

PHILIPPIANS

Lesson One (1:1-11)

Salutation (1:1-2)

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

V.1 Paul And Timothy – In his earlier years, Paul had been known by the Hebrew name Saul. He was raised a strict Pharisee (Acts 26:5; Phil. 3:5) and was loyal to the Jewish traditions. This misguided loyalty led him to assist in the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58) and to persecute the Lord's church (Gal. 1:13-14). When Saul was converted on the road to Damascus, he realized that all his Jewish zeal and legalistic righteousness were worthless. (See Phil. 3:4-11) He became an apostle and was sent forth to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17-18). On the second and third of his great missionary journeys, he traveled to Philippi.

Timothy was a younger co-worker of the apostle Paul. His mother was a devout Jewish woman (Acts 16:1; II Tim. 1:5), but his father was a Greek. Timothy was converted by Paul and became his assistant. He is named in six epistles as Paul's "co-author" (II Cor., Phil., Col., I & II Thess., Phlm.). Timothy was with Paul in Philippi on both the second and third missionary journeys, and the Philippians knew his worth (Phil. 2:22).

At the writing of this epistle, both Paul and Timothy were in Rome, where Paul was imprisoned and awaiting trial.

Servants Of Christ Jesus – Paul was so well known among his Philippian brethren that he felt no need to mention the fact that he was an apostle, as is stated in most of his other epistles. The only title is "servant" or "slave." The Greek word means simply a slave, a person owned by someone else. In the world of the first century, a slave had no legal or civil rights. He was entirely at his master's disposal. Paul gladly accepted this position of humble servanthood for the Master.

The word "Christ" means "the anointed one" and is the equivalent of the Hebrew word "Messiah." In the Old Testament, at least three types of people were anointed: prophets (Isa. 61:1), priests (Exod. 29:7), and

kings (I Sam. 15:1). God's only Son was anointed to be all three.

"Jesus" was the historical name given by the angel to both Mary (Luke 1:31) and Joseph (Matt. 1:21). It is the same as the Old Testament name Joshua, and means "Jehovah is salvation."

To All The Saints In Christ Jesus – The saints are "the holy ones." To be holy means to be "set apart" for special ownership and use. Every Christian should consider himself a saint, set apart for the service of God. No elite, separate class of sainthood is to be found in the church of the New Testament.

Who Are At Philippi – Philippi is a city with an interesting history. For a long time, it was just another obscure village of Macedonia, the northeast province of ancient Greece. Then gold was discovered nearby, and suddenly the little village was important. Philip, the king of Macedonia, took over the gold and renamed the city in his own honor. The gold enabled Philip to hire soldiers and begin the unification of all the separate cities and provinces of Greece. His son, Alexander the Great, led the Greek armies to conquer the entire Mediterranean world. Later, the Roman armies conquered Greece and made Philippi a Roman colony.

In Acts 16, Paul was on his second missionary journey when he had a vision in the night. He saw a man of Macedonia beseeching him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When Paul got to Macedonia, he began his work in Philippi. It was here that he converted Lydia, the seller of purple. It was here that he cast out a spirit of divination from a slave girl. And it was here that he was cast into jail and converted the Philippian jailer. The church in Philippi was especially close to the apostle Paul, supporting him with frequent offerings (Phil. 4:15; II Cor. 11:9). They were a generous church, despite their deep poverty (II Cor. 8:1-5). One of the immediate reasons for writing this epistle to the Philippians was to thank them for their recent gift to Paul in his imprisonment.

With The Bishops And Deacons – A bishop is literally an "over-seer" and is equated with the elder in Titus 1:5 and 7. (See also Acts 20:17 and 28, where "guardians" or "over-seers" is this same word.) The deacon is literally a "servant." The household servants of John 2:1-11 are called by this name.

V. 2 Grace To You – Every one of the thirteen epistles signed by Paul begins and ends with a mention of grace. The Greek word for grace is closely related to the word for joy, and means "unmerited favor or goodwill." This means that although we are unworthy and undeserving, God likes us anyway!

