

Letter to the Philippians

Theme:

The Unity and Joy We Have in Christ



Traditional place Paul met Lydia.

Early Christian Church building near the jail in which Paul and Silas were imprisoned at Philippi.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE CITY OF PHILIPPI

Background, the city of Philippi:

1. Philippi was a city in the province of Macedonia and was visited by the apostle Paul (Acts 15:1, 12-40; 20:6; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 2:2).
 - a. The **Topography** of Philippi:
 - 1) The city was located in eastern Macedonia in a plain East of Mount Pangaeus between the Strymon and Nestos Rivers.
 - 2) It was near the banks of a deep and rapid stream, the Gangites, which ran about ten miles to the seaport town of Neapolis.
 - 3) The city derived its importance from the fertile plain that surrounded it.
 - 4) It was also located along a strategic route between Asia and Europe.
 - 5) Gold mines were in the mountains to the north, and the seacoast was to the south.
 - b. The **History** of Philippi:
 - 1) It was first inhabited by colonists from the island of Thasos, who worked the gold mines to the north.
 - 2) Philip II of Macedon (the father of Alexander the Great) recognized its importance, sent a large colony there in 356 B.C. and changed its name to Philippi.
 - 3) The Romans defeated the Macedonians in 167 B.C. and became a Roman province.
 - 4) The decisive battle of the second civil war of Rome was fought at Philippi in 42 B.C.
 - a) Brutus and Cassius (assassinated Julius Caesar) were defeated by Mark Antony.
 - b) Many of the Roman soldiers who fought in the war and other veterans retired to the city of Philippi.
 - c) It was officially made a Roman colony with all its benefits.
 - 5) Augustus Caesar (Luke 2:1) opened the city for supporters of Antony who had lost their holdings in Rome during the civil war, thus, greatly increasing the population.
 - 6) Those who retired to the city brought their "riches" of bounty with them and turned Philippi into "a little Rome."

2. The city had a famous school of medicine, which was connected with one of the guilds of physicians that sent its adherents throughout the Hellenistic world.
 - a. It is believed that Luke was converted in Troas where Paul received the call to come to Macedonia, and he then joined Paul on the second missionary journey (Acts 16:8-10).
 - b. It is implied by the cessation of the "we" in Acts 17:1 that Luke remained behind in Philippi to work with the church there.

INTRODUCTION OF THE LETTER TO PHILIPPIANS

A. Authorship:

1. The opening salutation names Paul and Timothy as the writers of the letter.
2. Paul alone is responsible for its composition because he begins at once with the singular (1:3) and continues throughout.
3. It is personal letter from Paul.

B. Paul and the Church at Philippi:

1. The church in Philippi was founded by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:12-40).
2. They began the work in the province of Macedonia because God had summoned them in a very special way to come over there and preach the gospel (Acts 16:9-11).
3. Paul, Luke, Silas, and others came from Troy by way of Neapolis on the second missionary journey.
4. He went to a place of prayer beside the river on the Sabbath where he sat down with a group of women, among them, Lydia, a seller of purple dye from Thyatira.
5. Paul sat down and met and spoke with the women meeting on the riverside.
6. The initial number of converts was not large.
 - a. There was Lydia the business woman and her household, but the number is not given
 - b. Perhaps the soothsaying slave girl was converted.

