

**Introduction**

Who wrote the book of Philippians? It is universally accepted that Paul was the author of this epistle.

- Philippians is an interesting letter because Paul did not write it for the sole purpose of correction. Philippians is basically a thank you note to the believers at Philippi for their help to Paul when he was in need. Paul does send along some instruction though on Christian unity.
- One central thought in Philippians is this, only in Christ are real unity and joy possible.

The church in Philippi (which is mostly Gentile) was founded around A.D. 48 or 49 by Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Paul probably wrote this letter from Rome in A.D. 62.

**Themes and Keys to Philippians**

This letter was written to convey Paul's love and gratitude for the believers at Philippi and to exhort them to a lifestyle of unity, holiness, and joy.

Paul seemed to be very close to the church at Philippi. Philippians was not written because of any crisis, but to express Paul's affection for them, his gratitude for their gift (money), his encouragement concerning their Christian growth, his admonitions against false teaching, and his thoughts about his current circumstances (Paul's imprisonment).

- Though Paul did recognize a growing problem of disunity in the church and sought to correct it before it became severe.

The key phrase in Philippians is, *to live is Christ*, we will see throughout the whole letter that Paul connects every thing in life to Christ, especially our unity, joy, and salvation.

The key verses are 1:21 and 4:12 (read verse 11 as well). And the key chapter in Philippians is ch. 2. In this chapter we see the humility of Christ and Paul points out that Christ is to be our example in life.

Christ is very prominent in Philippians.

- In ch.1 Paul sees Christ as his life (1:21).
- In ch.2 Christ is the model of true humility (2:5).
- In ch.3 Christ is the one who transforms us from our lowly earth state to a glorious state (3:21).
- In ch.4 Christ is the source of Paul's power over circumstances (4:13).

Because of the informal nature of Philippians, it is sometimes hard to follow the flow of its content. It seems to jump from topic to topic without a strict outline. There are three things that we should keep in mind as we read Philippians to help us understand it better.

- Friendship was a more significant matter during this period. One type of ancient letter was the letter of friendship. Friends benefited from one another and it was expected that they would give and receive gifts as necessary. Those who stood in opposition to one party, stood in opposition to the other party as well. In these types of letters the writer would share his thoughts and circumstances and inquire about the other's circumstances.
- A letter of moral exhortation many times went along with friendship letters. These letters by a friend or a superior are to either persuade or dissuade the recipient from certain attitudes or behaviors.
- The third thing to keep in mind is that Philippi is a Roman colony. Therefore the devotion of the area was towards the emperor as the only lord. This thinking put Christians in direct opposition with the citizens because Christians proclaimed Christ as the only Lord.

Philippians is the epistle of joy and encouragement in the midst of adverse circumstances.

**Review**

Paul wrote Philippians as a thank you letter to the church in Philippi. It was not written for the sole purpose of correction although Paul goes take the opportunity to send some instruction on Christian unity.

- Paul seems to be very close to the church at Philippi.

The key phrase in Philippians is, *to live is Christ*, we will see throughout the whole letter that Paul connects every thing in life to Christ, especially our unity, joy, and salvation.

**Philippians Chapter 1**

Verses 1 and 2. Paul begins his letter with referring to himself and Timothy as servants of Christ, instead of asserting his apostleship (as he does in his other letters). And he also addresses overseers and deacons. He does not normally do either of these things in his letters, so this suggests Paul close relationship to the church.

- Common to all of his letters though, is the greeting of Grace and Peace. We obtain these through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Verses 3-11. Paul offers a prayer of thanksgiving in vs. 3-8 and then a prayer of petition (requests) in vs. 9-11.

- Many times in Paul's letters the opening prayer anticipates some concerns that Paul will be addressing in the rest of the letter. In it we see Paul's desire for unity with the church in his suffering and his desire for the church to love each other.

Verses 12-26. Paul tells the Philippians of his present circumstances.

Paul is very excited about the spread of the gospel both because of his imprisonment and despite his imprisonment.

- The gospel is spreading through the guards in his prison and also through palace guards and beyond.
- As Paul says in vs. 14, the other brothers are becoming more confident in God and bolder in speaking the truth of the gospel all because of the circumstances that Paul is in.
- Read vs. 15-18. Even in sharing the gospel many times people sin. The gospel should be spread out of love, but some people then, and still people now, spread it because they want to seem important. Paul still rejoices that the same gospel is being spread.