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And Peace – Peace is best defined as “well-being of the soul.” Despite outward circumstances (such as Roman imprisonment), the Christian has inner peace. He commits his anxieties to God and focuses his mind on the positive things of God (Phil. 4:6-9), and the God of peace is with him.

It has often been noted that “grace” (*charis*) is very similar in Greek to the usual Greek greeting (*chairein*). Also, “peace” was the usual Hebrew greeting (*shalom*). Since so much of Paul’s ministry involved bringing together Jews and Greeks into one body, it seems somehow appropriate that this Greek-Jew greeting should begin each of his epistles.

From God Our Father And The Lord Jesus Christ – Note how closely the work of Father and of Son are inter-connected in Philippians. At least a dozen times in this brief epistle, the Father and Son are names together in the same sentence. Perhaps one can best see this relationship between the Father’s majesty and the Son’s lordship in Phil. 2:5-11, especially verse 11.

Prayer For Philippians (1:3-11)

3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 thankful for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel thus about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus 9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

V. 3 I Thank My God – This statement of thanksgiving is also found in all of Paul’s other epistles except Galatians and Titus. It would seem that Paul must have spent a great deal of time in prayer, praying for so many different people. Before Paul could exhort the Philippians to pray (4:6), he first had to set the example.

In All My Remembrance Of You – The Philippians were very dear to Paul’s heart. He thought of them often, and every memory caused him to pause and thank God for these people.

V. 4 Always In Every Prayer Of Mine – The word for prayer used here means an “entreaty” or

“supplication” for a specific need. The New Testament commends this kind of specific prayer, as opposed to prayer that is general and vague. One special benefit of specific petitions is that we can be more keenly aware when God answers them.

Making My Prayer With Joy – Joy is one of the dominant themes of Philippians. The words “joy” and “rejoice” are found a total of eighteen times. Considering that Paul is imprisoned, facing a possible death sentence, that is a lot of joy!

Paul’s Greek readers would have been impressed with this tone of the epistle from the very beginning. Their eyes would have quickly caught the following pattern:

v. 2 “grace” – *charis*

v. 3 “I thank” – *eucharisto*

v. 4 “joy” – *chara*

V. 5 Thankful For Your Partnership In The Gospel – Their partnership (Gk. *koinonia*) included their money (4:10-15). They supported Paul, moreover, not as an act of benevolence, but as an active partnership in his work. (See II Cor. 11:9) Their missionary money was not sent because they felt sorry for Paul, but because they felt enthusiastic for the gospel! They were “partners” in the fullest sense of the word.

From The First Day Until Now – The very first day Paul and his coworkers arrived in Philippi, they found hospitality in the home of Lydia (Acts 16:15). When Paul went on to Thessalonica, the Philippian brethren sent him support more than once (Phil. 4:15-16).

V. 6 And I Am Sure – Paul’s confidence (repeated six times in this epistle) certainly seems out of character for a man waiting to face trial and possible martyrdom. Paul knew that the Lord was yet in control, and victory was assured.

He Who Began A Good Work In You – It is God who initiates the act of salvation. We do not first seek Him; rather, He first sought us. He works in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (2:12-13). With God motivating and empowering us, we can then “work out” our own salvation.

Will Bring It To Completion – The saving grace of God is not just a one-time event in our lives. From the moment we come to Christ until our lives shall end, we must keep on pressing forward (3:12-14). This is God’s intention for our lives. With our cooperation, He will bring it to a successful completion.

There is a possible allusion in this verse to the making of a sacrifice or burnt offering. Just as men begin and then bring to completion the act of sacrificing, so God was working among the Philippians.

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At The Day Of Jesus Christ – This day is probably the day of the Second Coming, the time of the consummation of the ages. The final victory of the church will be won and Jesus Christ will be acknowledged as Lord of all (2:10-11).

V. 7 It Is Right For Me To Feel Thus About You All – Paul knew the Philippians well enough to feel thankful and confident for them. His very personal attachment to them was based on their partnership in his work.