- c. The Philippian jailer and his household were converted, but the number is not given.
 - d. Clement as well as Euodia and Syntyche might have also been won at this time (Phil. 4:2-3).
7. It is implied from these few converts that the resulting congregation was predominantly Gentile in origin.
- a. Philippi did not have enough Jews (ten families with heads of households) to form a synagogue
 - b. The women, therefore, met at the riverside.
8. On the way to prayer Paul was admonished by a slave girl with a spirit of divination, who annoyed him for some time thereafter.
- a. Paul finally cast out the demon to the displeasure of her owners.
 - b. The owners of the girl dragged Paul and Silas before the magistrates of the city and accused them of disturbing the peace.
 - c. The magistrates gave orders that Paul and Silas be scourged.
 - d. They were put in stocks in the inner prison.
 - 1) At midnight an earthquake shook the prison.
 - 2) Fearful his prisoners had escaped, the jailer contemplated suicide.
 - 3) Paul indicated to the jailer that he and Silas were still there.
 - 4) The jailer was told not to harm himself.
 - e. Paul and Silas were taken to the jailer's house where he and his household were taught about Jesus and were then baptized at midnight.
9. When the authorities learned that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens they apologized to them and asked them to leave the city.
10. They then visited Lydia and other believers before they departed for Thessalonica (Acts 16:40).
11. At this point the pronoun of the first person ("I") is dropped until Paul returned to Macedonia on the third missionary journey (Acts 20:5).

NOTE: Many conjecture that Luke, a native of Philippi or, at least, a medical student there at one time, was left behind to work among the churches of Macedonia.

C. Place and Date of Origin:

1. Place:

- a. Paul indicates that he is a prisoner (Phil. 1:7, 13, 17).
- b. Paul was a prisoner several times: Rome (first and second time), Caesarea, and possibly brief imprisonments at Ephesus or elsewhere (2 Cor. 6:5; 11:23).
- c. The traditional view is Paul's first imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28: 1 6-3 1).
 - 1) Paul speaks of the "praetorian guard," (Phil. 1:13).
 - 2) Rome as the place for writing this letter would give natural explanation to the phrase "Caesar's household," (Phil 4:22).
 - 3) It agrees with the description of Paul's imprisonment in Acts 28:16-31.
 - 4) He was at liberty to receive companions, carry on correspondence with the churches, and arrange for the travels of assistants.
 - 5) He expected a favorable verdict regarding his imprisonment soon (Phil. 1:25; 2:23-24).

2. Date:

- a. Paul spent a few years in his first imprisonment in Rome.
- b. The date of Philippians is placed at the end of the Rome imprisonment because of the time needed for the four journeys necessary between Rome and Philippi.
 - 1) Someone brought news to Philippi that Paul was in prison.
 - 2) Epaphroditus was sent to Rome with a gift for Paul.
 - 3) Someone brought news back to Philippi that Epaphroditus was ill.
 - 4) A report of their concern for Paul was again brought to Paul, c. The best possible conjecture is A.D. 63 near the end of the first Roman imprisonment.

D. Occasion and Purpose:

1. Occasion:

- a. The immediate occasion for the writing of Philippians was the return home of Epaphroditus following his recovery from a serious illness (2:25-30).
- b. It gave Paul the opportunity to commend him as a co-worker with Paul and to write them concerning a variety of matters.

2. Purpose:

- a. Paul's immediate purpose was to assure an appropriate welcome for the returning Epaphroditus.
 - 1) His valiant service merited a warm welcome (2:25-30).
 - 2) He was to be of encouragement.
- b. Paul wrote about friendship matters:
 - 1) Paul gave an outpouring of love for a church that stood by him in difficult times.
 - 2) Paul gave them anxiously awaited news about himself and the work in Rome.
 - a) The verdict of the court of Caesar was being awaited and Timothy would send word as soon as a verdict is rendered (2:23).
 - b) He was confident of release and was expecting to visit them (2:24).
 - c) His imprisonment had actually advanced the gospel (1:12-20).
- c. Paul wrote to give them thanks for their generosity in helping him on several occasions:
 - 1) They had twice sent a contribution to Paul while he was at Thessalonica (Phil. 4:15-16).
 - 2) They had also sent him a gift at Corinth (Acts 18:5; 2 Cor. 11:8-9).
- d. Paul gave them much needed exhortations:
 - 1) He urged harmony and unity in aim and work (1:27-29).

