, Paul assures the Philippians of his prayers, updates them on his personal circumstances, reports on the effectiveness of gospel ministry in his area, offers spiritual encouragement, and expresses heartfelt gratitude for the many ways they support his ministry.
- With its highly patterned lines of praise to Christ, 2:5–11 is usually identified as one of the earliest hymns or confessions of the Christian church.
- The letter exhibits such stylistic techniques as aphorism, metaphor, and lyric to heighten the impact of the writing.

- The book of Philippians is unified by its joyful, almost exuberant mood; by the strong personal relationship between its author and its recipients (a relationship that is almost constantly in view, from the beginning of the letter to the end); and by the many connections Paul draws between the saving work of Jesus Christ and the servant ministry of his followers, who are called to live and die according to the pattern of the sufferings, death, resurrection, and glorious exaltation of Jesus himself.

The Christ of Philippians

The great (kenosis) passage is one of several portraits of Christ in this epistle. No passage is clearer and more declarative regarding the nature, fact, and purpose of the incarnation of Christ as is found in this book, the great *kenosis* passage (2:5-11). Further, in view of all Christ was, is, has and will accomplish, Paul declares Christ as the believer's life.

In chapter 1, Paul sees Christ as his life ("For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" - 1:21).

In chapter 2, Christ is the model of true humility ("Your attitude should be same as that of Christ Jesus" - 2:5).

Chapter 3 presents Him as the One Who ". . . will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body" - 3:21).

In chapter 4, He is the source of Paul's power over circumstances ("I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength" - 4:13).

Key Phrase: "To Live is Christ, and to die is gain"

This is the central concept to the letter to the Philippians. Every chapter resounds with the theme of the centrality of Jesus in the Christian's life. Paul, the apostle, is our model. High points include the following:

" . . . I am in chains for Christ" (1:13b)

“. . . but [I] will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death” (1:20b)

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (2:5);

"What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (3:8);

“I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (3:12);

"I can do everything through Him (Christ) who gives me strength" (4:13).

Some Aspects of Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians

1) Paul’s Account of his Present Circumstances

Paul's usual salutation (1:1-2) is followed by his thanksgiving, warm regard, and prayer on behalf of the Philippians (1:3-11). For years, they have participated in the apostle's ministry, and he prays for their continued growth in the real knowledge of Christ. Paul shares the circumstances of his imprisonment and rejoices in the spread of the gospel in spite of and because of his situation (1:12-26). As he considers the outcome of his approaching trial, he expresses his willingness “to depart, and be with Christ” (1:23) or to continue in ministry (1:24). Paul encourages the Philippians to remain steadfast in the face of opposition and coming persecution (1:27-30).

2) Paul’s Appeal to have the Mind of Christ

Paul exhorts the Philippians to have a spirit of unity and mutual concern by embracing the attitude of humility (2:1-4), the greatest example of which is the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ (2:5-11). The (kenosis), or "emptying," of Christ, does not mean that He divested Himself of His deity, but that He withheld His preincarnate glory and voluntarily restricted His use of certain attributes (e.g., omnipresence and

omniscience). Paul asks the Philippians to apply this attitude to their lives (2:12-18), and he gives two more examples of sacrifice, the ministers of Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30).

3) Paul's Appeal to have the Knowledge of Christ

It appears that Paul is about to close his letter ("Finally, my brothers," 3:1) when he launches into a warning about the continuing problem of legalism (3:1-9). Paul refutes this teaching with revealing autobiographical details about his previous attainments in Judaism. Compared to the goal of knowing Christ, those pursuits are as nothing. True righteousness is received through faith, not by mechanical obedience to any law. Paul yearns for the promised attainment of the resurrected body (3:10-11).

4) Paul's Appeal to have the peace of Christ

In a series of exhortations, Paul urges the Philippians to have peace with the brethren by living a life-style of unity, prayerful dependence, and holiness (4:2-9). In 4:7, Paul describes the secret of the peace of God. He then rejoices over their gift, but explains that the power of Christ enables him to live above his circumstances (4:10-20).