Paul said “you all” five times in this first chapter (v. 4, 7 twice, 8, and 25). Though the Philippian church apparently had some problems with disunity and personal conflicts (2:1-4; 4:2-3), Paul wanted them to know how he cared for them *all*.

Because I Hold You In My Heart – The heart is used here as the very center of Paul’s being, including both will and emotion.

For You Are All Partakers With Me Of Grace – Because they had also received God’s grace, Paul called them his “co-partners,” using much the same word as “partnership” in verse five. And as always, to receive the blessing of grace is also to receive the responsibility of service. The “grace” shared by Paul and the Philippians included their partnership in evangelism. (Notice a similar use of the word “grace” in Ephesians 3:7-8).

Both In My Imprisonment And In The Defense And Confirmation Of The Gospel – Not only had the Philippians shared in Paul’s missionary work; they also shared in his courageous stand for the gospel in Roman imprisonment. One of their number had even gone to Rome to serve Paul (2:25-30). With their support and with the help of God, Paul would defend the gospel and establish its truth even in Rome. It is noteworthy that Paul was not planning to defend himself, but the gospel.

V. 8 For God Is my Witness – Paul similarly called upon God to witness to his absolute truthfulness in Gal. 1:20.

How I Yearn For You All With The Affection Of Christ Jesus – The intensity of Paul’s feeling is well expressed in the Greek phrase he used, translated in the King James Version as “in the bowels of Jesus Christ.” The word literally means the inward parts, such as the stomach, lungs, heart, liver, etc. This area was once considered the seat of emotions in a man. The ancient Greeks had noticed, for example, that the intense feelings of pity, compassion, homesickness, and sentimental yearning were actually “felt” more in the pit of the stomach than anywhere else. Jesus felt this emotion frequently in the gospels, and Paul said that his own feeling was like that of Jesus.

V. 9 My Prayer That Your Love May Abound More And More – The specific petitions of Paul’s prayer are now listed. It is interesting that Paul did not pray primarily for their health or wealth, as often we pray for one another today. His concerns were matters of an eternal nature, beginning with the greatest of all—love. (See I Cor. 13:13).

With Knowledge And All Discernment – Love is not blind. Real love should abound with knowledge and discernment. This means that love should have perception that is sharpened by experience. Love should perceive, for instance, when to be gentle and when to be stern. Love always wants to meet the needs of the one who is loved, and perception helps the lover know which course of action to take.

Love without knowledge may be a misguided, pointless love. Knowledge without love profits nothing (I Cor. 13:2). Paul prayed for a full portion of both to be given his readers.

V. 10 So That You May Approve What Is Excellent – The word “approve” was the classical term for assaying metals to determine their genuineness. The words “what is excellent” were used by Greek philosophers to refer to “the things that really matter.” Paul wanted the Philippians to be able to test and prove out in their own lives the things that really matter. He wanted to spare them the tragedy of wasting all their days in trivial affairs of no lasting consequence (I Cor. 3:12-15). A similar thought is found in Romans 12:2, where they are exhorted to “prove” the will of God in their transformed lives.

And May Be Pure And Blameless For The Day Of Christ – The word “pure” probably first meant to “be tested in sunlight” where any imperfection would be seen. The word “blameless” meant “without stumbling.” Paul knew that the Philippians, like all Christians, still had some impurities in their lives and still sometimes stumbled. He prayed that they might grow on toward perfection (3:12-14), never content to settle for something less. Then at the day of Christ’s second coming, Paul could rejoice that they, too, had finished the course and kept the faith (II Tim. 4:7).

V. 11 Filled With The Fruits Of Righteousness – This fruit (not plural, but singular as in Gal. 5:22) is the harvest which Christ’s righteousness should produce in our lives. Our own lives should exhibit the same kind of right living that Jesus had. The Spirit of Christ living in us will also produce love, joy, peace, patients, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).