- 2) He urged humility as exemplified by Christ, who gave up his equality with God and became a servant in the flesh (2:1-11).
- 3) He urged the cultivation of joy and gladness amid difficulties (3:1; 4: 1, 4-7).
- 4) He urged the pursuit of noble virtues (4:8, 9).
- 5) He urged the settlement of disagreements among them (4:2, 3).
- 6) He strongly warned against the Judaizers (3:1-6).
- 7) He gently rebuked a "perfectionist" element among them (3:12-16).
- 8) He censured sensualists and materialists (3:18-21).

E. Outline sketch:

1. Paul's relations to the Philippians (1:1-11)
2. Paul's account of his circumstances (1:12-26)
 - a) Joy at the furtherance of the gospel (1:12-20)
 - b) Contemplation of life and death (1:21-26)
3. Practical appeals to the Philippians (1:27-2:18)
 - a) Appeal to steadfastness (1:27-30)
 - b) Appeal to unity and humility (2:1-11)
 - c) Appeal to realize God's salvation (2:12-18)
4. Plans for his companions (2:19-30)
5. Warnings against errors (3:1-4:1)
6. Exhortations to the Philippians (4:2-9)
7. Thanks for their gift (4: 10-20)
8. Conclusion: (4:21-23)

CHRISTIAN JOY INCLUDES:

The joy of prayer (1:4)

The joy that Jesus Christ is preached (1:18)

The joy of faith (1:25)

The joy of seeing Christians in fellowship together (2:2)

The joy of suffering for Christ (2:17)

The joy of news of a loved one (2:28)

The joy of Christian hospitality (2:29)

The joy of the man who has been baptized into Christ (3:1; 4:1)

The joy of the man who has won one soul for the Lord (4:1)

The joy inherent in every gift (4:10), this being not in regard merely to its value but to the fact of another's caring.

MAJOR OUTLINE OF THE LETTER TO THE

PHILIPPIANS

Part One: Christ Is the Christian's *Life Purpose* (1:1-30)¹

I. Paul Speaks of His Relationship to the Philippians (1:1-11).

A. He extends his greetings: (1:1-2).

1. He pictures himself and Timothy as bondservants (owned slaves) of Christ.
2. He extends to them grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. He offers his supplications on their behalf (1:1-11).

1. **For whom he prays:** He prays for the overseers, deacons, and all Christians in Philippi (1:1-2).
3. **When he prays:** He prays for them every time he thinks of them (1:3).
4. **How he prays:** He prays with his heart filled with joy.
5. **Why he prays:** The Philippians have rendered great assistance to Paul, both in prison and out of prison (1:5).
6. **What he prays:**
 - a. He prays that God's word be carried to its completion in every believer until the return of Christ (1:6).
 - b. He prays that they might be filled with love (1:9)
 - c. He prays that they might have the spirit of discernment, be sincere, and without offense (1:10).
 - d. He prays they be filled with the fruits of righteousness which are of Jesus Christ (1:11).

II. Paul Gives an Account of His Circumstances (1:12-26).

A. There is the **report** about his imprisonment (1:12-13).

1. His imprisonment has served to advance the gospel, starting with the palace guard and spreading from there (1:12-13).
2. His imprisonment is being recognized by all as being precipitated by his connection with Christ (1:12-13).

B. There is the **reaction** to his imprisonment, (1:14-17).

¹ Willmington, Harold. *The Outline Bible*. Carroll Stream, Ill.: Tyndale Publishing, 1999.

NOTE: Some of the headings are from this source.