A Look at the Key Themes (Taken from ESV Study Bible, Page 2277)

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Christians need to keep making progress in their lives. | <u>1:12, 25; 3:12-16</u> |
| 2. A proper spiritual outlook is critical for progress in the faith. | <u>1:5-11; 2:1-11; 3:7, 15; 4:7-9</u> |

3. Christ is the supreme example of loving and faithful service to God, and mature Christians can also serve as role models in this regard. [1:12–26](#); [2:5–11](#), [19–30](#); [3:3–17](#); [4:9](#)
4. Suffering will come, but through faith it can be met with joy. [1:12–26](#); [2:14–15](#); [4:4](#), [11–13](#), [19](#)
5. Prayer is crucial for maintaining a joyful Christian life. [1:3–11](#); [4:5–7](#)
6. The gospel is not individualistic: Christians are to share in rich fellowship with one another, and to be united together in service to promote the gospel. [1:4](#), [7](#), [24–27](#); [2:1–4](#), [19–30](#); [4:2–4](#), [14](#)
7. The old covenant and observance of the law cannot provide the necessary right standing with God. Believers can be saved only through faith in Jesus Christ. [3:2–10](#)
8. Jesus is fully God and fully man. Because of his suffering on the cross, he is now exalted as Lord and Christ. [2:5–11](#)

Joy and Rejoicing in Philippians

Reference

Paul ...

- [1:4](#) prays with joy
- [1:18](#) rejoices that Christ is proclaimed
- [1:25](#) will remain living on earth, for the Philippians' joy in the faith
- [2:2](#) asks the Philippians to complete his joy

<u>2:17–18</u>	is glad and rejoices with the Philippians
<u>2:28</u>	sends Epaphroditus, that the Philippians might rejoice
<u>2:29</u>	tells the Philippians to receive Epaphroditus with joy
<u>3:1</u>	tells the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord
<u>4:1</u>	tells the Philippians they are his joy
<u>4:4</u>	tells the Philippians twice to rejoice in the Lord
<u>4:10</u>	rejoiced in the Lord at the Philippians' concern for him

Partnering with Paul in the Gospel in Many Ways

<u>1:5</u>	“partnership in the gospel”
<u>1:7</u>	“partakers with me of grace”
<u>1:14–19</u>	“through your prayers”
<u>1:27</u>	“striving side by side for the faith”
<u>2:22</u>	“served with me in the gospel”
<u>2:25</u>	“my brother, and fellow worker, and fellow soldier”
<u>3:17</u>	“join in imitating me”
<u>4:3</u>	“laboured side by side with me”
<u>4:15</u>	“partnership with me in giving and receiving”

Outline (Taken from ESV Study Bible)

I Greeting and Prayer (1:1-11)

- A. Salutation from Paul and Timothy (1:1-2)
- B. Paul's thanksgiving and prayer for the Philippians (1:3-11)

II. Paul's Reflections on His Imprisonment (1:12-30)

- A. Paul's imprisonment has meant progress for the gospel (1:12-18)
- B. To live is Christ (1:19-26)
- C. Encouragement to walk worthy of the gospel (1:27-30)

III. Exhortation to Humble Service (2:1-30)

- A. Encouragement to unity in faith and service to one another (2:1-4)
- B. Christ's example of humble service (2:5-11)
- C. Living as lights in the world (2:12-18)
- D. Timothy as an example of a service-centred life (2:19-24)
- E. Epaphroditus as another example of service (2:25-30)

IV. Opponents of the Gospel: Where Does Righteousness Come from? (3:1-21)

- A. Initial call to rejoice in the Lord (3:1)
- B. Contrast between the opponents of the gospel and the true people of God (3:2-3)
- C. Paul's renunciation of spiritual and ethnic privileges for the sake of knowing Christ (3:4-11)
- D. Paul's progress in the gospel through Christ, not the law (3:12-16)
- E. A call to follow Paul's example of commitment to Jesus as Lord (3:17-21)

V. Concluding Exhortations and Thanksgiving (4:1-23)

- A. Standing together for the gospel (4:1-3)
- B. Rejoicing in faith (4:4-9)
- C. Thanksgiving for the Philippians' gift; Paul's contentment in God (4:10-20)
- D. Greetings (4:21-22)
- E. Benediction (4:23)

Topic for Discussion next week

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:” (2:5)

How did the apostle Paul highlight this with regards to:

- a) humility (2:1-11), and
- b) being content and sharing with others (4:10-19)

And how do these aspects apply to us SJSMers today?