Which Come Through Jesus Christ – The fruit of righteousness is not something we manufacture on our

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own. Paul had long since abandoned the futile attempt for self-righteousness and knew that the only true righteousness was based on faith in Jesus Christ and came from God (3:9).

To The Glory And Praise Of God – God’s glory is his own majesty and shining splendor. In the scriptures, this word “glory” is often surrounded with the imagery of brilliant light (I Tim. 6:16). We can do nothing to enhance the glory of God, but we can acknowledge it by our fruit-filled lives. We praise God not only with our lips, but also with our lives.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Who was Timothy? Was he of any special importance to the Philippians?
2. Has your understanding of words been influenced by ecclesiastical usage? What are “saints”? What are “bishops”? What are “deacons”?
3. What words are always found in the opening of Paul’s epistles? What is their significance?
4. What kind of “prayer” was Paul talking about in verse four?
5. What did “partnership in the gospel” mean for the Philippians? What will it mean for us?
6. Paul spoke of the defense of the gospel in verse seven. Does the gospel need to be defended?
7. Why does the King James Version employ the phrase “bowels of Jesus Christ”?

8. Is it wrong to pray for health and wealth? Could our prayers indicate our appraisal of “the things that really matter”?
9. Is love blind? Does love always forget, forgive, and overlook? How does this work with parental love? How does this work with God’s love?
10. Who gets the credit for the fruits of righteousness we produce? Why?

A.B.A. REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Briefly describe the background of Paul.
2. “In his earlier years, Paul had been known by the _____ name _____.”
3. During which missionary journeys did Paul visit Philippi?
4. Timothy’s mother was a devout _____ woman, but his father was a _____.
5. How many epistles list Timothy as Paul’s co-author? List these epistles.
6. During which missionary journeys did Timothy accompany Paul?
7. Why would Paul apply the term “servants” to himself and Timothy? What legal standing did a servant have in the ancient world?
8. Where were Paul and Timothy when Philippians was written?
9. Explain the meaning of the words “Christ” and “Jesus.”
10. Summarize what this lesson teaches about “saints.”

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11. Summarize the history and background of Philippi.
12. List one immediate reason for Paul writing Philippians.
13. Explain the meaning of “bishops” and “deacons.”
14. What does this lesson teach about “grace” and “peace”?
15. In Philippians, how many times are the Father and Son named together in the same sentence?
16. Name the two epistles, written by Paul, which do not contain the statement of thanksgiving “I thank my God.”
17. Explain the meaning of the word “prayer” in verse 4.
18. “_____ is one of the dominant themes of Philippians. The words “_____” and “_____” are found a total of _____ times.”
19. Briefly define these Greek words: charis, eucharisto, chara, and koinonia.
20. Explain the meaning of “I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”
21. How many times does Paul express “I am sure.” in this epistle?
22. In what way can Christians “work out” their own salvation?
23. Explain the meaning of “...how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.”
24. Based upon verse 9, what were the primary concerns of Paul’s prayers. How does this compare with the primary concerns of your own prayers?
25. Why is it so important to combine love, knowledge, and discernment?
26. Explain the background/meanings of these words in verse 10: approve, pure, and blameless.
27. Explain “the fruits of righteousness” in verse 11.
28. What imagery often surrounds the word “glory”?
29. What is the most important lesson you have learned from this section, and how can you apply this lesson in your own life?

Lesson Two (1:12-30)

Good News From Prison (1:12-18)

12 I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ; 14 and most of the brethren have been made confident in the Lord because of my imprisonment, and are much more bold to speak the word of God without fear.

15 Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. 16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel; 17 the former proclaim Christ out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.

V. 12 I Want You To Know, Brethren – When Paul was imprisoned, many questions must have swept over the Philippian church. Is all lost? Will Paul be forced to quit? Are we supporting a hopeless cause? So Paul wrote to them to set the record straight and to put their fears to rest.

That What Has Happened To Me – The account of what had happened to Paul is recorded in the last few chapters of Acts. Following his arrest and the false accusations of the Jews, Paul appealed to Caesar to hear his case. When he finally was taken to Rome, he was