1. His friends have been encouraged to increase their efforts in proclaiming the gospel (1:14, 17).
 - a. They have been made more confident and bold to preach the gospel
 - b. They do it for they know Paul is appointed to defend the gospel.
 - c. They do it out of love and good will.
 2. His foes are preaching the gospel, hoping to make the apostle jealous and miserable (1:15-16).
 - a. They proclaim the Christ out of jealousy and opposition, for they are jealous of the way God has used Paul.
 - b. They proclaim the Christ out of selfish ambition without sincerity.
 - c. They proclaim the Christ supposing to add affliction to Paul's chains.
- C. There is the **rejoicing** over the results of his imprisonment (1:18).
1. Whatever the motive, Paul rejoices that the gospel is being preached.
 2. Whatever the motive, Paul rejoices that the truth is being preached.
- D. There is the **resolve** to persevere (1:19-26).
1. He has a *dilemma* (1:19-23).
 - a. To remain in this life would result in additional hardships (1:19-21a, 22).
 - b. To depart this life would mean being with Christ (1:21b, 23).
 2. He makes a *decision* (1:24-26).
 - a. His greater desire is to remain because it is more needed for them and the fruit his work will bear.
 - b. His confidence is that he will remain and continue with them for their progress and joy.
 - c. His desire is to come and see them again and have great rejoicing.
 3. He makes a *request* (1:27-28).
 - a. They should continue conducting themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel no matter what his circumstances might be.
 - b. They should not fear their opponents, because to do so would give them encouragement.
 4. He gives them a *reminder* (1:29-30).
 - a. They are to trust in Christ.
 - b. They are to suffer for Christ.

Part Two: Christ Is the Christian's *Life Pattern* (2:1-30).

I. Paul Offers A Challenge to the Church in Philippi; Have the Humility of Christ In Their Hearts (2:1-18).

- A. They need to appreciate the **essentials** of humility (2:1-4).
 - 1. There must be unity in love.
 - 2. There must be unity in spirit and purpose.
- B. They need to follow the greatest **example** of humility, Jesus Christ (2:5-11).
 - 1. Christ suffered **pain** (2:5-8).
 - a. He did not cling to his prerogatives (truthful claims) as God's equal.
 - b. He laid aside his equality in glory.
 - c. He took upon himself the nature of a human servant.
 - d. He humbled himself.
 - e. He became obedient and died on the cross.
 - 2. Christ received **gain** (2:9-11).
 - a. God has exalted him to the highest place.
 - b. God has given him a name above all names.
 - c. God has insured that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.
- C. They need to respond to Paul's **exhortation** to humility (2:12-18).
 - 1. They should labor earnestly to make sure of their own salvation (2:12-13).
 - 2. They should not complain, grumble, or argue (2:14).
 - 3. They should shine as beacons of light in a dark world (2:15).
 - 4. They should cling to the word of life so that there will be rejoicing at the return of Christ (2:16).
 - 5. They should rejoice with Paul in his sacrifice (2:17-18).

II. Paul Promises To Send Messengers to the Church In Philippi (2:19-30).

- A. He promises to send **Timothy** (2:19-24).
 - 1. Timothy is a messenger of God who equally cares for their state.
 - 2. Timothy is a man of God who seeks not his own, but the things of God.
 - 3. Timothy is a son of Paul in the gospel who has proved his character.
- B. He promises to come and see them **himself** (2:24).

C. He promises to send **Epaphroditus** (2:25-30).

1. Epaphroditus is a brother, a worker, and a soldier.
2. Epaphroditus is a person who desires to help those who are in difficult circumstances.
3. Epaphroditus is a man who became very sick, near unto death.
4. Epaphroditus is a man who will not give up and therefore is willing to return to Philippi that they might all rejoice.
5. Epaphroditus is to be received with all gladness and held in high esteem.

Part Three: Christ Is the Christian's *Life Prize* (3:1-21).

I. Paul Warns The Church in Philippi Against *Corruption and Errors* (3:1-3, 18-19).

A. He tells them **who** these foes are (3:1-3).

1. They are Judaizers who teach that circumcision is necessary for salvation.
 - a. Those who worship God in the spirit and do not put their confidence in the flesh are the *true circumcision*.
 - b. Those who require *circumcision* of the flesh rely upon outward appearances as testimony of their righteousness.
 - c. Those who experience the *circumcision* of the heart demonstrate an inward change which is expressed by an outward life of righteous living.
2. They are worldly people who focus on earthly things (3:19).