Paul's next section is one that is very applicable for us and for every Christian who ever lived. Paul rejoices despite his circumstances, why, because he is truly in Christ. He understands his standing before God and rejoices in what Christ did to reconcile him to God.

- Our key verse is 1:21. If Paul lives he will continue in his ministry, but if he dies he knows that it will be far greater to be with his savior for all eternity.
- We have such a hard time truly grasping this. Our lives are so important to us, and God is often times very small to us. We like things that we can see and feel. Because of our view of God and our lives, we have a lot of stress and worries. Faith in Christ enables a true believer to be free of those fears and live a life of boldness for God.

Verse 27-30. Paul begins his instruction of unity in Christ despite oppression and suffering.

- These two concerns unity in Christ in a setting of oppression and suffering set up were Paul is going in chapter 2.
- Read vs. 27-30. Suffering will happen to the true believer.
- The only way to stand firm is a continual faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

**Review**

Why did Paul write the letter to the Philippians?

What is our key verse that we found in chapter 1? How is Paul able to have joy in possibly losing his life?

- His identity is in Christ, he is solely focused on his life in Christ and seeks to share that joy with the world.

How are Paul's current circumstances, being in prison, giving other believers boldness? The gospel is still spreading. (1:12-18)

**Philippians Chapter 2**

Chapter 2 is the key chapter in Philippians. Paul gives us a full picture of the grandeur of the sacrifice and humility of Jesus Christ.

The end of chapter 1, vs. 27-30, set us up on where Paul is going in the next chapter. What are the two themes that Paul talks about in these verses? Unity and suffering, unity is vital in a church and among believers and suffering is inescapable to the true believer.

Read 2:1-4. This is Paul's call to the church to be unified, remember Paul did not write this letter for the sole purpose of correction, but did take the opportunity to address some problems that are starting to begin.

- Paul says two things to help unify believers. One, don't do anything from any kind of selfish ambition, this only destroys unity. And two, humility promotes unity, counting others as more significant than yourself is key to being humble.

Paul gives us the perfect example of humility and selflessness in the following section. Read 2:5-11.

- Christ was fully God and already had all of the benefits of this. He didn't cling to it or try to hang onto it, though.
- Christ became human. Notice how Paul connects being human with being a servant and humbling yourself. Christ did this and was killed as a sacrifice for us.
- Because of Christ's humility he is now exalted as Lord over the universe.

Therefore, next section, because of Christ's example and the fact that he is the Lord of the universe our faith should be solely in Christ.

- Have faith with a reverence and awe before Christ. For it is God who gives you salvation. It is God who gives you the ability to obey.

Read 2:14-16. This is referring to our sanctification process. What is sanctification? Throughout our Christian lives, the holy Spirit grows us to be more and more like Christ.

- He grows us to be more blameless, to complain less and less about being humbled. Christians stand out in the world among those who are turned away from God.
- Paul instructs us to holdfast to the word of life, to Christ and the gospel. This is our life in Christ, identifying ourselves with Christ, our life is no longer ours. Notice how Paul continues to point us to Christ, he leaves nothing to our abilities to try our best. We take full comfort in the person of Christ, and who we already are in Christ.

In the last section Paul shares his desires in sending Timothy and hopefully coming himself.

- Paul gives us two more pictures of sacrifice and humility with the lives of both Timothy and Epaphroditus and the work that they do for the gospel.

Pride is a stumbling block to unity and humility. As Americans this letter is as much applicable to us as it was to the Philippians 2000 years ago. We are able to live humbly only if our identity and faith is in Christ.

**Review**

- Why was the book of Philippians written?
- What are some of the major themes that Paul talks about in chapters 1 and 2? (life in Christ, unity, suffering, humility)
- Why is chapter 2 our key chapter? Paul gives us a full picture of the grandeur of the sacrifice and humility of Jesus Christ.

**Philippians Chapter 3**

Paul seems to be closing out the letter when he launches into a warning against legalism. Since the church at Philippi and Paul are friends, they have common enemies. The same people that persecute Paul will persecute this church as well.

Paul is warning against people, mainly Jews, who still put confidence in the flesh apart from Jesus Christ.

- They preach that salvation is obtained by how well you obey the law, religious boasting.
- Jews thought that every Gentile who became a Christian should be circumcised. Circumcision was an outward sign that you were a child of God that you were clean, but with the coming of Christ we no longer need to perform acts of cleanliness to be holy.