B. He tells them **what and who** these foes are (3:18, 19b).

1. They are enemies of the cross.
2. They are proud and sensual materialists.

C. He tells them **where** these foes are headed (3:19a).

1. Their shame will be their glory.
2. Their end will be destruction.

II. Paul Informs The Church in Philippi of the *Cost* (3:4-8).

A. He gave up his **prestige** among the Jews (3:4-5)

B. He gave up his **persecution** against the church (3:6).

III. Paul Informs The Church in Philippi of the *Gain* (3:7-8).

- A. He gave up what he once thought important (3:7).
- B. He gained the priceless knowledge of Jesus Christ (3:8).

IV. Paul Informs The Church in Philippi of the *Crown* (3:9-14, 20-21).

- A. He describes four things he received from becoming a child of God (3:9-14, 20-21).
 - 1. He received a **new righteousness** which is from God by faith (3:9-12)
 - 2. He received a **new goal** which inspires him to reach forward to those things which are ahead (3:13-14)
 - 3. He received a **new home**; for, his (our) citizenship is now in heaven (3:20).
 - 4. He received a **new body**, a promise that will be fulfilled at the second appearance of Christ (3:21).
- B. He describes his desire in eagerly awaiting the return of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (3:20-21).

V. Paul Informs the Church in Philippi of the *Command* (3:15-17).

- A. They are to pattern their lives after his (3:15-16).
 - 1. This requires a mature mind.
 - 2. This requires forgetting the past.
 - 3. This requires being of the same mind in pressing toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
- B. They are to note those who so walk in following his pattern (3:17).

Part Four: Christ Is the Christian's *Life Power* (4:1-23).

I. Paul Urges Them To Take Advantage of *Unifying Power* (4:1-3).

- A. There were two contenders (4:1-2).
 - 1. Euodia and Syntyche were arguing with each other.
 - 2. Euodia and Syntyche should be of the same mind in the Lord.
- B. There were those in Philippi who could reconcile the differences (4:3).

II. Paul Urges Them To Take Advantage of *Fortifying Power* (4:4-7).

- A. There is the power of **prayer** (4:4-6)
 - 1. We must never be stressful in anything, and be gentle in all things.
 - 2. We must always be thankful in everything.
- B. There is the power of **peace** (4:7).
 - 1. The peace of God surpasses all understanding.
 - 2. The peace of God will guard your hearts and minds.

III. Paul Urges Them To Take Advantage of His *Exemplifying Power* (4:9).

- A. He offers himself as a spiritual role model (4:9).
- B. He proffers that the God of peace will be with them if they follow his example (4:9).

IV. Paul Urges Them To Take Advantage of *Satisfying Power* (4:10-13).

- A. The satisfaction is described (4:10-12).
 - 1. Paul is content even when hungry and in need of many things (4:10-12).
 - 2. Paul is content when filled and in need of nothing.
- B. The satisfier is described (4:13).
 - 1. Christ makes it possible.
 - 2. Christ strengthens him so that he can do all things.

V. Paul Gives Them Thanks For The *Sweet Smelling Power* (4:14-18).

- A. He is grateful for the money and gifts they sent to him on several occasions (4:14-17).
 - 1. They shared in his distress by sending gifts by the hands of Epaphroditus.
 - 2. They shared in the past when he was on his missionary journeys when no one else did.
 - 3. They sent aid once and again to Paul when he was in Thessalonica.
 - 4. They abounded because of the fruit that was registered to their account.
- B. He is grateful for their acceptable sacrifice which was well pleasing to God (3:18).

VI. Paul Promises Them They Will Be Blessed (4:19).

- A. God supplied his needs.
- B. God will supply their needs according to His riches in glory by Jesus Christ.

IV. Paul Gives His Closing Greeting and Blessing (4:21-23).

- A. He wants every saint in Philippi greeted as everyone in Rome greets them (4:21).
- B. He wants them to know that those of Caesar's household especially give them greetings (4:22).
- C. He wants the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to be with them all.



Location of Philippi

RESOURCES*

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*This was the major source for the Major Outline of Philippians.