Read 3:3-6. Paul goes into his personal life and tells of how blameless he would be under the law. He is basically saying been there done that, doesn't work. For a Hebrew this is a very impressive list of law keeping.

Now read 3:7-11. Knowing Christ is far greater than anything Paul could have accomplished by obeying the law.

- Paul counts those things that he did as a waste as worthless. He does this so he may gain Christ and the righteousness that comes only through Christ.
- Why would Paul count all of this as rubbish so he can gain Christ? Paul is destroying pride, his righteousness has nothing to do with him, and everything to do with Christ.
- When we take pride in how good of a Christian we are, it makes it very hard to truly have a life and identity in Christ.

In verse 12-21, Paul instructs us on what our attitude should be regarding our life in Christ.

- He starts off by making it clear that we are not perfect on earth, our righteousness is seen by God and will fully be obtained when we die, but we are still sinful on earth.
- The Christian also has the responsibility to persevere in their faith, to actively seek God. We do this in response to who we already are in Christ (vs 16).

Paul warns the Philippians of the people who are opposite of the legalistic group in verse 17-21.

- Paul calls them enemies of the cross. These are people who think of themselves as being holy already and that permits them to do whatever they want.
- Their focus is on enjoying whatever pleasure they want food, sex, etc. Paul says that they are focused on earthly things and not focused on Christ the same as the legalistic group is not focused on Christ.

Read verse 20 and 21. The true Christian's focus is living as a child of God. Realizing that our citizenship is in heaven and living with that in mind.

- This is a life of humility, suffering, and unity with our fellow believers.
- Our life is secured by Christ which means we don't have to perform meaningless acts to be holy, but we realize that we are children of God and abstain from indulging in inappropriate earthly pleasures.

**Review**

- In chapter 3 verses 1-11 what is Paul discouraging the Philippians to take confidence in? What is he pointing them towards? Righteousness in Christ instead of confidence in the flesh.
- What do verses 12-19 say about our responsibilities involving our salvation? Persevere in the faith, actively seek God, we do not have the right to do whatever we want.

**Philippians Chapter 4**

Since chapter 4 starts out with the word “therefore” let’s read the previous paragraph again, read 3:17-21.

- Because of what we have already obtained, citizenship in heaven, Paul is instructing us to stand firm in the Lord. Again Paul is pointing people beyond themselves to God and Christ.

He continues the chapter by writing about unity again. This time he is writing about specific people, apparently these women are leaders or someone of influence in the church.

Verses 2-9 are Paul’s closing exhortations (urge or advise strongly, persuading sermon or speech). These are common in Paul’s letters, notice how this one is specific to the Philippians situations.

- The first section talks about unity before it gets out of hand
- The second section talks about rejoicing, thankfulness, the peace of God both in their hearts and in what they practice. This goes along with the reason for Paul writing the letter; it is a letter of friendship and thankfulness for the Philippians, not a strictly corrective letter.

Read verses 10-20. Paul again drives home the idea of being content in all circumstances. Notice though how he doesn’t just talk about being in need, he also talks about being content when he has an abundance of blessings (food, money). That speaks to us because not many of us have had to be content with nothing, but we do have to be content with the blessings that we do have. Verse 13 affirms the power of a life in Christ.

Verses 14-18 reference the gift and the support that the Philippians gave to Paul. He closes out his letter of friendship by thanking them for the things that the church has supplied him with.

- He is unable to personally return the favor because he is in prison, but in verse 19 he directs them to God supplying their needs. Then he breaks into a doxology (a short song of praise).

Paul ends the letter with a short closing so the words of verses 19 and 20 are fresh in their ears. He references the servants in Caesar’s house who have become believers. He then closes with a short benediction.

**Brief Overview of Philippians**

Key verse is 1:21. Throughout the whole letter Paul encourages the Philippians and believers of all ages to live their lives in Jesus Christ. Your identity should be in Christ and your way of life should reflect your citizenship in heaven.

Christ is the ultimate example of humility. He gave up more than we ever can. Humility is one of the keys to unity with fellow believers, humility destroys pride.

Because our life is in Christ our confidence in salvation is not found in what we accomplish or can do, it is found solely in Jesus Christ, this also destroys pride.

Rejoice in God, seek God, have thankfulness in God, let the peace of God rule you. These are keys to being content in whatever situation God puts you in.